

Redesigning for a Strategic Approach
to Human Capital Management:
Spotlight on San Antonio Independent
School District

Teacher Quality Programs Technical
Assistance Center

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ABSTRACT: This document profiles San Antonio Independent School District (SAISD), a Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grantee, who adopted a strategic approach to teacher recruitment and retention that included an organizational district redesign and implementation of a master teacher program using revised talent management practices and an aligned, competency-based approach. The document summarizes SAISD's approach and offers considerations for implementing a talent management and master teacher approach. After just one year of implementation, SAISD demonstrated a fast-improving district based on the Texas Education Agency accountability system, and a high Master Teacher retention rate.



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Background

The Teacher Quality Programs Technical Assistance (TQP TA) Center facilitated a peer exchange site visit on March 20-21, 2019 for San Antonio Independent School District (SAISD), a U.S. Department of Education Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grantee, and East St. Louis School District #189 (East St. Louis), a Teacher and School Leader (TSL) Incentive Fund grantee.¹ During the peer exchange, district representatives from SAISD met with representatives from East St. Louis to share SAISD's strategic approach to teacher recruitment and retention and teacher leadership. The two districts worked to identify ways the SAISD strategies could be adapted for East St. Louis as the district considers an organizational redesign of their human capital management systems and creation of a talent management function at the district level.

In 2016, SAISD launched a district-wide organizational redesign. The goal of the redesign was to raise student achievement and growth through: a) the strategic recruitment, hiring, and selection of teachers, and b) the implementation of a master teacher program. By the program's third year of implementation (2018-2019), the initiative resulted in marked improvement in student achievement, moving the district's state accountability grade from "F" to "B²," as well as showing significant gains in the retention rate of highly qualified teachers.

Introduction

This paper summarizes the strategies shared during the East St. Louis and SAISD peer exchange so that other Effective Educator Development (EED) grantees may consider potential ways to strengthen their district's (or their partner district's) talent management and human resources functions through:

- The use of a data-informed improvement strategy to provide focus and prioritization for maximum impact;
- Processes for strategic recruitment, hiring, and selection of teacher career ladder roles using a combination of competency-based alignment and student growth and achievement analytics;

¹ TIF and TSL grants provide funding for the creation and implementation of performance-based teacher and principal compensation in high-need schools, as well as for the modification of their human capital management systems (HCMS). Districts' HCMS practices include recruitment, hiring, and selection and – when designed strategically – include competency-based alignment.

² For more information about SAISD's performance, visit <https://txschools.gov/districts/015907/overview>.

Peer Exchange Visits

Peer exchange visits directly connect grantees to one another to promote the study and application of successful strategies. Visiting grantees gather promising practices and lessons from their peers, while host grantees can benefit from the process by re-examining and reflecting on their own work and by gaining an outsider's perspective. Peer exchanges are facilitated by TQP TA Center experts who work with grantees before, during, and after the visit to facilitate grantee learnings and ensure knowledge transfer and dissemination of key strategies and practices.



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- The design of a master teacher role in which the purpose is to increase student growth and transformational teaching and learning on school campuses through additional instructional time; and
- Their theory of change regarding how student achievement and growth (or other metrics aligned to programmatic goals) will improve key outcomes by integrating the strategies described above.

This summary highlights two key SAISD strategies: (1) an organizational district redesign that created a Talent Management Department to more strategically recruit, select, and place teachers – which includes more autonomy for principals to provide substantial influence on recruiting and hiring teachers for their schools, and (2) implementation of a master teacher program using their revised recruitment, hiring, and placement practices and an aligned, competency-based approach. It also includes both SAISD and East St. Louis staff’s reflections on implementation in their district context.

Importance of a Strategic, Competency-Based Approach to Recruitment, Hiring, and Selection

While there are other factors that improve outcomes for students, no other in school factor plays as great a role in student learning as the effectiveness of classroom teachers (Goldhaber & Hansen, 2013). District leaders play a critical role in developing recruitment, hiring, and selection strategies to ensure that an effective educator is in every classroom. A strategic, competency based approach to recruitment, hiring, and selection is critical given the essential role of quality teachers in improving student outcomes (Heneman & Milanowski, 2004, 2011). While many district leaders tend to focus on recruitment marketing activities, research shows that they could benefit significantly from investing time and resources into developing aligned recruitment, hiring, and selection strategies that clearly link the criteria of teacher competencies (e.g., knowledge, skills, and behaviors) to program goals and strategic objectives.

Teacher and principal competencies are typically articulated within the practice rubric of the evaluation system, strategic plans of districts, or other assessments of teacher performance – a lagging indicator. With a competency based approach, districts lead with competencies by recruiting, hiring, and selecting educators with the knowledge, skills, and behaviors needed to improve outcomes for all students. Additionally, district leaders are strategic about aligning the competencies of teachers to specific needs of their schools, based on demonstrated ability to improve student outcomes.



SAISD's Talent Management and Master Teacher Initiative: The Approach

District Organizational Re-Design for New Talent Management Department

SAISD's Theory of Change

If an integrated Talent Management system is developed that places excellent teaching and learning at the core of recruitment and retention practices and aligns all district systems to support the vision,

then teacher job satisfaction will increase; teacher and principal retention rates will improve; schools will become robust learning environments in which teachers and students thrive; and student outcomes will improve substantially—ultimately resulting in the movement of schools defined by the state as “Improvement Required” from a rating of “at-risk” to “at-promise.”

SAISD's approach included a district organizational redesign to create a Talent Management Department and to revise their human capital management systems (HCMS) practices. SAISD began by creating a new Talent Management Department at the district level, recognizing that recruitment and retention are distinct from the accountability and compliance functions of traditional human resources (HR) departments and require different skill sets.

The Talent Management Department focuses on recruitment, retention, culture, and climate, pairing each campus in the district with a Talent Partner (<https://tgp.grads360.org/#communities/pdc/documents/18249>) within the department. The Talent Partner, often a former principal, facilitates the alignment of teacher skill sets with the specialized needs of individual schools and ensures schools are fully staffed with high quality teachers. Some of the Talent Partner's key duties are to advise principals on a broad range of talent management issues (e.g., staffing, retention, career advancement), support principals in evaluation processes, and collaborate with district staff in identifying and supporting high performing school staff. They use assessment data and other key metrics to assist principals in making data-based talent management decisions, and they use competency-based recruitment, selection, and hiring protocols that forecast potential talent management needs and areas of concern in their schools. The Talent Partner is a key district role that ensures that the Talent Management Department's goals, processes, and policies are implemented and supported at the campus level.

Using Data-Informed Strategy for Focus and Prioritization of Master Teacher Roles

SAISD's strategy included using data analytics to strategically hire and place Master Teachers in priority schools. The district's department of Accountability, Research, Evaluation, and Testing used internal district data and data from the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) to identify the district's top areas of greatest need by grade, subject area, student population, and campus. These areas were ranked and then used to determine the priorities for deployment of highly qualified teachers through the district's new Master Teacher Initiative (<https://www.saisd.net/page/masterteacher-home>). The Master Teacher Initiative partners skilled, demonstrably successful teachers with the most at-promise students to accelerate their learning.



The Master Teacher Role

Master Teachers are full time teachers of record and take on additional teacher leadership duties, as determined by campus needs.

- School leaders have flexibility to define the responsibilities of the role, which could include activities such as serving on a principal’s cabinet or conducting instructional rounds.
- For all Master Teachers, teaching occurs in an extended day schedule, which generally adds five additional instructional hours each week during the school year, 10 days of instruction during the summer or on Saturdays, and 10 additional hours over the course of the year in professional learning.
- Master Teachers are compensated up to \$15,000 above their regular salary for the additional instructional and professional learning time worked.

For example, in school year 2018-2019 SAISD’s top priority were the subject area and grade levels most in need of improvement, reading in grades 3, 4, 6, and 7 (See SAISD Top Ten Areas of Greatest Need: <https://tqp.grads360.org/#communities/pdc/documents/18248>). These grade levels and this subject became the focus for placing Master Teachers in priority schools.

Strategic Recruitment, Selection, Hiring, and Placement

Candidates for Master Teacher positions were identified through a two-pronged strategy: 1) internal candidates within the district who met eligibility requirements were invited to apply, and 2) the opportunity was advertised widely in neighboring districts, regionally, and out of state (<https://tqp.grads360.org/#communities/pdc/documents/18248>).

Eligibility Requirements for the Master Teacher Role

Minimum eligibility requirements for the Master Teacher role include:

- a bachelor’s degree from an accredited four year college or university;
- a valid Texas Teaching Certificate with required endorsements for subject and level assigned (or valid out of state credentials with proof of working toward Texas licensure);
- satisfactory reference and fingerprint background checks;
- proof of two years teaching experience with minimum “proficient” rating, which is one of five levels of professional evaluation (improvement required, developing, proficient, accomplished, distinguished); and
- a proficient or higher evaluation rating in each of the four domains in the state appraisal system, Texas Teacher Evaluation Support System (T-TESS).



Teachers meeting minimum eligibility requirements are asked to submit data on the impact the candidate has had on student growth or achievement over time,³ short answers to questions regarding the candidate's philosophy toward teaching students who are achieving significantly below grade level, and a description of how the candidate uses student data to inform teaching practices in his or her classroom. From this pool, candidates are selected to teach a demonstration lesson; during the lesson, candidates are evaluated using a four-part rubric that is aligned to the teacher competencies in the Texas Teacher Evaluation Support System (T-TESS): 1) classroom culture; 2) management of student behavior; 3) classroom environment, routines, and procedures; and 4) communication. The final step of the selection process is a campus-based interview, also aligned to the T-TESS rubric. (For more information see SAISD's Master Teacher Selection Overview SY17-18:

<https://tqp.grads360.org/#communities/pdc/documents/18248>.)

Once hired, Master Teachers are strategically placed in instructional roles to impact the grade levels and subjects in greatest need of academic growth and achievement. Master Teachers are surveyed annually to verify their interest in continuing in the position, and eligibility for the following school year is determined through their T-TESS appraisal and fulfillment of professional development requirements.

SAISD Talent Management and Master Teacher Initiative: One Year Results

As of school year 2019-2020, SAISD is the second-fastest improving district in the state (Dallas Independent School District is the fastest-improving) based on the Texas Education Agency accountability system. Additionally, after the first year of implementation of the Master Teacher Initiative, the teacher attrition rate slowed from 12 percent to just 10 percent.

As a result of its intensified focus within the talent management model, retention rates for Master Teachers are significantly higher than regular teachers. While SAISD monitors whether burnout of Master Teachers is a problem, the district is not seeing significant evidence of burnout at this time. Most Master Teachers who did not continue in the role in school year 2019-2020 were promoted to other instructional roles or left the district for personal reasons.

Additional Considerations for Implementing a Talent Management and Master Teacher Approach

Considerations from SAISD

During the PEN visit, representatives from SAISD identified several key considerations for implementing programs like the Master Teacher Initiative.

- **As a talent management initiative is implemented, new communication channels may be required to support timely and effective sharing of information.** At SAISD, for example, the creation of a SharePoint site for principals offered a go-to source for information about processes and policies; a Master Teacher advisory committee was established to bring feedback to the district

³ Applicants must submit evidence of impact on student growth *or* achievement in one of SAISD's ten areas of greatest need. (See SAISD Top Ten Areas of Greatest Need here: <https://tqp.grads360.org/#communities/pdc/documents/18248>.)



about the program; and software/systems were reconfigured to support timely responses to teacher applications so that applicants could be swiftly notified regarding missing information and kept abreast of their status.

- **Identifying the appropriate metrics for evaluating teachers' track records is critical for recruiting successful teachers from within and outside the district.** SAISD has found more success using student growth metrics as a leading indicator for teacher performance, rather than student achievement metrics, as student achievement may be influenced by outside factors (e.g., systemic inequalities).
- **Master Teachers recruited from outside districts may need additional professional learning to teach effectively in the district's context.** SAISD has found that teachers who have not taught in an urban environment need additional professional learning and support to understand and teach to the needs of SAISD students. The department of Social Emotional and Academic Development supports new-to-district teachers' abilities to acclimate to the SAISD system.
- **Differentiated professional learning opportunities provide opportunities to more effectively address teachers' needs.** Interviews conducted with teachers (including Master Teachers), principals, and assistant principals in SAISD showed the need for enhanced opportunities for differentiated professional learning. Teachers reported that a "one size fits all" training was not effective in meeting their needs, and that synchronous trainings after school and on Saturdays sometimes conflicted with personal responsibilities. SAISD implemented several professional learning options to address these needs: (1) EPIC Saturday a quarterly, conference style professional learning day with concurrent breakout sessions consisting of 50-90 minute sessions with 600+ teachers in attendance; (2) PD in PJs, a synchronous virtual professional learning on Saturdays held quarterly on a wide range of topics; (3) Unconference, an Edcamp Foundation-style convening of professionals working on their own problem of practice in an organic, informal structure; and (4) Social Emotional Academic Development (SEAD) Conference, a three-day conference in summer hosting nationally-recognized speakers in half-day sessions. SAISD's SEAD event in school year 2018-2019 had over 1,000 teachers in attendance each day.
- **Fair and consistent teacher evaluations are critical in identifying effective educators for positions like the Master Teacher role.** At SAISD, school-level administrators or district-level directors appraise all teachers, and SAISD's Educator Quality Department works with administrators to calibrate appraisals so that they are fair and consistent districtwide.
- **Evaluations must be timely in order to inform decisions about teachers' continuation in the Master Teacher role.** In Year Two of grant implementation, the deadline for completion of evaluations was shortened to January of each year so that principals could be informed of concerns about Master Teacher performance by February 8, providing time to communicate to teachers that if their performance did not improve, their role as a Master Teacher would be relinquished and stipend removed.

Considerations from East St. Louis

Following the PEN visit and presentations by SAISD, representatives from East St. Louis identified several key considerations as they consider aligning SAISD's work to their own district's strategies. Other districts or educational organizations at the beginning stages of developing a talent management department and a



strategic set of recruitment, hiring, selection, and placement strategies might also consider East St. Louis's key themes.

- **Adopting a talent management approach offers the opportunity to focus more directly on the recruitment, hiring, and retention of skilled teachers than is possible in a strictly compliance-centered HR configuration.** Such a shift, East St. Louis, observed, requires additional personnel within HR or a separate functional talent management department. For example, after the peer exchange, East St. Louis hired a recruiter to support the Director of Human Resources in focusing on developing a talent management approach like SAISD's.
- **The Master Teacher role must be aligned to the district's existing career pathway.** East St. Louis changed their current Master Teacher title to "Mentor Teacher", as they wanted to capture exactly what the role entailed – mentoring teachers. Next steps include defining the new Mentor Teacher role using SAISD's criteria.
- **Data for student performance segmented by both subject area and by school are critical in identifying priority targets for Master Teacher intervention.** After the Peer Exchange, East St. Louis reviewed recent state assessment results to identify 7-10 teachers who made significant gains in math and ELA. The identification of high performing teachers has focused the district's planning conversations on elevating to Master Teacher roles those teachers who are exceeding state data targets and improving student achievement significantly.
- **Implementation of a talent management program must be tailored to the needs of individual campuses within a district.** Noting that in East St. Louis, as in SAISD, student needs may vary widely within campuses, East St. Louis highlighted the need to tailor implementation of a talent management program to individual campuses. Similar to SAISD, East St. Louis is considering an approach which supports autonomy for principals in the recruitment and hiring process— to directly access the district-wide pool of applicants, select candidates for interviews, and submit their own hiring recommendations.
- **Multiple factors must be included in the hiring criteria for Master Teachers.** In particular, East St. Louis noted that culturally responsive and trauma-informed teachers were a priority for the district. They also noted the importance of considering peer leadership and collaborative skills in hiring Master Teachers.

Looking Forward

One of the central challenges that Effective Educator Development (EED) grantees face is demonstrating significant impacts on important outcomes, such as teacher effectiveness, student growth, and student achievement, through their grant strategies. Because some important measures - student growth and student achievement in particular - are influenced by many factors, identifying exactly what to focus on or where to apply resources for improvements is not always clear, easy, or agreed upon by all stakeholders. (The Equitable Access Support Network (EASN)'s Talent Management Strategies: District Self-Assessment Checklist provides an easy-to-use tool to assess the usefulness of current talent management strategies: <https://easn.grads360.org/#communities/pdc/documents/12611>.)



To that end, SAISD’s system of strategies is a challenge to the assumption that one or two key improvements in talent management are enough to make significant gains in Master Teacher effectiveness and student learning. A set of interrelated strategies was needed – along with the ambition and leadership to make changes at the central office level, like with the addition of the Talent Management Department. When SAISD applied the strategic use of data to a set of improvement and organizational re-design efforts to provide focus and prioritize, they saw positive shifts in student growth and achievement. This is evidenced by moving from an “F” rating to a “B” rating as rated by the Texas Education Agency after one year of implementing the Master Teacher Initiative.

Extending to Comprehensive Sustainability Planning

Comprehensive sustainability planning is a core support available to EED grantees facilitated by the TQP TA Center. The TQP TA Center Sustainability Planning Guide (<https://tqp.grads360.org/#communities/pdc/documents/17936>) assists grantees in making their grant strategies a long term reality. The Guide highlights four key areas of sustainability as critical to long term sustainability of grant strategies. These areas include:

1. Partnerships, Stakeholder Engagement, and Communications;
2. Widespread Use and Continuing with Fidelity;
3. Return on Investment; and
4. Financial Sustainability.

Further, EED grantees considering how to make their grant work and strategies sustainable in the long term can look to SAISD’s approach. SAISD’s Master Teacher model focuses successfully on two key areas of long-term sustainability: “Widespread Use and Continuing with Fidelity” and “Return on Investment.” In the area of “Widespread Use and Continuing with Fidelity”, SAISD focuses on using data for continuous improvement, using a Talent Management Department and Talent Managers to extend reach and to ensure fidelity of their new HCMS across schools, and wedding a successful theory of action to implementation of the Master Teacher Initiative. In the area of “Return on Investment” SAISD demonstrates strong evidence in the form of improved teacher retention and improved student growth and achievement scores as a result of their combined efforts, thus making a compelling case to stakeholders that the investment in the Master Teacher Initiative and the new Talent Management Department creates meaningful impact on teacher and student outcomes.

EED grantees, following East St. Louis’ example, can strengthen their grant’s impacts and likelihood of long-term sustainability by studying SAISD’s strategic approach of interrelated strategies grounded in using data for continuous improvement and generating evidence for effective storytelling. Engaging in comprehensive sustainability planning upfront can help grantees design successful models, monitor the health of implementation, and better communicate the impacts to make their grant strategies a long-term reality.



The Peer Exchange Participants: By the Numbers

SAN ANTONIO INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT (<https://www.saisd.net>)

Location: San Antonio, TX

District Type: Urban

Funding: \$46,370,483 TIF award (2016)

Schools: 32 elementary schools, 11 middle schools, 13 high schools, 6 early childhood centers, 3 alternative schools, and 27 academies serving non-traditional grade ranges. Out of the 92 total schools, 25 are TIF schools.



The Master Teacher Initiative is districtwide. The TIF award supports the 25 TIF schools; the non-TIF schools are supported with district funds.

Student Population:

- 90% Hispanic, 6% African American, 2% White
- 90% qualify for free or reduced lunch
- 20% English learners

Context: In 2016, the Texas Education Agency was preparing to introduce an A-F letter grade rating system for school districts statewide, reflecting individual district's performance in three categories: student achievement, school progress, and closing the gaps. That year, numerical data indicated that SAISD would have received an "F." Just five percent of the district's students were considered college-ready, and just three percent of graduates had been admitted to Tier I universities.

EAST ST. LOUIS 189 (<https://www.est189.com>)

Location: East St. Louis, IL

District Type: Urban

Funding: \$5,823,779 TSL award (2017)

Schools: 5 elementary schools, 2 middle schools, 1 senior high school, 1 preschool center, 1 alternative school



Student Population:

- 97% African American, 1% two or more races, 1% White, 1% Hispanic
- >98% percent qualify for free or reduced lunch

Context: In 2017, following the introduction of a system-wide student improvement initiative called the MIRACLES Turnaround Strategy, district leadership received the Illinois State Board of Education's Award of Excellence in recognition of significant academic improvement the district had achieved (Pieper, 2017).



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Additional Resources

Equitable Access Support Network Talent Management Strategies: District Self-Assessment Checklist (<https://easn.grads360.org/#communities/pdc/documents/12611>)

SAISD Master Teacher Recruitment and Selection Resources (<https://tqp.grads360.org/#communities/pdc/documents/18248>)

SAISD Talent Partner Job Description (<https://tqp.grads360.org/#communities/pdc/documents/16936>)

TQP TA Center Sustainability Planning Guide (<https://tqp.grads360.org/#communities/pdc/documents/17936>)

TQP TA Center Sustainability Self-Assessment Planning Template (<https://tqp.grads360.org/#communities/pdc/documents/16936>)

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The **Teacher Quality Programs Technical Assistance Center (TQP TA Center)** provides technical assistance and resources to organizations funded by the U.S. Department of Education. The TQP TA Center's purpose is to support these grantees as they 1) pilot programs to improve the quality of teacher and leader preparation, induction, and ongoing development; 2) test strategies to more equitably distribute highly effective teachers and leaders across LEAs and schools; and 3) monitor implementation.

For more information please visit us online at <https://tqp.grads360.org/#program>.



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