

## Stand for Children’s Educator Network Position Statement

### Effective Teachers for Every Student in DISD

#### The Significance of the Teacher Excellence Initiative (TEI)

#### What is the Teacher Excellence Initiative?

The Teacher Excellence Initiative (TEI) is an initiative voted into existence in May 2014. The initiative was created with teachers in order to focus on building systems and tools to help Dallas ISD (DISD) achieve its North Star goal of ensuring a highly effective teacher for all students.

#### LOOKING BACK: THE HOW AND WHY OF THE TEI

In 2011, the DISD Board of Trustees took on the task of re-writing the [AE \(Local\)](#), the district’s North Star for Educational Philosophy. The process took a year to transform a policy that spoke to “beliefs” into a policy focused on goals and outcomes that are ranked in order of importance and are measurable. In January 2012, the Board of Trustees approved AE (Local), which states that the overall goal of the district is “to improve the quality of education for all our students.” The first priority to achieve this goal is to “ensure highly effective teachers for all students” because research shows that “the quality of a teacher is the single most important school-based influence on a student’s academic achievement.”<sup>1</sup>

Once the goal of “highly effective teachers for all students” was set, the Board and the Administration began working on a tool to identify, support, and reward highly effective teachers. In May 2014, the Dallas ISD Board of Trustees voted to pass the Teacher Excellence Initiative (TEI), which focuses on defining, supporting, and rewarding teacher excellence. For far too long, the evaluation of an educator in Dallas had little or no positive association with her/his ability to ensure students are progressing by at least one grade level each year. TEI ensures meaningful evaluation by defining excellence through teacher observations by certified evaluators, student achievement data using multiple measures, and student surveys for grades 3-12. Based on those factors, teachers receive an evaluation rating (the sum of all the points earned from applicable TEI evaluation components). The evaluation rating then informs

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*Overall, TEI is a much more objective and accurate evaluation system than PDAS. The three separate metrics: Student perception, test scores, and Administrator observation - together give a better overall picture of a teacher's work performance.*  
-- North Dallas HS Teacher

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the effectiveness level. This process and entire comprehensive system was designed with direct educator participation and feedback.

What makes TEI different than many other high-quality evaluation systems across the country is how it rewards educators. Historically, educators in DISD were not compensated as the professionals they are. With the previous step system that was based on number of years of service and degrees held, it would take an educator in DISD approximately ten years to see an increase of just \$5,000, and 20 years for a \$10,000 increase. In that system, ten-year veterans in DISD were lucky to make \$55,000 per year.

TEI rewards excellence via nine effectiveness levels based on the educator’s annual evaluation. Compensation is significantly higher with each level, as the expectation of educator effectiveness grows.

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<sup>1</sup> RAND Corporation, (2012). Teachers Matter: Understanding Teachers' Impact on Student Achievement. Santa Monica. Retrieved from [http://www.rand.org/pubs/corporate\\_pubs/CP693z1-2012-09.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/corporate_pubs/CP693z1-2012-09.html)

Salaries now range from \$50,000 for a first year teacher, to \$90,000 for a Master Teacher. The compensation model under TEI offers an educator new to teaching the potential to see an increase of \$5,000 by their fourth year as long they move up in effectiveness levels year-over-year. The more effective an educator is, the greater potential for higher compensation. For example, if an educator has been designated Distinguished and is on the effectiveness level of Proficient III, they have the potential to receive an increase of \$9,000 in one year when they move up one effectiveness level to Exemplary I.

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*During my first two years my students saw incredible academic gains, going from a 17% passing rate on district exams to a 74% passing rate. The result of my 2014-15 TEI scorecard was Proficient I, the highest I could attain given I just completed my second year teaching, bringing me to a salary level far higher than I could hope to attain elsewhere as a second year teacher. TEI and the compensation model is the premier model in Texas to bring about positive outcomes for students and teachers.*

*---North Dallas HS Teacher*

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## **HERE AND NOW: THE TEI IS WORKING**

Fall 2015 saw the first round of TEI results and subsequent compensation changes. The first-year results were very encouraging. The retention rate for the district's most effective teachers – teachers in the top three effectiveness levels -- was 90.3%. More than 70% of TEI eligible teachers received a salary increase for the 2015-16 school year with an average increase of \$2,739, and the biggest increases were seen for the most effective teachers. Overall, the TEI clearly did what it was supposed to do in terms of rewarding teaching excellence.

It is expected that overall student achievement scores will rise, and gaps between student populations will narrow as TEI continues to identify and reward the most effective teachers. This will happen over time, as administrators support educators to increase the effectiveness of their craft. Experiences of two Distinguished Teachers from Dade Middle School are instructive. The two teachers had been identified for the Distinguished Teacher Review (DTR) in 2014-15 and were then offered the opportunity to move to an Accelerating Campus Excellence (ACE) school for 2015-16, which they did. With a great deal of passion and pride, they reported their students achieved double digit gains on the end of semester exams known as Assessments of Course Performance (ACP). On the Dade Middle School campus, a school that has seen its share of difficulties, these highly effective teachers have made a significant impact on their students' achievement, a positive outcome which will happen more and more frequently the longer the TEI is in place across the district.

TEI has been successful thus far due to diligent work by educators, the TEI team's dedication, and the continued support from the administration and Board of Trustees. With the change in leadership, it is crucial for Dr. Hinojosa and the Board of Trustees to publically commit to maintaining the following TEI elements in order to ensure its continued success:

### *Defining Excellence*

- 1) Evaluations occur every year for every teacher, regardless of effectiveness and seniority;
- 2) Evaluate teachers based on teacher performance, student achievement, and student perceptions surveys, where age appropriate;
- 3) Evaluators engage teachers in at least three conferences throughout the school year;
- 4) Evaluators new to the district or the role receive certification training within 30 instructional days;
- 5) Evaluators are recertified every year through a rigorous training process;
- 6) Evaluators are calibrated throughout the year to ensure consistency across the district;

- 7) Student perception surveys are administered to students in grades 3-12 utilizing research-based questions, and are calculated into TEI scores;

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*The results of my 2014-15 student perception surveys were not as strong as I expected...I realized I wasn't making the connection with students the way I thought I was. I made adjustments to my practice based upon the data and my relationships with my students and their academic achievement have improved.*

---Pinkston HS Teacher

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- 8) Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) are administered as a way for teachers to, as William J. Slotnik, Founder and Executive Director of the Community Training and Assessment Center, puts it, "help teachers bring more science to their art, strengthen instructional support to the classrooms, and improve the quality of the outcome." SLOs give teachers the opportunity to focus on specific objectives and assess them in real time so they can adjust their practice accordingly;
- 9) Distinguished Teachers submit DTR applications; they are not simply identified as Distinguished by their evaluation, because being a Distinguished Teacher is about recognizing what teachers are doing above and beyond, leading their peers, engaging as lifelong learners in order to benefit both their peers and students, and their contributions to the profession.

#### *Supporting Excellence*

- 1) School leaders provide timely, effective feedback to grow teacher practice;
- 2) Teacher evaluation data used to identify, create and provide differentiated, job-embedded professional development and support that promotes teachers' professional learning;
- 3) Teachers' professional learning plans are a part of, and supported by, schools' campus action plans.

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*There were many unexpected positive outcomes from my role as an evaluator in the Distinguished Teacher Reviews. The most significant was witnessing highly effective teachers engaging their students in ways I knew would help my staff and our students. The entire science staff met with and observed a few of the most effective science teachers in the district. The team was reenergized, came away with tangible best practices to achieve positive results for students.*

—Evaluator J.L. Long MS

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#### *Rewarding Excellence*

- 1) Teacher pay is significantly differentiated based upon results of effectiveness from evaluation. Maintain the current tiers, which are working to retain high performers while ensuring high performers at the top of the range still benefit;
- 2) Distinguished Teachers continue to submit a formal application a minimum of every other year;
- 3) Compensation model is fundable through the 2017-2018 school year.

## LOOKING AHEAD: STAYING THE COURSE WITH THE TEI

The Board of Trustees made the right decision when they passed the TEI. The data validate the Trustees' decision and indicate that, if DISD stays the course and the TEI continues to be effectively implemented, more success will result for students, schools, and the district.

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*"This past year I was awarded DTR through TEI. I work incredibly hard to provide the best education for my students, and it is validating to see my hard work pay off, literally, in the form of my paycheck. I love teaching, and what brought me to DISD from another district was TEI. Through this rigorous evaluation system, I feel like the efforts of teachers who go above and beyond are finally being recognized. My partner, who is a beginning teacher, came to DISD instead of competing districts because of TEI as well. The thought of being able to make a wage that matches the effort we put in is exciting and encourages us to continue with this district. It is crucial to support TEI ... as one of the largest urban districts in the nation we need to innovate and lead in order to recruit top talent - and TEI helps us do that."*

*Ann Richards MS Teacher*

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With fewer and fewer people joining the teaching profession and a significant percentage of teachers at or near retirement age, identifying, supporting and retaining effective teachers is essential. For this reason, staying the course on the TEI is crucial. And there is yet one more reason; the TEI gives Dallas ISD a critical competitive recruitment advantage.

The time is now for the Board of Trustees and Superintendent Hinojosa to recommit to the TEI, so that DISD can continue to move forward toward achieving the district's goal of ensuring highly effective teachers for all students.