

Professional Pathways for Teachers

2020–2021 Evaluation Report

Introduction

Purpose of 2020–2021 Evaluation

The purpose of the 2020–2021 Professional Pathways for Teachers (PPfT) evaluation was to (a) help program staff conceptualize PPfT implementation and (b) provide summative data on program implementation, outputs, and outcomes.

Program Description

PPfT is a human capital system that blends four primary components: teacher appraisal, teacher professional learning (PL) opportunities, teacher leadership opportunities, and teacher compensation.

Teacher appraisal under PPfT is a multi-measure system that covers three areas: instructional practice (IP); professional growth and responsibilities (PGR); and two measures of student growth—a teacher-level student learning objective (SLO) measure and a campus-level school-wide value-added (SWVA) measure. PPfT appraisal uses three types of appraisal plans to cover all teachers, inclusive of those new to the district and teaching on special campuses.

Three types of PPfT-specific PL opportunities were offered to teachers: professional development units (PDUs), leadership pathways (LPs), and PL aligned to the PPfT observation rubric. PDUs are an optional 1-year cycle in which teams of teachers identify a need they plan to focus on throughout the year and develop a plan of study and implementation to address that need, similar to action-research projects. LPs are a 2-year process focused on a specific district priority. The topics for 2020–2021 were advanced academics (AA), cultural proficiency and inclusiveness (CPI), literacy, problem-based learning (PBL), social and emotional learning (SEL), and transformative technology (TT). The process allows teachers to earn micro-credentials through engagement in PL opportunities, application of that learning to practice, and reflection on the impact on their teaching. The PL opportunities aligned to the PPfT observation rubric are offered to teachers through the district’s human capital platform (HCP) as a way to target their growth in specific areas of need.

In 2020–2021, two types of leadership opportunities continued to be offered to staff through PPfT. In addition to their regular responsibilities, campus-based staff were offered a stipend-based position to be their campus contact for PPfT. Teachers could also engage in leadership pathways +1 (LP+1), which is a leadership role for those who have completed a LP. Experienced LP teachers can opt to extend their PL opportunities in their respective pathway district priority area and serve in a leadership role through LP+1.



Compensation under PPfT is base building, which means it adds permanent pay increases to a teacher’s regular salary instead of operating within a traditional step-and-lane salary schedule. The compensation framework builds base increases through a cumulative point system in which teachers earn PPfT compensation points each year from a year of service, their PPfT appraisal rating, and optional participation in PPfT PL opportunities. Campuses may be designated as “enhanced compensation” campuses, meaning that because of the unique needs of that school, more points are awarded to teachers for teaching on such campuses.

Program Goal

The goal of PPfT is to build the capacity of Austin Independent School District (AISD) teachers through a comprehensive system of supports and compensation. Underlying this goal is the core belief that professionalizing teaching and empowering teachers will lead to positive impacts on teacher retention and student achievement.

Program Structure

Beginning in 2020–2021, all teachers participated in the compensation component of PPfT, which meant that all teachers received base building pay increases and were eligible to participate in PPfT PL opportunities. Therefore, 2020–2021 marked the end of the traditional step-and-lane compensation option for teachers, and all teachers were compensated under the PPfT compensation system.

Description of 2020-2021 Program Evaluation and Support

Overview

The Department of Research and Evaluation (DRE) PPfT support year runs from July to June each school year (e.g., July 2020 to June 2021). However, year-end PPfT appraisal data do not become available until the summer in the subsequent support year (e.g., July/August 2021). Consequently, DRE PPfT support in 2020–2021 began with analysis and reporting of the prior school year’s appraisal results (i.e., 2019–2020), in parallel with the program evaluation activities and program support activities for 2020–2021 PPfT implementation. Due to the unprecedented events from the COVID-19 pandemic, priorities of both DRE and the PPfT team shifted considerably throughout the year in response to the district’s needs. Therefore, some research and evaluation activities that may have occurred in a typical year (e.g., PPfT-related board update, PPfT perceptions survey) were not conducted in 2020–2021.

In support of the goals of PPfT, and considering the shifting priorities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020–2021 AISD DRE program evaluation and support activities included:

- a summary report of the 2020–2021 PPfT implementation work
- the provision of 2020–2021 data analysis and reporting on the PPfT implementation, outputs, and outcomes in support of board accountability
- assisting in the development of an updated PPfT appraisal rubric and scor-

Impact of COVID-19

From March 13, 2020, through the end of the 2019–2020 school year, AISD schools closed, and all students shifted to virtual learning in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Students remained in virtual learning and campuses remained closed through October 2020. Subsequently, the PPfT team needed to modify certain aspects of PPfT appraisal. In light of the unprecedented circumstances surrounding COVID-19, AISD applied for a Texas Education Agency waiver to grant the superintendent authority to waive or adjust appraisal plans, components, and timelines. The board of trustees accepted the superintendent’s recommendation to suspend policies related to appraisals for all AISD staff on April 6, 2020, and therefore appraisal scores were not available in 2019–2020. In addition, because standardized tests (i.e., the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness [STAAR]) were cancelled in 2019–2020, SWVA measures were waived from teachers’ appraisals for 2020–2021. SWVA is a lagging measure of student growth, in that prior-year STAAR scores have an impact on teachers’ current-year appraisals. Therefore, testing data were not available to compute a SWVA measure, resulting in SWVA being waived from appraisal scores in 2020–2021.

ing system

- participation in the PPfT oversight committee
- calculation of instructional services index (ISI) scores to determine enhanced compensation campuses for the 2021–2022 school year
- preparing data files for upload to SAS Education Value-Added Assessment System (EVAAS) for the computing of value-added scores
- providing ad hoc data, as requested

The ultimate goal of ongoing AISD DRE program evaluation activities is to help PPfT program staff understand if, where, and to what extent PPfT is working. This evaluation report focuses on 2020–2021 implementation work, outputs, and outcomes

Evaluation of Implementation and Outputs

Annually, PPfT is evaluated in relation to its 1) implementation, 2) outputs, and 3) outcomes. First, it is vital to determine if PPfT is operating or implemented as designed. This involves evaluating if the components of PPfT (e.g., PL opportunities, PPfT compensation, differing aspects of PPfT appraisal) were implemented effectively. Second, evaluation of PPfT can help determine if the program is producing what was intended – this is a question of output, or the degree of goal state attainment. This involves evaluating if PPfT is producing the goal of professionalizing teaching and empowering teachers. Third, evaluation of PPfT helps to determine if PPfT is achieving the intended long-term changes – this is a question of outcome or impact. This involves evaluating if PPfT is impacting staff retention and, in more typical years, student achievement.

How many teachers were in PPfT in 2020-2021?

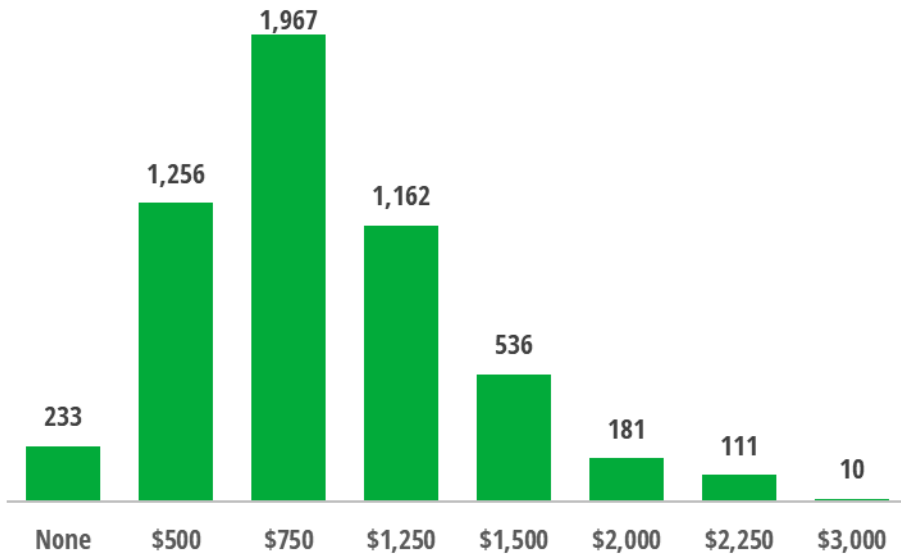
In 2020–2021, 5,456 teachers were appraised under PPfT. As stated, new to the 2020–2021 school year was the enrollment of all 5,456 teachers (100%) in PPfT compensation. In prior years, approximately 50% of teachers participated in PPfT compensation, with 58% participating in 2019–2020, 50% in 2018–2019, and 45% in 2017–2018. Moving forward, PPfT should no longer be conceptualized into two separate components (i.e., PPfT appraisal and PPfT compensation) and instead should be thought of as a single system of both appraisal and compensation.

How many teachers received an increase in their salary due to PPfT compensation?

Since all teachers were enrolled in PPfT compensation in 2020–2021, all were able to apply their points to potential salary increases. Overall, 5,223 teachers received an increase in their salaries, ranging from \$500 to \$3000 per year. As mentioned above, teachers earn PPfT compensation points each year from a year of service, their PPfT appraisal rating, and whether or not they chose to participate in PPfT PL opportunities. Teachers can also earn more points if their campus is designated as “enhanced compensation”. Enhanced compensation campuses are defined as the top 25% of campuses at the elementary, middle, and high school levels with the highest instructional services index, which takes into account the percentage of economically disadvantaged students, percentage of students served in Bilingual/English Second Language (ESL) programs, and the percentage of students served with special education programs. Multi-year improvement required (IR) campuses who are not in the top 25% are also included as enhanced compensation campuses. Enhanced compensation campuses are designed to provide recruitment and retention support to campuses, and designation as an enhanced compensation campus changes from year to year. In 2020–2021, 1,256 teachers taught on an enhanced compensation campus. Figure 1 displays the number of teachers who received pay increases and how much additional pay they earned. Those who received ‘None’ did not have enough points accumulated to earn a pay increase. Additionally, Figure 2 shows the differences in average salary increases across campus types. As expected, average salary increases were highest at enhanced compensation campuses, followed by Title 1 campuses, and then standard campuses (campuses with no designations).

Figure 1.

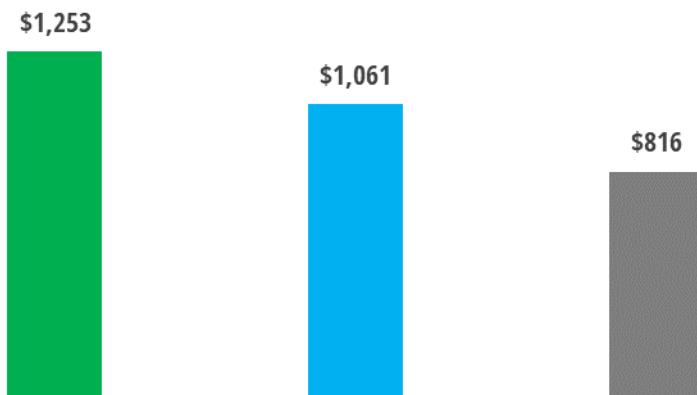
Approximately 96% of teachers received a pay increase due to PPfT compensation, with a small number ($n = 10$) earning as much as an additional \$3,000.



Source. PPfT 2020–2021 data retrieved from the Office of Employee Effectiveness and AISD data systems

Figure 2.

Teachers on enhanced compensation campuses earned the highest average salary increases, followed by teachers on Title I campuses and teachers on standard campuses.



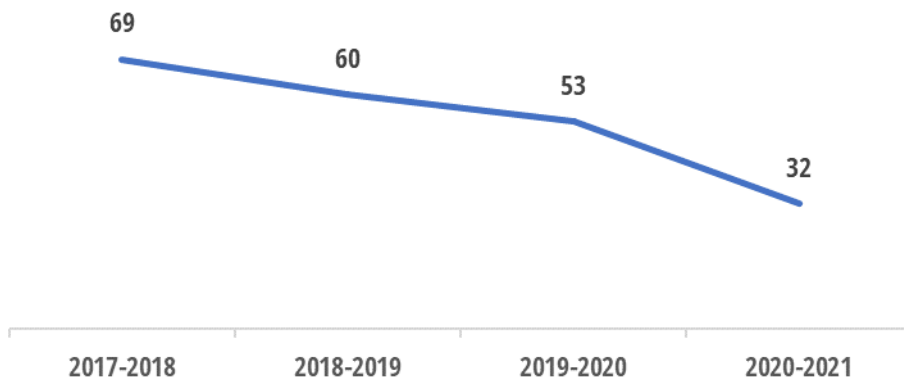
Source. PPfT 2020–2021 data retrieved from the Office of Employee Effectiveness and AISD data systems

To what extent did teachers participate in PPfT PL opportunities?

In 2020–2021, 32 teachers completed the PDU process and received their compensation points for PDUs (Figure 3). This is down from the past 3 years: 53 teachers participated in and received points for a PDU in 2019–2020, 60 teachers participated in and successfully completed a PDU in 2018–2019, and 69 participated in 2017–2018. The reduction in the number of teachers receiving PDU points in 2020–2021 can be attributed to the challenges of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic during the 2020–2021 school year. It is expected that PDU participation will increase again in 2021–2022, as the teaching environment resembles a more typical school year.

Figure 3.

Participation in PDUs was lower in 2020–2021 than in previous years, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



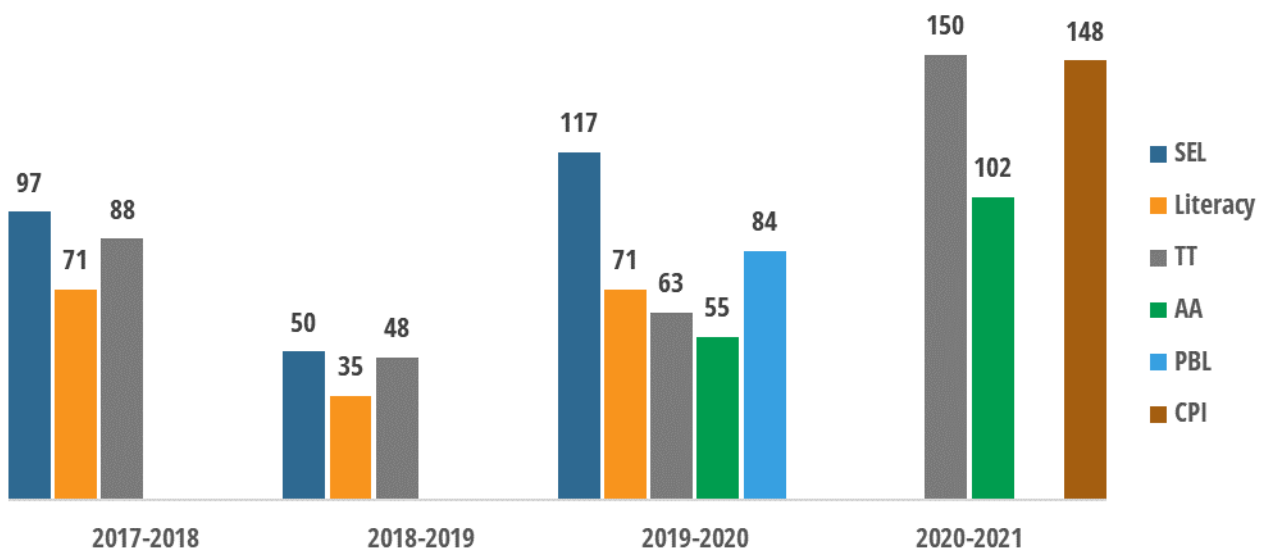
Source. PPFT 2020–2021 data retrieved from the Office of Employee Effectiveness and AISD data systems

Two cohorts of teachers progressed through the 2-year LP process during the 2020–2021 school year: a cohort who began the LP process in 2019–2020 worked toward completion of their LP journey, and a cohort who began their LP journey in 2020–2021. The first cohort of teachers, who began their LP journey in 2019–2020, had 156 teachers successfully complete an LP (completing micro credential [MC] 1–4) at the conclusion of the 2020–2021 school year. The second cohort of teachers (i.e., those beginning their LP journey in 2020–2021) may have completed MC 1 and MC 2 and may have the opportunity to complete MCs 3 and 4 in 2021–2022. In 2020–2021, teachers could choose from three additional LPs; AA; PBL; and CPI. A record-breaking 786 teachers expressed interest in LPs during the 2020–2021 LP opt-in window.

Additionally, some attrition in LP participation was expected over the course of the 2-year LP journey. While many may start a LP, not all will continue through the four MCs and graduate. The number of teachers who began an LP in each year is displayed in Figure 4.

Figure 4.

More of the teacher cohort who began their LP journey in 2020–2021 chose TT ($n = 150$) or CPI ($n = 148$) than chose AA ($n = 102$). Past cohorts could also choose from SEL, literacy, and PBL.

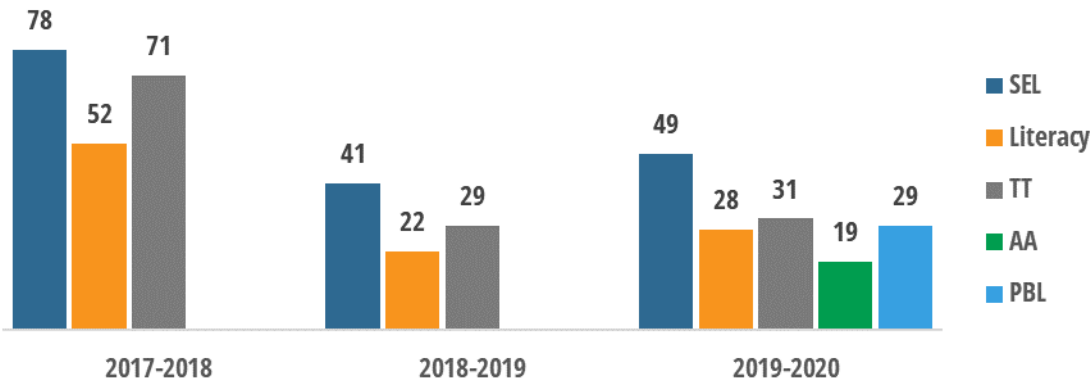


Source. PPFT 2020–2021 data retrieved from the Office of Employee Effectiveness and AISD data systems

Of the 156 LP teachers who graduated in spring 2021 (who were in the 2019–2020 cohort), 28 successfully completed the literacy LP, 49 completed the SEL LP, 31 completed the TT pathway, 19 completed AA, and 29 completed the PBL pathway. A comparison of 2018–2019, 2017–2018, and 2019–2020 cohort graduates is displayed in Figure 5.

Figure 5.

A total of 156 teachers from the 2019–2020 cohort graduated from their LP pathway in 2020–2021. The SEL pathway had more graduates ($n = 49$) than did literacy, TT, AA and PBL in all three years of cohorts.



Source. PPFT 2020–2021 data retrieved from the Office of Employee Effectiveness and AISD data systems

Additionally, 2020–2021 was the second year that teacher leaders who had previously graduated from a LP could participate in LP+1. In 2020–2021, 37 teachers participated in LP+1 and received a point for their participation. Those in LP+1 could serve in a variety of positions (Table 1).

Table 1.

The percentages of teachers in each position varied slightly in 2020–2021 from the previous year, with 54% of those in LP+1 choosing to be scorers, 35% mentors, and 11% PL facilitators.

LP +1 option	2019–2020	2020–2021
Mentor	15	13
PL facilitator	7	4
Scorer	18	20
Total	40	37

Source. PPFT 2020–2021 data retrieved from the Office of Employee Effectiveness and AISD data systems

Evaluation of Outcomes

As mentioned, one of the more long-term intended outcomes of PPfT is for the program to positively impact the retention of high-quality teachers. As shown in the figures below, those who engage in PPfT program components more, as indicated by their average salary increase and participation in PPfT PL opportunities, are more likely to remain in AISD than those who engage with the system less and add less compensation to their base salary.

Figure 6.

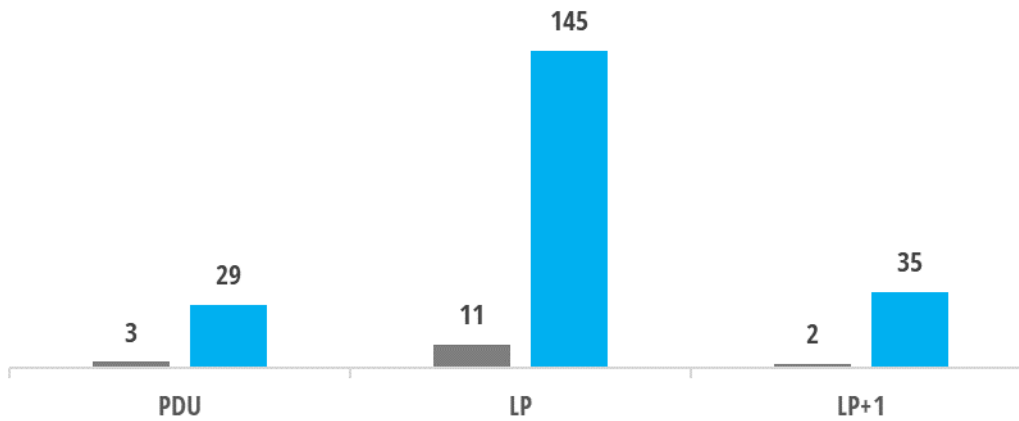
AISD **retained** teachers who had higher average annual salary increases compared to those who left the district between the end of the 2020–2021 school year and September 2021.



Source. PPFT 2020–2021 data retrieved from the Office of Employee Effectiveness and AISD data systems

Figure 7.

Ninety-one percent of teachers who participated in a PDU, 93% of teachers who participated in a LP, and 95% of LP+1 participants were **retained** between the end of the 2020–2021 school year and September 2021. Only 16 teachers who engaged in PDUs, LPs, or LP+1 left the district.



Source. PPFT 2020–2021 data retrieved from the Office of Employee Effectiveness and AISD data systems

Summary and Recommendations

Evaluation of Implementation and Outputs

PPFT evolved in several distinct ways in school year 2020–2021, its fifth year of implementation. PPFT PL opportunities continued to expand as a new pathway, CPI, was launched. It was also the first year all teachers automatically participated in PPFT compensation. This was considered a major step forward in the implementation of PPFT. Revising the IP and PGR rubrics in collaboration with the PPFT oversight committee was also a major implementation goal achieved in 2020–2021. Additionally, outputs were found to be in line with expectations, as those who were involved in PPFT PL opportunities or those who were on enhanced compensation campuses did indeed gain more compensation, as is the intended by the design of PPFT. Lastly, in terms of outcomes, it was found that teachers who engaged more with the PPFT system, by partici-

New Implementation Work

During the 2020–2021 school year, new implementation work included the launch of a new LP (i.e., CPI), as well as a complete reconstruction of the rubrics for IP and PGR. Creation of these rubrics was a collaborative effort that included teaching and principal staff, Education Austin, representatives from DRE, and AISD district leaders. Additionally, the two pathways (i.e., AA and PBL) that were launched in 2019–2020 continued to gain participants.

Due to the many pathways that have been created, a “three on, three off” system began in 2020–2021. In other words, new spots were offered in three pathways in one year, and the other three pathways will be offered in the following year. In 2020–2021, LP participants could opt into the AA pathway, CPI pathway, or TT pathway, while those who began a pathway previously still participated in their original pathway of choice.

pating in PL opportunities and earning more compensation were more likely to return to AISD in the following school year than those who did not participate in PL opportunities and earned less compensation. PPfT continues to work toward its goal of empowering and professionalizing teachers by offering more competitive salaries, more targeted PL opportunities that align with district initiatives, and more opportunities for teachers to be leaders on their campus with the ultimate goal retaining high-quality teachers and improving in student outcomes for all students.

Recommendations

The evaluation work to support PPfT in 2020–2021 collectively supported several recommendations for future evaluation efforts. As COVID-19 continues to be a factor affecting how school and learning are conducted, these recommendations may shift as new priorities are identified:

- Conduct an inquiry into PL attrition in order to understand barriers to completion of an LP or PDU.
- Continue to improve measures for ascertaining perceptions and feedback from stakeholders through refinement of the PPfT Perceptions Survey.
- Conduct PL opportunity evaluations to analyze the effectiveness of the training materials launched in tandem with the new rubrics created for the school year 2021–2022.

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