

Educator Excellence Innovation Program (EEIP)

Year 3 Summary of Implementation

Background and Overview of EEIP

Many new teachers leave after their first couple of years of teaching, especially at high-needs schools. Those who persist through their early years may be left in charge of their own development. Replacing teachers is expensive, but more importantly, students may be placed at an academic disadvantage during a novice teacher's learning years. Schools need a culture of high-quality, school-based supports and leadership opportunities for teachers to help induct, develop, and continuously grow as professionals throughout their careers.

The Educator Excellence Innovation Program (EEIP) is a Texas Education Agency (TEA) grant program that funds innovation in teacher support. Austin Independent School District (AISD) was initially awarded a total of \$2 million over a 2-year period of performance from 2014 through 2016. In 2016, AISD's renewal application was accepted for an additional 2 years of funding through the 2017–2018 school year.

In the 2016–2017 school year, 237 classroom teachers at six Title I elementary schools participated in EEIP (i.e., Houston, Langford, Linder, Palm, Perez, and Widen). The AISD EEIP implementation included novice teacher mentoring, peer observation, the Professional Pathways for Teachers (PPFT) appraisal system, student learning objective (SLO) facilitators, and professional learning communities (PLCs) and PLC leads.

Major program adjustments for the 2016–2017 school year, based on the year 2 evaluation (i.e., 2015–2016 school year), included:

- Adopting professional action research teams (PARTs) into PLCs to help better integrate PLCs into instruction and learning in the teachers' classrooms
- Changing participation in peer observation from voluntary to requiring at least one peer observation for every experienced teacher on an EEIP campus
- Encouraging teachers to build the work of their SLOs into the work of their PARTs

Employee Coordinated Survey

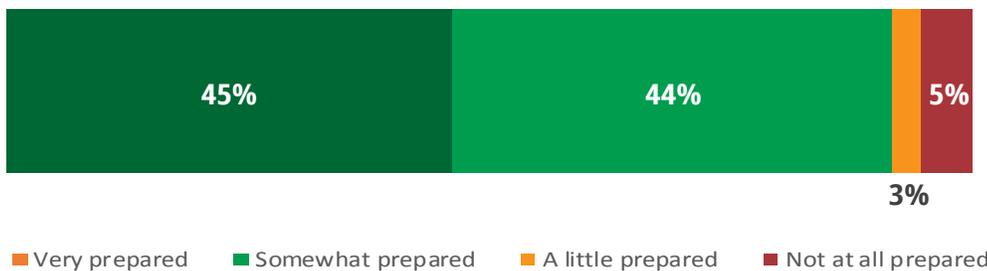
Every year the Employee Coordinated Survey (ECS) is administered in the spring. The ECS has items for many of the programs in the district, including the EEIP and PPfT programs. The items included focus on employees' perceptions of and the efficacy of the programs. A sampling scheme is used so not all the EEIP teachers were included.

What is the perception of EEIP by teachers in the program?

The turnover of novice teachers in their first few years of teaching is the main issue EEIP program has been striving to address. Teachers who leave the profession after only 1 or 2 years cite the lack of support in those first years as one of the main reasons for leaving. Therefore, teachers' perspectives on EEIP are of great interest. One part of EEIP was to prepare teachers for scored observations (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Almost 90% of new EEIP teachers felt very or somewhat prepared for scored observations after working with their peer observer.



Source. Employee Coordinated Survey, 2016–2017

Professional Learning Communities

One of the goals of PLCs was to provide teachers with opportunities for professional development. Of the EEIP teachers responding to the Employee Coordinated Survey (ECS), 70% agreed PLCs helped them feel in control over their professional growth; this increased from year 2 (63%). According to the ECS, 80% of the EEIP teachers surveyed considered their PLC time to be a professional development opportunity, an increase of 4 percentage points from year 2. Teachers also reported positive impacts of participation in PLCs. On average, about three-fourths (81%) of EEIP teachers surveyed agreed that participating in PLCs helped improve their instructional practices (Figure 2).

What is EEIP in AISD?

EEIP is a TEA grant program that funds innovation in teacher support and leadership opportunities.

AISD was initially awarded a total of \$2 million over a 2-year period of performance from 2014 through 2016. In 2016, AISD's renewal application was accepted for an additional 2 years of funding through the 2017–2018 school year.

EEIP in AISD has supported more than 230 teachers in each year of the program at six Title I elementary schools:

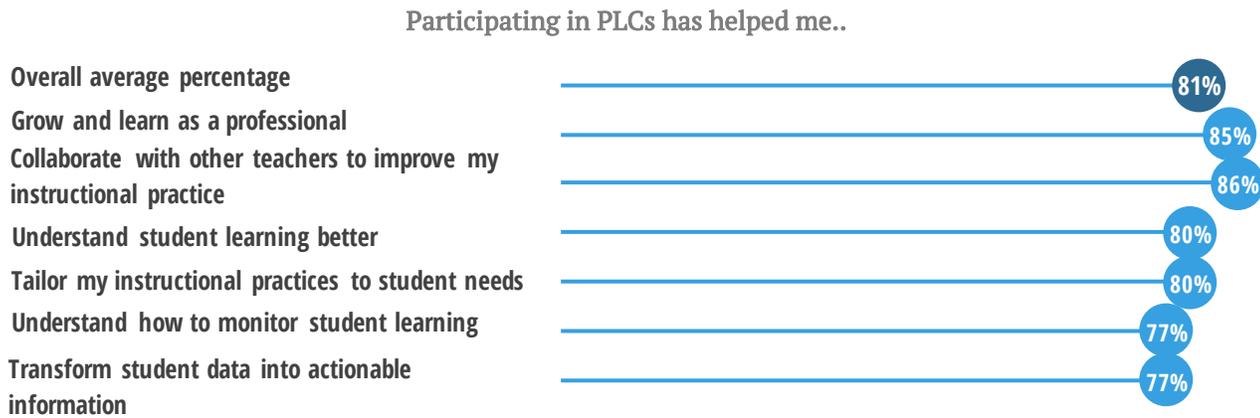
- Houston
- Langford
- Linder
- Palm
- Perez
- Widen

Resources funded through the grant include:

- Stipends for mentorship roles
- Full Release Mentor and Peer Observer teaching salaries
- Stipends for teacher leadership roles
- Compensation for substitutes
- Professional development opportunities and training for all support roles
- Technology to facilitate observations and PLC work.

Figure 2

The percentage of EEIP teachers who strongly agreed or agreed to statements about their participation in PLCs increased from year 2.

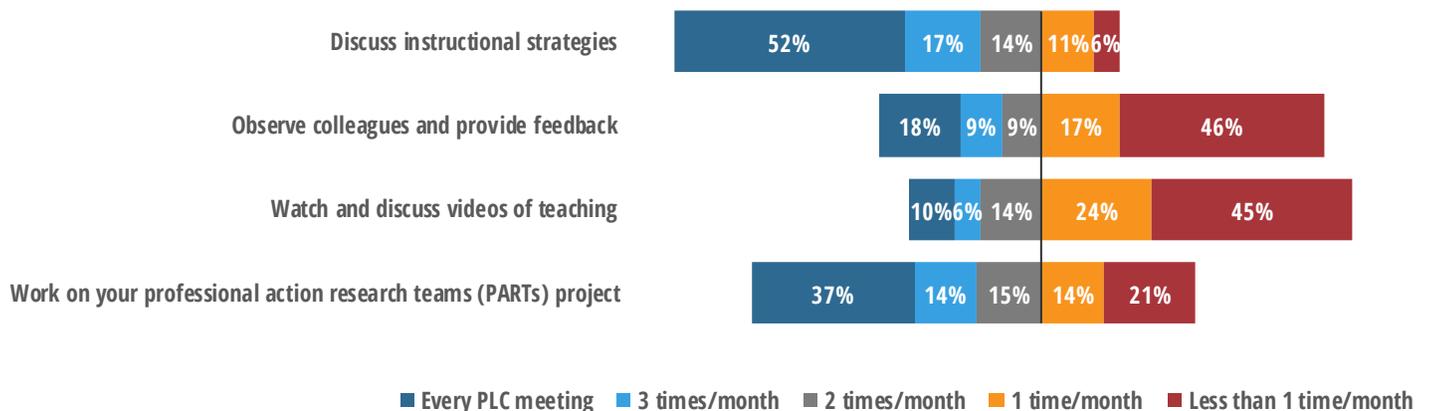


Source. Employee Coordinated Survey, 2016— 2017

In year 3 of EEIP, improvements in the effective use of PLC time was seen. In year 2 of EEIP implementation, principals perceived room for improvement in effective use of PLC time. In year 3, teachers reported improvement in effective time use during PLCs on the ECS survey, discussing instructional strategies continued to be the most frequent activity. Of the EEIP teachers surveyed, 83% reported discussing instructional strategies at least two times per month in year 3 (Figure 3). In year 3 of EEIP implementation, PARTs were incorporated into the PLCs. In year 3, of the EEIP teachers surveyed in the ECS, 66% reported working on their research project at least two times per month during PLC time (Figure 3). In year 2, only 30% of EEIP teachers reported that they observed colleagues and used PLCs to provide feedback at least two times per month. Although this number increased to 36% in year 3 (Figure 3), there was still room for improvement. Watching and discussing videos of teaching was the least frequent activity during PLC time for EEIP teachers, with 30% of the teachers surveyed doing this activity at least two times per month (Figure 3). In contrast, in year 2, only 19% of teachers reported doing this activity at least two times per month.

Figure 3

Discussing instructional strategies continued to dominate the activities EEIP teachers reported doing during PLC time.

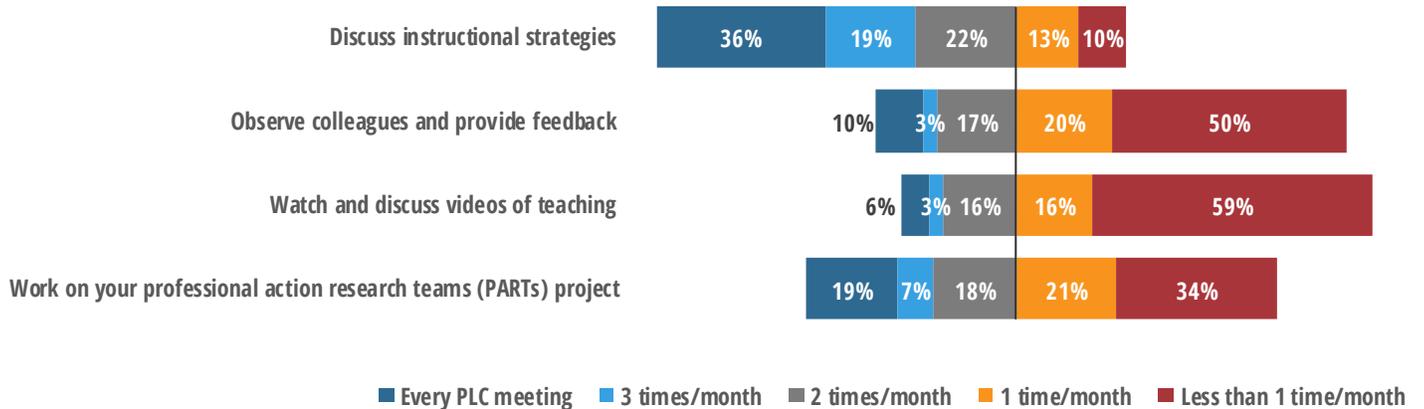


Source. Employee Coordinated Survey, 2016— 2017

EEIP teachers reported spending the majority of their time outside PLC time discussing instructional strategies (Figure 4). Both inside and outside PLC time there appears to be room for more time spent on observing colleagues and providing feedback and on watching and discussing videos of teaching.

Figure 4

Observing colleagues and providing feedback, and watching and discussing videos of teaching, were the least common activities EEIP teachers reported doing outside PLC time.



Source. Employee Coordinated Survey, 2016– 2017.

Student Learning Objectives

The intent in year 3 was to encourage teachers to incorporate SLOs into the work of their PARTs. Although 80% of the teachers surveyed in the 2016– 2017 ECS responded that writing an SLO was not at all challenging or a little challenging, this proportion decreased 5 percentage points from the prior year. Teachers reported during a focus group interview that they did not have enough time during the PLCs to cover all important activities. Of the EEIP teachers who responded to the ECS, 98% indicated they received very good or fair support from the campus SLO contact with writing student learning objectives (Figure 5). In terms of selecting an SLO assessment and assessing the attainment of the SLO, 96% of the EEIP teachers surveyed reported they had received very good or fair support from the campus SLO contact (Figure 5). So, although slightly more EEIP teachers perceived writing an SLO as more challenging, the perceived support from the campus SLO staff was extremely high, indicating that if teachers were struggling they had support available to them.

Figure 5

Big gains were seen in teachers’ perceptions of the quality of assessing attainment of SLOs in 2016– 2017, compared with 2015– 2016.



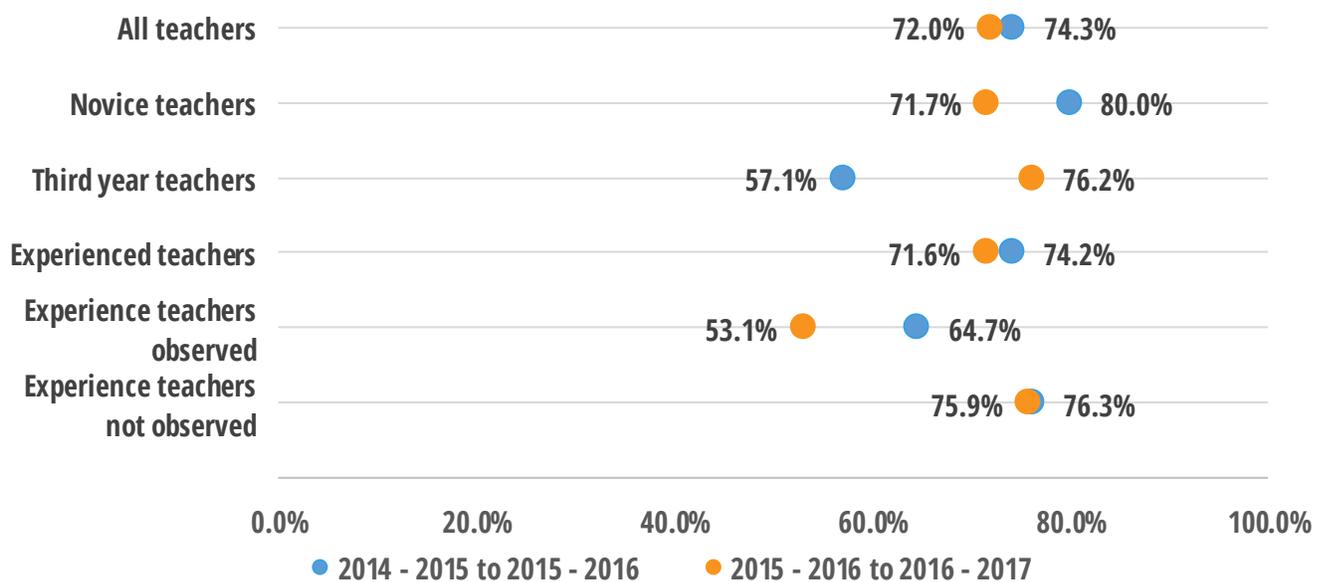
Source. Employee Coordinated Survey, 2015– 2016 and 2016– 2017.

Teacher Retention

Retention of novice teachers was one of the main goals of EEIP, due to the high cost of teacher turnover to both the district and students. Retention of all teachers decreased slightly from year 2 to year 3 of EEIP (Figure 6), and this trend was also seen with the retention of experienced teachers. Retention of novice teachers in year 3 continued to be an issue, which may be related to some other factor not addressed by EEIP. The increased cost of living in the Austin area and the environment in the school, are just a couple of factors that could be impacting teacher retention overall. The Professional Pathways for Teachers (PPfT) aims to address the issue of teacher retention through a comprehensive human capital system, including appraisal and compensation. Teacher retention and leaver factors were investigated in 2015, however, an update to the previous studies is needed to fully understand and improve teacher retention, for more information see *Sustaining a System for High-Quality Teachers, Report 1 & 2* at www.austinisd.org.

Figure 6

Retention of 3rd-year teachers increased from year 2 to year 3 of EEIP.



Source. Human Capital Platform database, 2015– 2016 and 2016– 2017

Summary of the Year 3 Evaluation Findings

Findings from the first 3 years of evaluation revealed the following:

- EEIP teachers valued having the PLCs and reported positive impacts of instruction. Participants’ feedback in year 2 revealed that PLCs were struggling with time efficiency issues and made minimal use of PLC time for watching peers’ teaching lessons and providing feedback. Although, this increased in year 3, the room for improvement still exists.
- EEIP participants continued to report being well supported in their SLO work, these reports increased from year 2.

- Incorporation of PARTs into PLCs may have influenced the integration of PLCs into instruction and learning in the classroom. Of the EEIP teachers surveyed, 83% reported spending at least two times per month discussing instructional strategies during PLC time, and 66% reported PLC time was spent working on their professional action research team project at least two times per month.
- The focus group revealed that some teachers felt that their PLC time was too limited to incorporate PARTs.
- The focus group also revealed that teachers perceived a lack of “buy-in” from administration.
- Of the EEIP teacher surveyed in the 2016– 2017 ECS, perceptions of the quality of support provided for SLOs increased from year 2 to year 3. Ninety-five percent of EEIP teachers reported very good to fair support for writing SLOs, selecting a SLO assessment, and assessing SLO attainment.
- Retention of 3rd-year teachers increased in year 3 of EEIP implementation, compared with retention from year 1 to year 2. This increase in retention of 3rd-year teachers was in contrast with decreased retention of novice teachers in year 3, compared with retention rates of novice teachers from year 1 to year 2.

EEIP teachers’ perceptions reflected increased positive experiences with the implementation of EEIP in the 3rd year. Efficient use of time during the PLCs continued to be an issue in year 3; however, improvement was seen from year 2 to year 3. Retention of 3rd year teachers increased, possibly indicating that EEIP had the desired effect of increasing retention of new teachers in the first few years of teaching. Conversely, retention of novice teachers from year 2 to year 3 decreased, indicating additional focus in this area is necessary.

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