AISD REACH Year 2 Evaluation Report I, 2008–2009

Austin Independent School District
Department of Program Evaluation

August 2009
Publication Number 08.53

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In Fall 2007, Austin Independent School District (AISD) implemented the first phase of a 4-year strategic compensation pilot, AISD REACH , designed to improve student learning by attracting and retaining well-qualified teachers and principals, strengthen the knowledge and skills of campus staff, and recognize exemplary practice with various forms of compensation (AISD, 2009b). Participating schools that are considered "highest needs" based on their percentages of economically disadvantaged, limited English proficient, and special education students, receive additional support and higher monetary awards than those that are considered non-highest needs. The present report documents the attitudes and experiences of REACH staff and their peers at selected comparison schools, and describes the progress of the pilot towards its key program goals. Specifically, data are examined to determine the pilot's influence on teachers' job satisfaction; attachment to the teaching profession, their school, and the district; data use practices; teaching efficacy; collegial experiences; and requests for transfer.

KEY FINDINGS

In general, the pilot made greater progress towards its key goals at highest needs schools than at non-highest needs schools. Attitudes of staff at highest needs REACH schools were more favorable toward the program than were those of staff at non-highest needs REACH schools, and teachers at highest needs REACH schools were less likely to report that they often look for non-teaching jobs than were their peers at highest needs comparison schools. Highest needs pilot staff also reported more positive school climate than did their comparison peers.

Although requests to transfer to a different school in 2009-2010 were not significantly less likely to be made at REACH pilot schools than at comparison schools, teachers across the pilot indicated that REACH influenced their decisions to remain on campus rather than to retire or move to a different school. Because novice teachers were not eligible to request a transfer within AISD, data were not available regarding the potential influence of REACH on their retention status. However, novice teachers at highest needs schools reported significantly more favorable mentoring experiences with REACH mentors than did their peers at comparison schools with traditional AISD mentors. They also discussed the significant contribution REACH mentors had made to their teaching practices and to their decision to remain at their pilot schools for the coming school year.

Staff groups that participated in REACH for the first time in 2008-2009 (i.e., assistant principals, librarians, and instructional coaches and specialists) described the challenges they faced with integrating Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) into their job functions. Most notable were the difficulties associated with sharing students who are part of a traditional teacher's classroom, the heavy influence of student attendance on their limited time with

students, and the selection of appropriate targets for learning. Teachers and new participants also described additional challenges with the new D2 assessment required of core area teachers in grades 3 through 11.

REACH teachers did not differ significantly from their comparison peers in their ratings of behaviors associated with professional learning communities (e.g., engaging in systematic analysis of student performance data, planning lessons and units together, and developing common student assessments). Many teachers did, however, express a desire for their principals to help them collaborate on SLOs in the future by encouraging them to meet with colleagues who have similar student needs, facilitating the connections between grade levels and/or subject areas that may be useful, and discussing ways campus staff can share assessments and materials.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- REACH staff should provide additional guidance to assistant principals and librarians regarding appropriate learning objectives, target performance levels, and strategies for maximizing time with students.
- REACH staff and principals also should challenge teachers to recognize the importance of student growth in addition to student mastery and to understand the program's intended purpose to reward teachers for student growth.
- Principals should actively facilitate collaboration among staff to accomplish REACH objectives, and REACH staff should continue to engage special area teachers, assistant principals, librarians, and instructional coaches/specialists in collaborative opportunities.
- Finally, because of the apparent discrepancies in satisfaction and engagement between the highest and non-highest needs pilot campuses, REACH should include additional support structures for staff at non-highest needs pilot schools to encourage them to value their work in the program.

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INTRODUCTION

AISD REACH, a 4-year pilot teacher incentive pay program at Austin Independent School District (AISD), was designed to support and reward excellent teaching by providing professional development opportunities and instructional support to teachers, as well as stipends to those able to demonstrate excellence. The program includes incentives for student growth, professional growth, recruitment, and retention. Eligible staff write two performance goals, called Student Learning Objectives (SLOs), and are rewarded with stipends for demonstrating the student growth necessary to meet their SLOs. Additional stipends are awarded to all eligible staff on campuses whose students demonstrate outstanding performance on Texas Education Agency's (TEA) measure of Comparable Improvement for reading and math performance on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). Staff also may participate in a voluntary professional growth program sponsored by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) called *Take One!*® (AISD, 2009b). Campuses that are considered "highest needs" based on their percentages of economically disadvantaged, limited English proficient, and special education students are eligible for higher stipends than are their peers at non-highest needs campuses and also are eligible for extra support and incentives. At highest needs schools, novice teachers (i.e., teachers in their first 3 years of teaching) are supported by full-time mentor teachers, and all eligible staff can earn extra stipends for moving into or remaining on those campuses.

To accomplish the evaluation objectives for year 2, the present report documents the pilot changes over time and describes the progress of the pilot towards key program goals: rewards for educators, teacher retention, and student achievement. Several indicators of success in these key areas are examined, and outcomes for pilot schools are compared with those for similar non-pilot schools to determine whether AISD REACH demonstrates evidence of accomplishing its primary objectives in year 2. Results of statistical analyses are provided to document the areas in which REACH participants did or did not outperform their comparison school peers.

PILOT FOR YEAR 1

Year 1 of the pilot commenced during the 2007–2008 school year. Four hundred and seventy-three teachers, instructional coaches/specialists, and principals at nine schools participated in the program (Table 1). Despite some implementation challenges, the results of year 1 were generally neutral to positive.

Table 1. REACH Pilot Schools and Eligible Staff

	Highest needs schools	Non-highest need schools	Eligible staff (at least .5 FTE)
Year 1	• Hart Elementary • Rodriguez Elementary • Sims Elementary • Dobie Middle School • Lanier High School	• Barton Hills Elementary • Menchaca Elementary • Sunset Valley Elementary • O. Henry Middle School	• Teachers • Instructional specialists/ coaches (with at least 50% teaching course load) • Principals
Year 2	• Jordan Elementary • Webb Middle School		• Librarians • Assistant principals • All instructional specialists/coaches

Most teachers met at least one SLO in 2007–2008, and performance on SLOs was related to TAKS results for math and reading. In addition, 10 teachers who participated in *Take One!*® received a passing score on their portfolio entry, which can be applied toward National Board certification within 3 years. Retention rates at highest needs schools improved, particularly among novice teachers at those campuses, and teachers with higher performing students were more likely to remain on their campuses than were teachers with lower performing students. A total of $2.2 million was awarded to REACH participants during year 1 (see Schmitt et al., 2009 for a full report of the results of year 1).

CHANGES TO THE PILOT FOR YEAR 2

Based on a combination of experiences and formative feedback throughout the 2007–2008 school year, several changes were made to the pilot for 2008–2009. The addition of $5.4 million in state funding from the District Awards for Teaching Excellence (D.A.T.E.) grant allowed two schools to join the pilot (i.e., Jordan Elementary School and Webb Middle School), bringing the total number of campuses to 11 for year 2. Both Jordan and Webb were classified as highest needs schools and were eligible for all programs, including novice teacher mentoring. Also, additional staff were eligible for participation starting in year 2, including librarians, assistant principals, and instructional specialists/coaches who were not assigned to classes of their own (Table 1).

Two notable changes were made to the SLO program for year 2. First, to address the possibility of missing SLO targets because students already performing at the very top cannot mathematically demonstrate the amount of growth that can be achieved by lower performing students, tiered SLOs were permitted based on pre-assessment performance. Second, to address issues of consistency and rigor across subject area and grade level, 3rd- through 11th-grade staff

who wrote SLOs in reading, math, science, or social studies were required to use a new formative assessment (D2).

Perhaps the most significant changes in 2008–2009 were to the novice teacher mentoring program. New funding through a Beginning Teacher Induction grant allowed REACH to partner with the New Teacher Center at the University of California at Santa Cruz, which provided substantial training for program mentors, mentee teachers, and principals. In addition, the mentoring program was converted from one in which mentors were hired and supervised by principals to one in which mentors were hired, supervised, and assigned centrally as part of a district team of mentors, with mentor placement on campuses according to appropriate match and novice teacher need.

The following report is the first in a series of four planned reports designed to provide results for year 2. This report focuses primarily on the results of surveys and focus groups assessing attitudes toward and experiences with REACH during year 2. Also included are preliminary results for teacher retention and for SLOs, and a description of the primary activities in which the REACH mentors engaged with their novice teacher mentees. Subsequent reports in this series will include an evaluation of the D2 formative assessment; analyses of SLO results, student TAKS performance, and teacher retention; and results for *Take One!*®.

METHODOLOGY

This report was prepared using a variety of district human resource and institutional data. These data were supplemented with survey and focus group data collected throughout the school year. For research purposes, two comparison schools were selected to correspond with each pilot school. Matches were chosen based on school need, TAKS performance, average teacher experience, and average teacher retention rates. These comparison schools provide a reference group for pilot school trends that will be monitored over the 4-year pilot.

Staff responded to the annual AISD Staff Climate Survey late in Fall 2008 and to the annual Employee Coordinated Survey in Spring 2009. These surveys provided information regarding work environment, the level of support pilot participants received from program staff, participants' attitudes toward REACH, and their support for the program elements. Novice teachers at highest needs pilot and comparison schools also reported their experiences with mentors, and *Take One!*® participants responded to questions about the quality of professional development opportunities they experienced in the program. In addition, a sample of pilot principals, mentors, teachers, instructional specialists/coaches, librarians, and assistant principals participated in focus groups regarding the pilot. Data from the AISD teacher transfer request system and the REACH mentor database also were examined. Table 2 presents the hypotheses tested in this report.

Table 2. Hypotheses for Year 2 Evaluation Report I

Goal	Hypothesis	Measure
Rewards for Educators	• REACH participants will feel more favorably towards the program and strategic compensation than do non-participants.	• Employee Coordinated Survey
	• Highest needs and non-highest needs participants will report favorable experiences in the pilot.	• Employee Coordinated Survey
Teacher Retention	• REACH will influence pilot teachers to remain on their campuses.	• Focus Groups
	• REACH teachers will be less likely to request transfers than their comparison school peers.	• Spring Transfer Requests
	• REACH teachers will feel more attached to the profession and their schools, and will be more satisfied with their work environment than will their comparison school peers.	• Employee Coordinated Survey
	• REACH teachers will feel more satisfied with their work environment than they were the prior year.	• Employee Coordinated Survey

Table 2 (continued). Hypotheses for Year 2 Evaluation Report I

Goal	Hypothesis	Measure
Teacher Retention (continued)	• REACH novice teachers at highest needs campuses will report greater attachment to the district than will their comparison school peers.	• Employee Coordinated Survey
	• REACH novice teachers at highest needs campuses will report greater support from their mentors than do novice teachers at their comparison schools.	• Employee Coordinated Survey
Student Achievement	• REACH staff will report greater achievement press, collegial leadership, and professional teacher behavior (factors related to student achievement in AISD) than will their comparison school peers.	• Staff Climate Survey
	• REACH staff will report greater improvements in achievement press, collegial leadership, and professional teacher behavior in 2008-09 from the prior year than will their comparison school peers.	• Staff Climate Survey
	• REACH participants will perceive a relationship between SLOs and student achievement.	• Focus Groups • Employee Coordinated Survey
	• REACH participants will report collaboration in professional learning communities about teaching and learning as a result of the SLO process	• Focus Groups • Employee Coordinated Survey
	• REACH participants will report greater collaboration in professional learning communities about teaching and learning than do their comparison peers.	• Employee Coordinated Survey
	• *Take One!*® participants will report satisfaction with the program as a form of high quality professional development.	• *Take One!*® Participant Survey

RESULTS

ATTITUDES IN AISD TOWARD PERFORMANCE-BASED COMPENSATION AND REACH

Perceptions of performance-based pay systems, knowledge about REACH, and reported desire to participate in REACH varied according to whether staff were at a pilot or comparison school and by whether their school was categorized as a highest needs school (Table 3). REACH participants were more likely than were staff at their comparison schools to agree that strategic compensation is a good idea, to be knowledgeable about REACH, and to desire participation in REACH. Staff at highest needs schools were most likely to believe strategic compensation is a good idea and desire participation in REACH. When compared with 2008 responses, teachers at both highest need pilot and comparison campuses were more favorable toward strategic compensation in 2009. However, teachers at non-highest need comparison schools rated strategic compensation less favorably in 2009 than in 2008.

Table 3. Average Ratings for Strategic Compensation Items, by Pilot and Need Status

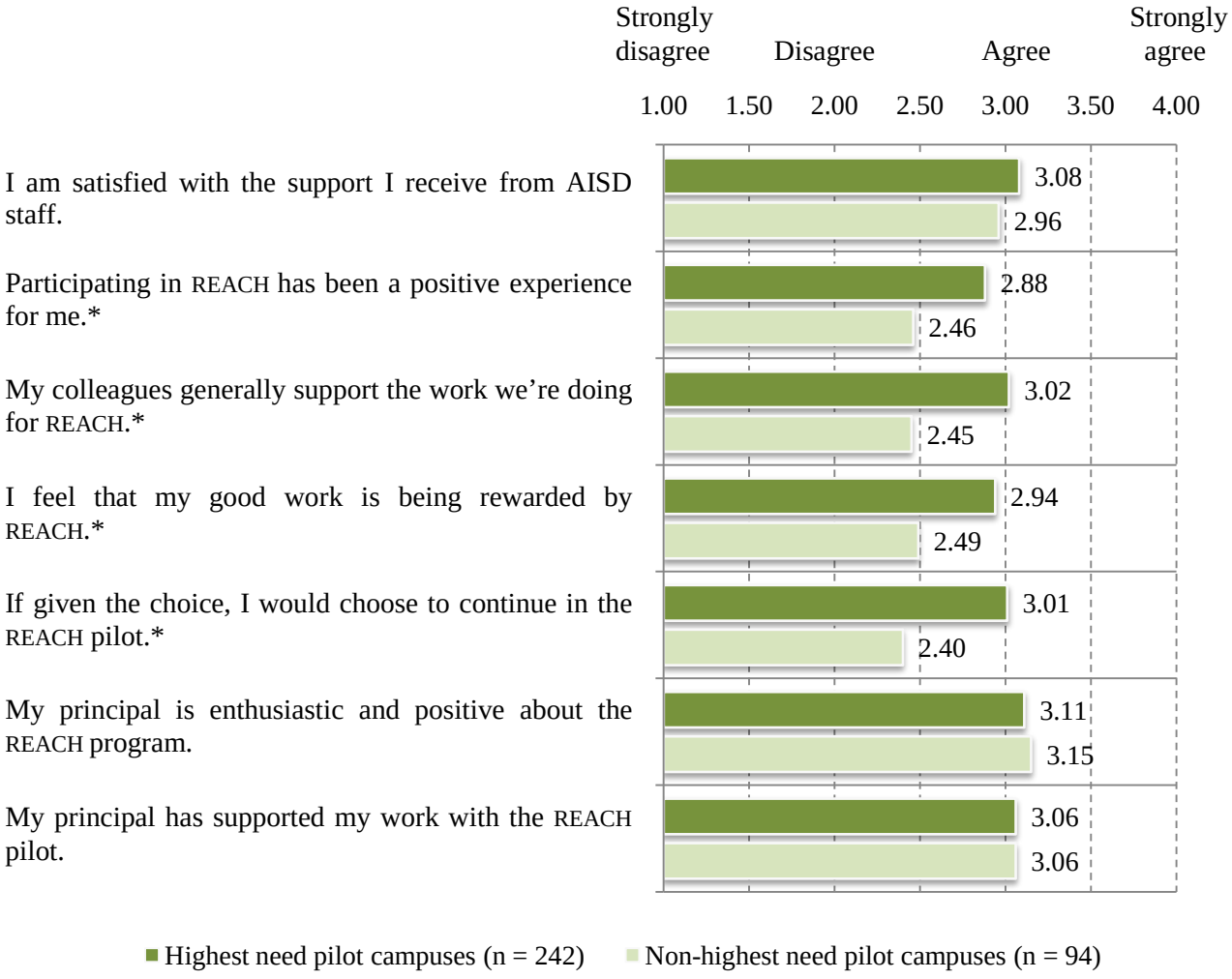
	Highest needs pilot		High needs comparison		Non-highest needs pilot		Non-highest needs comparison	
	2008	2009	2008	2009	2008	2009	2008	2009
I am knowledgeable about the district's REACH strategic compensation pilot program.	n/a	3.47*	n/a	2.64	n/a	3.47*	n/a	2.74
I would like to be eligible to participate in the REACH program.	n/a	3.36*	2.49	2.67	n/a	2.47*	2.17	2.25
Strategic compensation (i.e., a performance-based pay system) is a good idea.	2.95	3.16*↑	2.15	2.35↑	2.45	2.29*	2.38	1.86↓

Source. Spring 2008 and Spring 2009 Employee Coordinated Surveys
* Indicates a mean significantly different from the mean at a comparison school at the same need level (i.e., highest or non-highest)
↑↓ Indicates a mean significantly higher or lower than the mean for the prior year, based on Cohen's *d* > .18.

REACH TEACHER ATTITUDES ABOUT THE PROGRAM

REACH teachers were asked to report their perceptions of the pilot (Figure 1). Results indicate that staff at highest needs pilot campuses were substantially more satisfied with the experience and had more favorable attitudes toward the program than did staff at non-highest need pilot schools. Items with statistically meaningful mean differences are indicated by asterisks. Notably, average ratings on many of these items were below 2.5 for non-highest needs staff, indicating that on average, they *disagreed.* (See Appendix A.1 for *t*-test results.)

Figure 1. Average Ratings for Strategic Compensation Items, by Pilot and Need Status



Source. Spring 2009 Employee Coordinated Survey
* Indicates a statistically significant mean difference

Most teachers at pilot campuses, regardless of need status, agreed or strongly agreed that their principal supported their work with the REACH pilot and that their principal was enthusiastic and positive about the program. In addition, more than 80% of all pilot teachers agreed or strongly agreed that they were satisfied with the support received from REACH staff. However, despite the similarities across need status with regard to support from their principals and program staff, teachers at highest needs REACH schools were more favorable about the program than were their non-highest needs peers.

Focus group discussions indicated some teachers did not perceive a connection between the REACH program and their work for a variety of reasons. Some at non-highest needs schools did not value SLOs because many of their students already performed at a high level. They did not seem to distinguish between student mastery and student growth (e.g., one teacher did not

understand why she did not attain her SLOs when her students passed the TAKS test, and others were confused that the campus had not received an award for school-wide growth despite strong TAKS performance). Others described a dislike of performance-based programs in general and did not view REACH as an initiative designed to promote student achievement.

Fewer than half of teachers at non-highest needs pilot schools reported they would choose to continue with REACH, if given the choice, while more than three-quarters of teachers at highest needs pilot schools said they would do so. Teachers, instructional coaches, and assistant principals described during focus groups that although extra pay was welcome, the district should not lose sight of the importance of working conditions and a competitive base salary. Some also did not believe the program provided enough incentive to alter their decision to leave or to stay. One teacher from a highest needs school who had favorable opinions about REACH stated that she was leaving the campus and would miss the program, but that ultimately "you have to be happy going through the year."

REQUESTS FOR TRANSFER IN 2009–2010

Teachers, instructional coaches, principals, and assistant principals indicated that across both highest needs and non-highest needs campuses, many had been influenced to remain on their campuses due to the REACH program. Teachers from every highest needs school and some non-highest needs schools suggested that the program provided incentives for them not to transfer, leave the profession, or retire. One teacher at a highest needs school said, "I was 'out the door,' but here I am for round 2. I didn't think it would matter, but it does. Surrounding schools just can't match the stipends that we're getting here." Another teacher stated, "I was seriously going to leave until we got Comparable Growth [stipends]." A teacher from a different highest needs school reported that the retention stipend equaled the special education stipend she could have received for transferring into a special education position at another school; however, she opted to remain at her campus to teach general education instead. A novice teacher at another highest needs school stated, "[I] thought about another ISD, something closer to my house, but I couldn't imagine not having [my REACH mentor]."

Although actual retention data will not become available until Fall 2009, transfer requests provide some indication of teachers' intentions for the coming school year. Each spring, teachers in AISD with more than 3 years of experience can submit a request for transfer to another school in AISD for the following school year. Transfer requests of pilot and comparison teachers were examined to determine whether REACH was effective in meeting this interim step towards the program goal of teacher retention. It is noteworthy that significantly greater percentages of teachers at both non-highest needs pilot and comparison schools requested transfers for 2009–2010 than had for 2008–2009 (Table 4), suggesting more desire

for movement among these teachers despite a challenging economic climate with fewer teaching vacancies in the district.

Table 4. Pilot and Comparison Teachers Requesting a Transfer for 2009–2010

	Total *N*	**% of total *N* who made any transfer request**	**Average number of requests made by those who made any transfer request**	**% of 2007–2008 teachers who made any transfer request for 2008–2009**
Highest needs pilot	444	11.9%	4.7	9.1%
Highest needs comparison	968	11.5%	4.1	10.1%
Non-highest needs pilot	183	16.9%*	4.6	8.9%
Non-highest needs comparison	386	12.4%*	3.9	7.3%

Source. AISD transfer request database
* Indicates a statistically significant change ($p < .05$), compared with percentage of teachers requesting a transfer in Spring 2008

No significant differences were found between the percentages of pilot and of comparison teachers making a request to transfer in 2009–2010 (Table 4). In addition, the difference between transfer requests at non-highest needs pilot and comparison schools, although non-significant, occurred in the undesirable direction, with a tendency for more pilot teachers to request transfers. However, several factors must be considered when interpreting these results for both highest needs and non-highest needs schools.

First, novice teachers are not eligible to transfer within the district; thus, novice teachers who chose to remain on their campus (rather than leave the district) due to the support of their REACH mentor are not reflected in these data. Rather, these results should be evident in the retention rates for the coming school year that will be available after the school year begins. Second, comments from some pilot participants at Hart who chose to transfer to other schools suggested the program had been attractive, but the money and support were not enough to keep them on that campus during a challenging principal transition and uncertainty about whether their school would again receive oversight from an executive principal.

To explore the relative influence of leadership context and REACH on teacher behaviors, transfer requests were examined without data for Hart or its comparison schools. The difference in percentages of highest needs pilot and comparison teachers requesting transfers remained non-significant but increased, with a trend toward fewer highest needs pilot teachers requesting a transfer (Table 5). Like Hart, Rodriguez was to experience a principal change in 2009–2010, but requests from teachers at Rodriguez did not influence the overall percentage of teacher requests from highest needs pilot schools. These results again underscore

the importance of both campus work environment and perceptions about the pilot program to decisions regarding whether to stay or to leave, and that the influence of any compensation initiative can be mitigated by contextual factors.

Table 5. Highest Needs Pilot and Comparison Teachers Requesting a Transfer for 2009–2010, With and Without Hart and Rodriguez and Their Comparison Schools

	All highest needs			Excluding Hart and its comparisons			Excluding Hart and Rodriguez and their comparisons		
	pilot	comparison	*p*	pilot	comparison	*p*	pilot	comparison	*p*
% of teachers requesting a transfer	11.9%	11.5%	.83	8.5%	11.3%	.12	8.5%	11.2%	.16

Source. AISD transfer request database
Note. Differences are considered statistically significant when $p < .05$.

A variety of contextual factors must be considered when examining teacher mobility. For example, economic conditions can cause teachers to reconsider retirement and choose to remain at their jobs ("Lagging Economy," 2009). REACH principals indeed believed that the local economy influenced some teachers to remain in their positions for the upcoming school year. However, economic conditions may not have outweighed the desire for teachers unhappy in their assignments to request transfers to schools they perceived to be more desirable.

TEACHER RATINGS OF THEIR WORK ENVIRONMENT

Research suggests that psychological attachment to teaching and to one's school, along with satisfaction with the work environment, are some of the factors that best differentiate teachers who leave the district, transfer to another school, or remain on the same campus in AISD (Cornetto & Schmitt, 2009). REACH includes program elements designed to facilitate these attitudes, which, like transfer requests, are interim steps toward the program goal of teacher retention. To gauge the influence of pilot participation on these factors, REACH pilot and comparison school teachers were asked to report on these topics. Results indicated that teachers at REACH schools did not report significantly greater attachment to their schools, the district, or the profession in 2009 than did their peers at comparison schools (Table 6). However, non-highest needs pilot teachers were significantly less likely than were their comparison peers to report they often look for other non-teaching jobs ($M = 3.40$, $SD = .70$ and $M = 3.20$, $SD = .77$, respectively; $t = 2.22$, $p < .05$).

Attitudes of both pilot and comparison teachers improved from 2008 to 2009 regarding their opportunities for collaboration with other teachers in the school. However, non-highest needs REACH teachers rated several things less favorably in 2009 than they had the prior year: their ability to influence the school's policies and practices, the amount of autonomy and

control they had over their classrooms, and their opportunity to contribute to the success of their schools less. Conversely, non-highest needs REACH teachers' attitudes improved in 2009 toward their salaries, and their satisfaction with their schools' system for rewarding and recognizing outstanding teachers did not decline like that of their comparison school peers. Thus, non-highest needs pilot teachers felt less autonomy and control but were more satisfied with their salaries in year 2 than before.

Table 6. Average Ratings of Teacher Satisfaction With the Work Environment

	Highest needs pilot		Highest needs comparison		Non-highest needs pilot		Non-highest needs comparison	
	2008	2009	2008	2009	2008	2009	2008	2009
My salary	2.34	2.44	2.23	2.30	2.13	2.36↑	2.25	2.36
My ability to influence the school's policies and practices	2.57	2.53	2.55	2.58	2.90	2.54↓	2.85	2.67↓
The amount of autonomy and control I have over my own classroom	3.12	3.02	3.17	2.89↓	3.44	3.19↓	3.23	3.21
Opportunities for collaboration with other teachers in the school	2.97	3.14↑	2.63	3.11↑	2.97	3.11↑	2.85	3.20↑
Opportunities for professional advancement (promotion) offered to teachers at this school	2.75	2.81	2.64	2.75	2.90	2.95	2.78	2.84
My opportunity to "make a difference" and to contribute to the overall success of my school	3.11	3.05	2.99	3.01	3.43	3.22↓	3.28	3.21
My school's system for rewarding and recognizing outstanding teachers.	2.61	2.51	2.45	2.58	2.87	2.83	2.87	2.53↓

Source. Spring 2008 and Spring 2009 Employee Coordinated Surveys
* Indicates a mean significantly different from the mean at a comparison school at same need level (i.e., highest or non-highest).
↑↓ Indicates a mean higher or lower than the mean for the prior year, based on Cohen's $d > .18$.

Each November, AISD campus staff complete a survey regarding climate dimensions, including campus Achievement Press, Collegial Leadership, and Professional Teacher Behavior (Imes, Schmitt, & Cornetto, 2009). These dimensions indicate the extent to which staff believe the school community pushes for academic improvement; the extent to which staff believe the principal establishes clear expectations and values the input of staff; and the extent to which staff believe teachers are committed to students, are competent, and support each other. In 2008–2009, staff at highest needs pilot schools rated Achievement Press and

Collegial Leadership significantly higher than did their comparison school peers (Table 7), echoing reports from principals that their conversations with teachers surrounding SLOs had been an invaluable result of the program.

Table 7. Staff Climate Survey Ratings of Pilot and Comparison Campuses, 2008–2009

	Achievement Press			Collegial Leadership			Professional Teacher Behavior		
	Pilot mean	Comparison mean	*p*	Pilot mean	Comparison mean	*p*	Pilot mean	Comparison mean	*p*
Highest needs	2.66	2.55	<.01	3.14	2.92	<.01	3.14	3.15	<.01
Non-highest needs	2.96	2.93		3.05	3.07		3.27	3.26	

Source. 2007–2008 and 2008–2009 AISD Staff Climate Survey
Note. Differences are considered statistically significant when $p < .05$.

To monitor changes in staff ratings of campus climate over time, Table 8 presents the percentage of schools with meaningful increases or decreases in climate ratings from 2007–2008 to 2008–2009. Ratings for both Collegial Leadership and Professional Teacher Behavior were more likely to have increased from 2007–2008 to 2008–2009 at highest needs pilot schools than at comparison schools. Non-highest needs pilot schools did not differ from their comparison schools in the likelihood of experiencing increases or decreases in climate from one year to the next.

Table 8. Staff Climate Survey Changes for Pilot and Comparison Campuses, From 2007–2008 to 2008–2009

	Achievement Press		Collegial Leadership		Professional Teacher Behavior	
	% improved	% declined	% improved	% declined	% improved	% declined
Highest needs pilot	29%	0%	86%*	14%	43%*	0%
Highest needs comparison	21%	0%	14%	14%	7%	7%
Non-highest needs pilot	25%	0%	0%	0%	25%	25%
Non-highest needs comparison	25%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Source. 2007–2008 and 2008–2009 AISD Staff Climate Survey
Note. *Difference between pilot and comparison schools of the same need status is considered statistically significant at $p < .05$.

Participant Experiences With SLOs

A major component of REACH was the development of SLOs. Teachers, instructional specialists and coaches, librarians, and assistant principals were required to establish two learning goals (SLOs) for their students and to pre- and post-assess students to measure growth that had occurred during the school year. They received a stipend for each SLO for which student growth had met the target (AISD, 2009a). SLO performance was similar for years 1 and 2, with 83% and 81% of eligible staff meeting at least one SLO, respectively (Table 9).

Table 9. Pilot Teachers Meeting 0, 1, or 2 SLOs in 2007–2008 and 2008–2009

	2007–2008 Number of eligible staff and percentage meeting SLOs	2008–2009 Number of eligible staff and percentage meeting SLOs
All pilot teachers	*N* = 464	*N* = 623
Met 0 SLOs	17%	19%
Met 1 SLO	19%	22%
Met 2 SLOs	64%	59%
Highest needs pilot teachers	*n* = 301	*n* = 440
Met 0 SLOs	14%	21%
Met 1 SLO	18%	22%
Met 2 SLOs	68%	57%
Non-highest needs pilot teachers	*n* = 163	*n* = 182
Met 0 SLOs	23%	15%
Met 1 SLO	20%	21%
Met 2 SLOs	57%	63%

Source. REACH SLO database

During the focus groups, teachers and principals were asked to discuss their experiences with SLOs during 2008–2009, including the use of D2 assessments and their collaboration with each other and with REACH staff. Results suggest that the SLO process was less confusing to staff in 2008–2009 than had been reported in 2007–2008 (Schmitt et al., 2009), although several challenges remained. Most notably, teachers were frustrated with the D2 assessment system required for core area teachers in most grade levels. In addition, the SLO process presented particular challenges for librarians and assistant principals, who were among those with job roles included in REACH for the first time in 2008–2009. However, pilot participants reported great satisfaction and appreciation for REACH program staff. In many cases, participants spontaneously mentioned REACH staff members by name to describe the level of support and guidance they had received throughout the year.

Teachers at several schools were excited to talk about student growth and about how the SLOs gave them a unique framework through which to view growth. One elementary teacher, despite not meeting either growth target, described the excitement her students displayed when she showed them how much they had learned over the year. Another teacher said that for the first time, she sat down with individual students to compare their work from

the beginning of the semester with that from the end of the semester so they, too, could see how far they had come; she described it as a "powerful" exercise she would continue to use in the future. These comments were especially prominent among teachers in subjects and grade levels typically not assessed with common or standardized measures.

Teachers expressed some continuing frustration with the SLO process. The most common complaint regarding SLOs was that teachers did not feel they set attainable goals. For example, some teachers said they established goals that were unrealistically high or that they should have set multi-tiered goals but had not (e.g., they had established a goal stating that *all* students would improve by 25 points rather than "the bottom quartile of students will improve by 30 points, the top quartile will improve by 10 points"). Several teachers expressed frustration because they were required by their principal or by program staff to revise their SLO(s) and felt they had not accomplished the objectives because of this "interference." Some were discouraged by these required revisions because they felt they knew their students and the data better than anyone else did, and felt they should have been permitted to establish what they perceived to be an appropriately rigorous goal. Some questioned the expertise of their principals and/or the REACH staff who had deemed their original goals not rigorous enough.

In addition, some teachers were troubled by the lack of alignment between their students' success with TAKS but not with SLOs. More than one teacher lamented that 100% of his/her students passed TAKS but he/she had not met any SLOs.[1] Many also described how the timing of SLO post-assessment had been problematic because of its close proximity to TAKS. They reported concerns that students did not take the post-assessment seriously after TAKS, but that taking the assessment too closely before TAKS might lead to burnout before students are required to take the high-stakes state assessment.

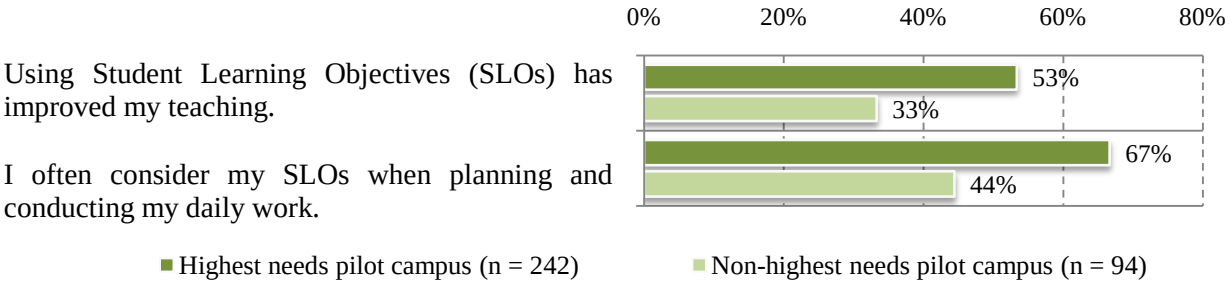
Some teachers also reported feeling "like a failure" if they had not accomplished their SLOs and that the stress associated with establishing appropriate SLOs had made them dislike the program. These feelings were exacerbated by continued anxiety regarding the likelihood the local newspaper would publish their names and SLO results. Teachers on some campuses also expressed lingering skepticism about the rigor of SLOs in non-TAKS grades or subjects. Despite these negative experiences, many teachers felt it would be easier in subsequent years to establish rigorous but realistic SLOs given their previous experience.

Figure 2 displays responses to survey items teachers answered about SLOs. At highest needs campuses, teachers were significantly more likely to agree or strongly agree with the statement "Using Student Learning Objectives has improved my teaching" than were those at

[1] Principals reported varied relationships between TAKS and SLO performance on their campuses, with some describing similar performance on both, while others reported conflicting results. The statistical relationships between TAKS and SLO performance will be examined in subsequent reports.

non-highest needs campuses. However, despite some encouraging comments made in the focus groups, ratings were relatively low across both need categories regarding whether the use of SLOs improved their teaching, with agreement from only 53% and 33% of teachers at highest and non-highest needs pilot campuses, respectively.

Figure 2. Teachers Who Agreed or Strongly Agreed With SLO-Related Statements



Source. Spring 2009 Employee Coordinated Survey

D2 Assessments

One significant change to REACH for 2008–2009 was the requirement that all core subject area teachers in grades 3 through 11 use a new assessment system, D2. Based on examination of TAKS results from the prior 3 years, the D2 assessments were designed to assess specific content areas that were deemed most critical needs at each grade level 3 through 12 in reading, math, science, and social studies. Tests were housed in an online electronic system, along with the test scores of students, after exams had been scanned into the system. D2 also contained an item bank teachers could use to create their own assessments.

Teachers from each of the 10 pilot campuses where focus groups were conducted reported difficulty with the D2 system, as did the majority of survey respondents (Appendix A.3). Aside from technical difficulties associated with the program (e.g., formatting problems with exams and issues with the scanning and uploading of data), the most striking problem teachers reported with D2 was that 3rd- and 5th-grade D2 assessments in math did not match the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) they were expected to teach. Teachers in these grades felt this misalignment caused their failure to reach their SLOs, as measured by the D2 assessments. Despite significant efforts REACH staff made to obtain feedback on assessments by district curriculum experts and pilot staff and to work with D2 consultants on remedies for problems they identified, teachers reported lingering concerns at the end of the school year.

In addition to technical and content concerns, some teachers were discouraged by the concept of a required assessment, suggesting that the REACH program was described to them as an opportunity to demonstrate their students' progress beyond what could be measured with

standardized tests (i.e., TAKS). Some teachers noted that a required assessment seemed contradictory to that central premise. Some also were frustrated that they had spent a considerable amount of time developing their own assessments during year 1 that they were unable to use in year 2. D2 assessments also raised concerns among some teachers and principals who worried about a potential discrepancy between primary grades and upper grades in the difficulty of meeting SLOs. It is important to note that D2 assessments will be optional in 2009–2010, a decision supported by 85% of survey respondents (Appendix A.3).

However, despite these issues with D2, some teachers reported appreciation for the attempt to provide standard ways of measuring SLOs and spoke about the merits of ensuring consistent rigor across pilot schools. Although many teachers described general frustration with the D2 system and relief that D2 assessments will not be required, many also indicated they will use either the pre-established assessments or the D2 item bank in the coming year. In fact, more than one-third of survey respondents reported they would use D2 assessments even if to do so were not required (Appendix A.3). However, many teachers suggested revisions to the assessments, additional training, and improvements to the documentation associated with the D2 system.

New Participants' Experiences With SLOs

In 2008–2009, assistant principals, instructional coaches/specialists, and librarians participated in REACH for the first time. Discussions with staff from each group indicated they felt pleased to be included in the REACH program because they already had been doing the work associated with REACH and appreciated the opportunity to be rewarded for their efforts. Despite expressing overall positive feelings toward their inclusion in REACH, many reported experiencing challenges when integrating the REACH SLOs into their roles.

Most of these challenges pertained to difficulty accessing the specific group of students targeted by their SLO. For example, many librarians expressed difficulty finding adequate amounts of time to work with their targeted students, given that they had to rely on classroom teachers to allow students to work with them, usually 1 or 2 days a week for an hour at a time. They reported that as TAKS time approached, the amount of time they were able to spend with their student group diminished. In addition, they expressed frustration that student attendance could influence so heavily their ability to spend what they regarded as an adequate amount of time with students to accomplish their SLOs. They explained how a student absence on one day could result in a lack of interaction with that student for up to 2 weeks, a similar frustration to that reported by special area elementary teachers, who do not see their students each day in the same way as does a traditional classroom teacher. Assistant principals and instructional coaches/specialists did not express the same challenges with access to students, but did note

that the only way to achieve their SLOs was to have a good working relationship with the classroom teacher(s) of their targeted student group.

Both librarians and assistant principals also reported difficulty establishing SLOs. For example, librarians described difficulty creating SLOs that were not directly tied to the library. Some were directed by their principals to create SLOs in areas other than reading (e.g., mathematics or science), although they would have felt more comfortable with content area more directly tied to their work (e.g., literacy, library research skills). Both groups reported they needed more guidance from REACH staff members in this area. As a means of addressing this issue, some assistant principals suggested implementing regular meetings with other assistant principals in the REACH program to discuss how to incorporate SLOs into their work, how to support teachers with SLOs, and other issues related to the REACH program that are specific to their role. Instructional coaches/specialists did not describe challenges with the establishment of SLOs, but did express challenges with determining appropriate targets for student groups they may not see on a regular basis. Some assistant principals also expressed confusion about the guidelines for establishing operational SLOs and requested clarity in this area. However, librarians were encouraged at the prospect of using operational goals (e.g., parent and student participation in book clubs) to help principals and teachers see the connection between library skills and TAKS test scores, particularly in the area of reading.

Although the newly included staff reported specific challenges with REACH in 2008–2009, they remained optimistic about the program and described specific plans to incorporate their experiences into the process next year. Specifically, librarians indicated a desire to use operational goals for SLOs and suggested such goals would emphasize their role in student achievement, thus encouraging staff and students to view librarians' time with students as valuable. Assistant principals reported plans to become more involved in the SLO process, both for themselves and with teachers, and to use operational goals more strategically. Instructional coaches/specialists indicated specific content areas they likely would target and discussed alterations they will make to their target-setting process.

Collaboration Among Campus Staff

Some teachers described ways the SLO process helped them to collaborate with each other. They reported discussing SLOs together and also indicated appreciation for the partnerships established between assistant principals or instructional coaches/specialists and teachers. However, collaboration among campus staff was not evident across all pilot schools. Staff at some campuses reported little collaboration regarding SLOs and even indicated wishing their principals had facilitated more conversations and/or suggested they work together on SLOs. Some teachers at one non-highest needs school characterized their

collaboration as "griping and group confusion more than collaboration." At other campuses, it was apparent during focus groups that some grade level/subject area teams had worked together to set SLOs and others had not. Some teachers expressed surprise when they learned their colleagues had collaborated when setting goals, making remarks such as "I didn't know that we could do that!" and "It would have been helpful to know that we could work together." Some teachers went so far as to suggest that a common grade-level SLO should be required. As further evidence of the lack of consistency in collaboration, survey data did not indicate significantly different professional learning community practices in pilot and comparison schools (Table 10).

Table 10. Pilot and Comparison Staff Ratings for Professional Learning Community Items

	Pilot status 2008–2009			
	Pilot (*n* = 348)		**Comparison (*n* = 590)**	
I participate with a group of my campus colleagues to...	**mean**	***SD***	**mean**	***SD***
…share and discuss student work.	3.59	.99	3.71	.96
…share and discuss new teaching approaches to increase student engagement, alignment, and rigor.	3.61	.94	3.61	.98
…engage in systematic analysis of student performance data.	3.37	1.01	3.42	1.05
…observe each other's classroom instruction.	2.52	1.14	2.52	1.13
…plan lessons and units together.	3.56	1.28	3.53	1.23
…develop common student assessments.	3.41	1.30	3.42	1.21
…share and discuss research on effective teaching and learning practices.	3.18	1.09	3.12	1.09
…develop strategies to support struggling learners.	3.54	1.02	3.54	1.06
Professional Learning Community subscale mean	3.35	.89	3.36	.86

Source. Spring 2009 Employee Coordinated Survey
Note. Items were scored on a scale from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*).

Although focus group responses were largely positive when describing collaboration with teachers and administrators on REACH activities, some teachers reported frustration communicating with their principals and REACH staff, particularly in circumstances in which all parties disagreed on the level of rigor associated with SLOs. Also, teachers at Hart reported the challenges associated with implementing REACH when their executive principal did not support the program.

REACH MENTORING PROGRAM

A key component of the REACH program is to provide full-time high quality mentors to novice teachers (those in their first 3 years of teaching) at highest needs schools, with the goal of providing high quality induction to the teaching profession and encouraging professional growth during the critical formative years of teaching. Unlike mentors provided to novice teachers in their first 2 years of teaching at other AISD schools, REACH mentors do not have teaching responsibilities of their own; rather, they are assigned to dedicated, full-time mentoring positions in which they each mentor up to ten novice teachers. Moreover, REACH mentors received training from the New Teacher Center (NTC), a non-profit organization at UC Santa Cruz that develops and administers induction and mentoring programs for new teachers and administrators and is considered by many to be the premier mentor training program in the US.

In Summer 2008, mentors attended a week of professional development provided through the American Federation of Teachers Educational Research & Dissemination (ER&D) Program, which provided an overview of research-based best practices related to all aspects of teaching, and prepared mentors to become trainers on these topics, themselves. Mentors also received intensive training from NTC four times during the year, with each session designed to provide content most relevant to mentee teachers' needs at that time of year. In addition, training was customized for mentors based on their years as mentors in the program. The training from NTC, along with program-specific training from REACH staff and their own experiences as classroom teachers and/or AISD, mentors created a highly specialized mentoring team that was well equipped to provide intensive support and guidance to new teachers on challenging campuses.

Teacher and Principal Perceptions of the Mentor Program

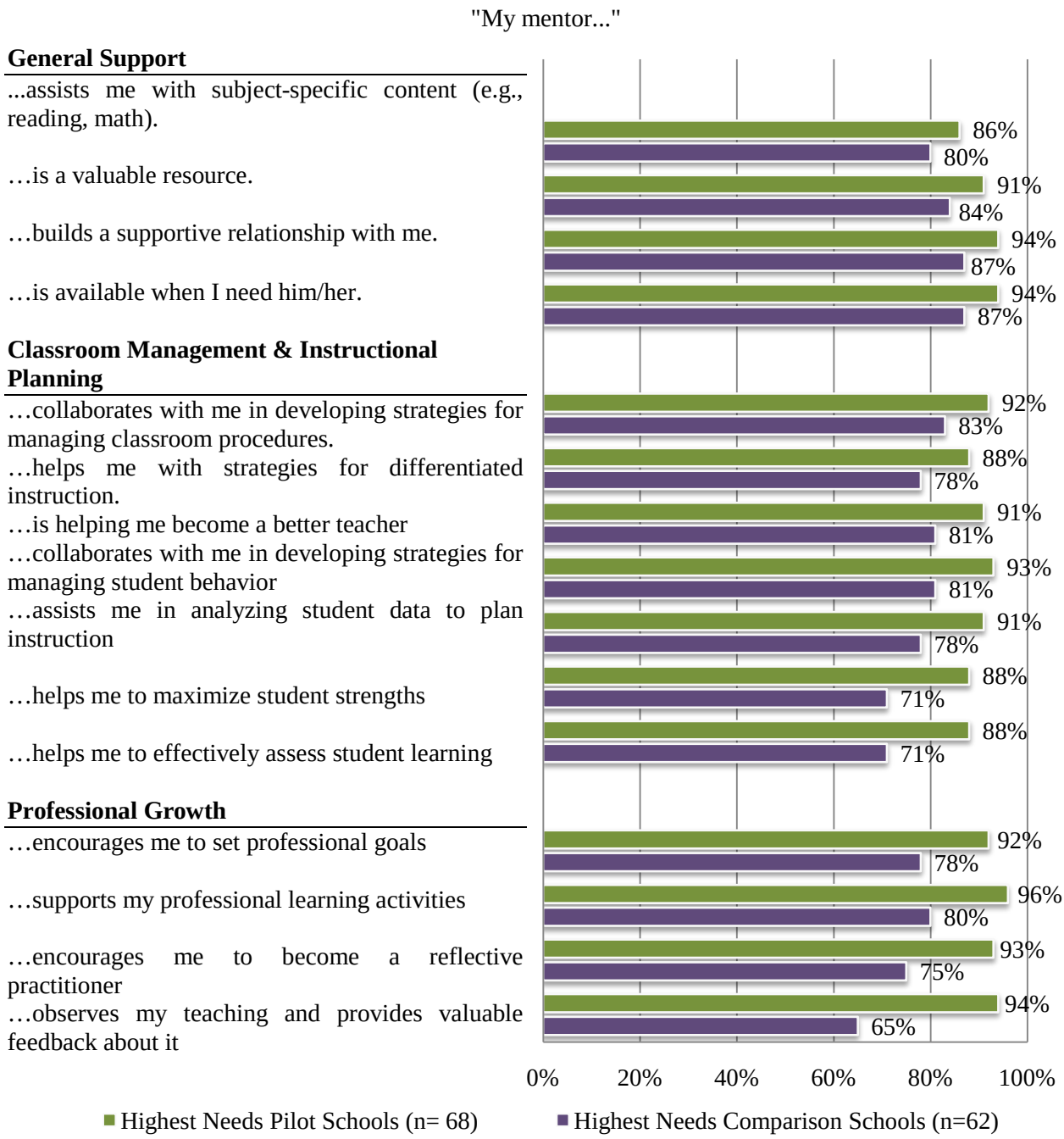
Discussion with teachers at highest needs REACH schools indicated widespread appreciation for the commitment, support, and expertise of REACH mentors. Many teachers praised the mentors for their work not only with novice teachers, but with the whole campus. Novice teachers and veteran teachers alike described REACH mentors as a valuable resource to everyone and expressed gratitude for the mentors' participation in grade level/department meetings and for their assistance with SLOs and with D2 assessment scanning and troubleshooting. In addition, instructional coaches described how REACH mentors had partnered with them to support teachers in a strategic and efficient way throughout the school year. Many teachers indicated the mentoring program had such an impact on their campus that it should be implemented district wide. Even those who were uncertain about the REACH program or were uncomfortable with the concept of performance pay reported strong support

for the mentoring program. One veteran teacher said she was reluctant to participate in REACH for a second year until she started working with the REACH mentors; she indicated their support was reason enough to want to stay in the program. Some veteran teachers went so far as to indicate envy and regret that they had not been given the opportunity to work with a full-time mentor teacher during their novice years. Principals also expressed overwhelming support for the mentor program. One principal went so far as to say that, "the mentor program is the best thing coming out of REACH – not the money."

Despite a few criticisms of the mentoring program, REACH novice teachers reported their mentors had substantially influenced their ability to be successful teachers and, in some cases, had influenced their decision to stay at the same school for the coming school year. They discussed the many ways in which their mentors had provided instructional strategies, had encouraged their collaboration and integration with more experienced peers on campus, and had offered emotional support when needed.

To gauge the ways in which novice pilot school teachers and their comparison school peers were supported by their mentors (i.e., either REACH or traditional AISD mentors), the teachers received survey items regarding their experiences (Figure 3). Novice teachers at highest needs REACH schools reported significantly more favorable levels ($p < .01$) of each aspect of mentor involvement than did their peers at highest needs comparison schools. Responses were most discrepant between the two groups for ratings of mentor assistance with professional growth (e.g., observing teaching and providing valuable feedback about it); instructional planning (e.g., helping to assess student learning effectively); and classroom management (e.g., developing strategies for managing classroom procedures). Pilot and comparison novice teachers were most similar in their ratings of items assessing general mentor support (e.g., is available when needed).

Figure 3. Teachers Who Agreed or Strongly Agreed With Mentor-Related Statements



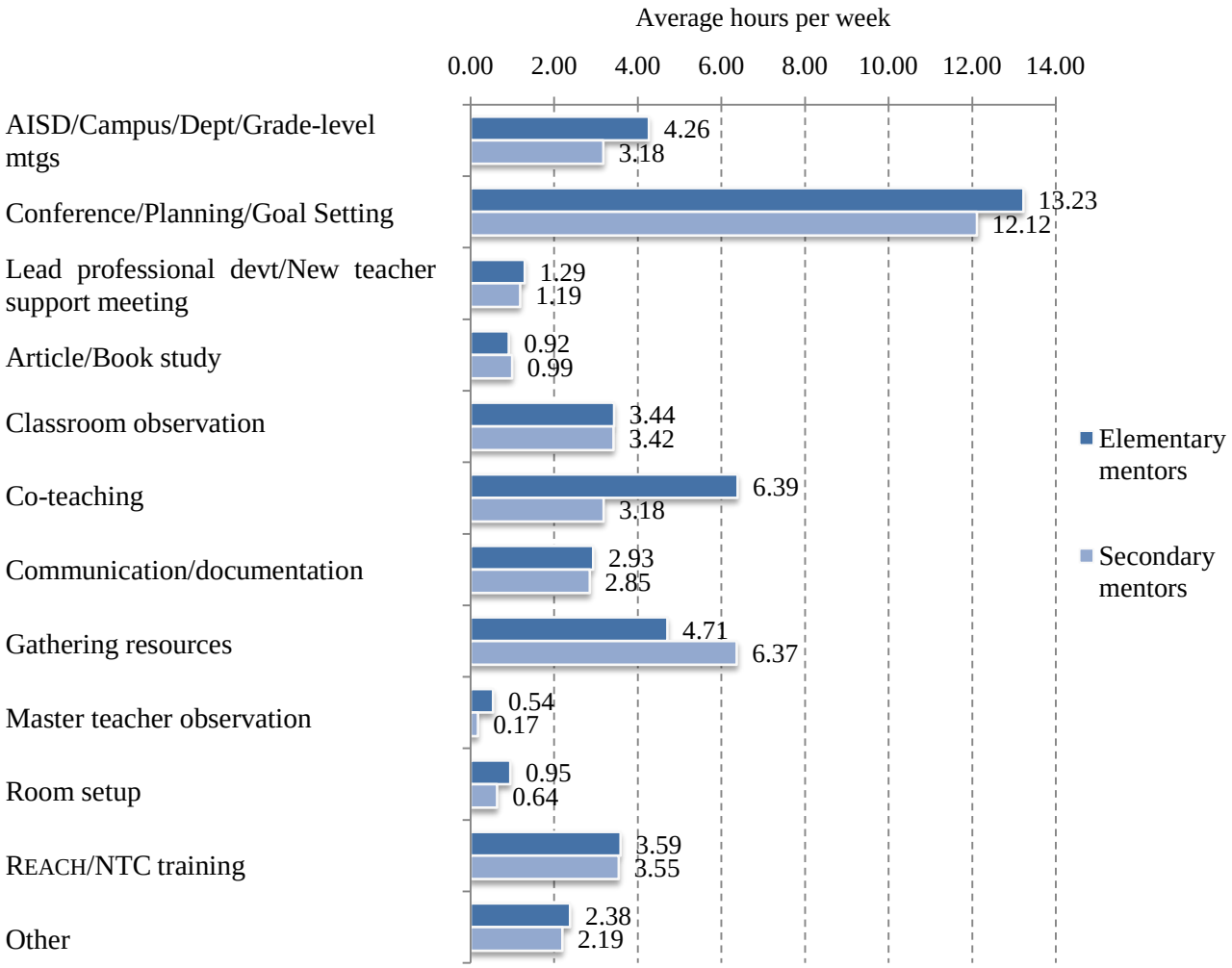
Source. Spring 2009 Employee Coordinated Survey
Note. All differences are significant at $p < .05$.

Mentor Activities

Mentors submitted online activity forms to document the types of activities in which they had engaged. Mentors identified the type of activity (i.e., a choice of 16 activities plus "other"); length of time spent; activity participants; and any comments they wished to provide (e.g., information about the content of their meeting). Figure 4 displays the average number of hours per week that mentors reported engaging in various mentoring activities.

Mentors reported spending an average of 18 hours per week in conferences for planning and goal setting with mentees, and gathering resources for teachers. They reported spending an additional 6 to 10 hours per week conducting classroom observations and co-teaching with mentees. Little difference was found between elementary and secondary mentors in the amount of time spent on these activities. However, elementary mentors reported spending more time co-teaching with mentees than did secondary mentors, and secondary mentors reported spending more time gathering resources than did elementary mentors. These differences likely reflect the fact that many secondary mentors were not matched to mentees by subject area (due to practical limitations); therefore, mentors with such assignments would not have been expected to engage in co-teaching. Similarly, because most elementary mentors were former elementary generalists who were proficient across subject areas, they likely already had a wide variety of resources for their mentees, including their personal libraries/collections. Secondary mentors may have needed more time to locate and access resources for mentees whose subject areas or grade levels were new to them (for more detailed information on activities, see Appendix A.3).

Figure 4. Summary of 2008–2009 Mentor Weekly Activities, by Level

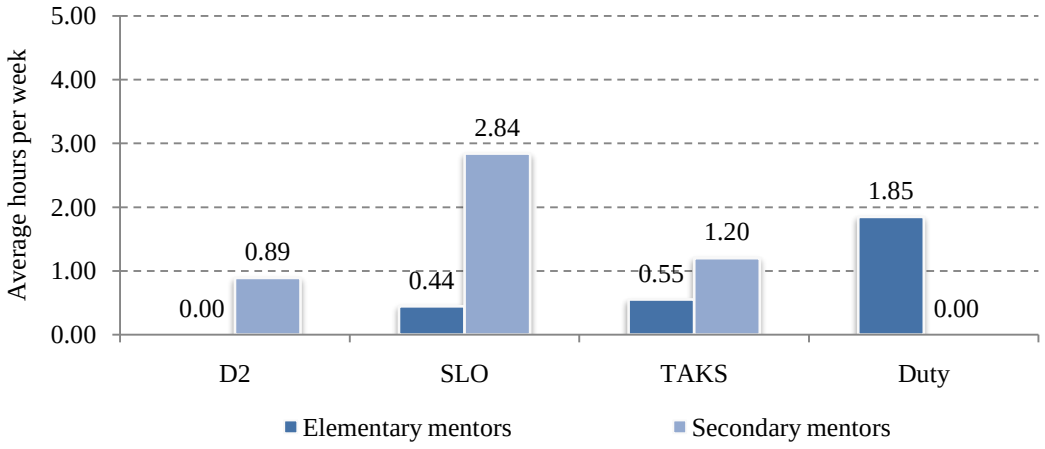


Source. REACH Mentor Database

Mentors were encouraged to annotate their entries when possible to indicate the content of their activities. Although they were not specifically asked to indicate when they were working with mentees on REACH-specific activities such as SLOs or D2 issues, many mentors did flag these interactions. Figure 5 displays the average number of hours per week mentors spent working with teachers on D2 issues, SLOs, and TAKS, along with the average number of "duty" hours (i.e., morning/afternoon duty or other campus assignments) per week. It is notable that mentors on only one campus, Rodriguez, were assigned to campus duty, and that no elementary mentors noted they worked with teachers on D2 issues.

In subsequent evaluation reports, mentor activities will be examined in combination with mentee job performance (i.e., TAKS performance of students of novice teachers and novice teacher SLO performance) and novice teacher retention when those data are available.

Figure 5. Summary of 2008–2009 Mentor Weekly REACH Activities, by Level



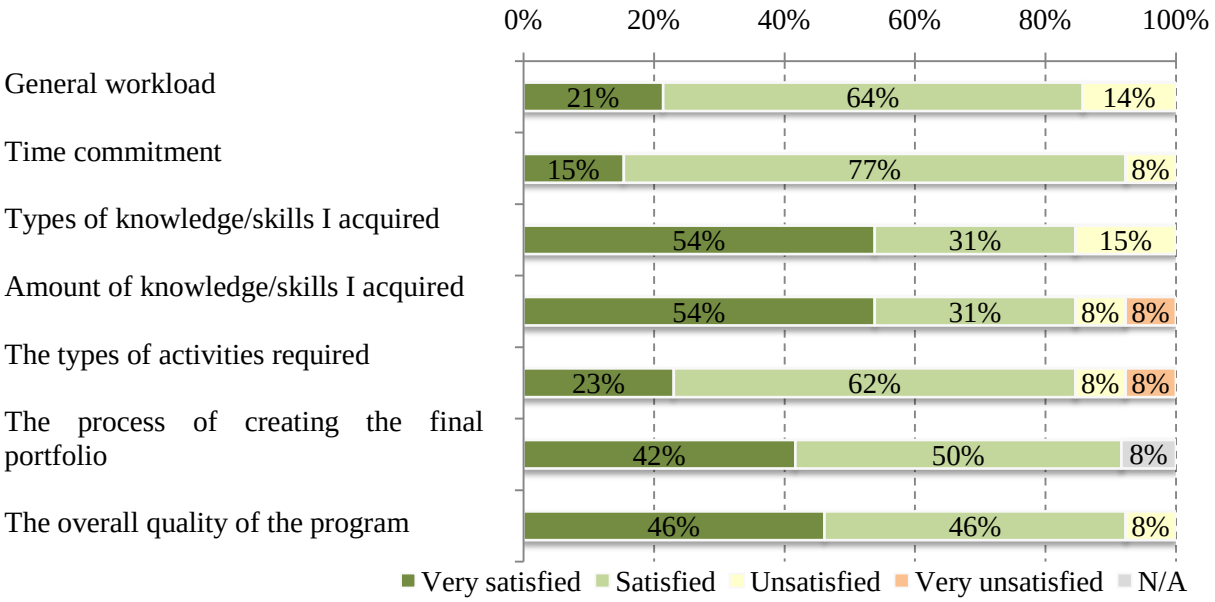
Source. REACH mentor database

TAKE ONE!®

REACH pilot teachers can participate in a unique professional development opportunity called the *Take One!*® program. *Take One!*® is sponsored by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) and provides teachers with the opportunity to prepare and submit one video portfolio entry from any of the certificate areas of National Board Certification. Participants who receive a passing score from the NBPTS on their portfolio can later apply the score toward National Board candidacy. Based on feedback received from 2007–2008 *Take One!*® participants, the program format changed substantially in 2008–2009, including a reduction in the number of meetings and time commitment of participants, and increased alignment between the program activities and the portfolio entry process.

Sixteen REACH teachers participated in the *Take One!*® program in 2008–2009, approximately one-third the number of teachers who had participated in 2007–2008 (Schmitt et al., 2009). Participants were assigned to small cohorts, facilitated by National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs), that met approximately twice per month from November to May. Most participants reported they were satisfied with the general workload and time commitment and the types of activities required for *Take One!*® (Figure 6), a distinct improvement from the previous year, when many participants reported both were more than they expected (Schmitt et al., 2009). Many 2008–2009 participants also reported they were very satisfied with the type and amount of knowledge and skills acquired and the overall quality of the program.

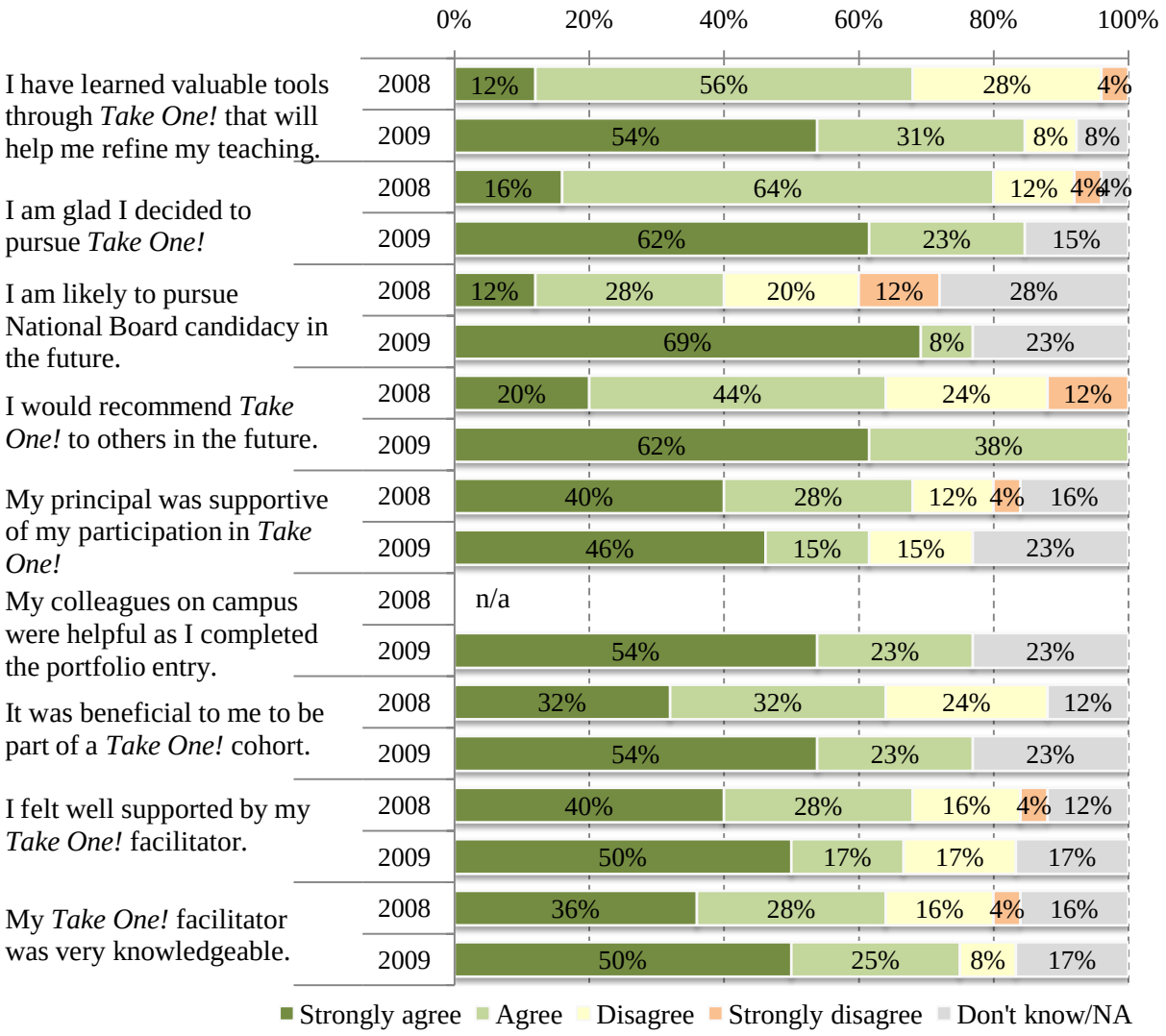
Figure 6. *Take One!*® Participants' Satisfaction With the Program



Source. 2009 *Take One!*® participant survey

Take One!® participants in 2008–2009 reported more favorable opinions about the program than did their peers who participated in 2007–2008, and 100% reported they would recommend the program to others in the future (Figure 7). Participants in 2008–2009 were more likely than those from 2007–2008 to submit a final portfolio (100% and 62%, respectively) and to report planning to pursue National Board candidacy in the future. They also were more likely to strongly agree they were glad to have participated in *Take One!*®. More than half of 2008–2009 participants indicated they expected to receive a passing score on their portfolios. In 2007–2008, about one-third of participants who submitted a portfolio received a passing score (Schmitt et al., 2009).

Figure 7. *Take One!*® 2008 and 2009 Participant Attitudes Toward the Program



Source. Spring 2008 and Spring 2009 *Take One!*® participant surveys

CONCLUSION

The results from surveys, focus groups, and transfer requests highlight some major themes associated with REACH participant experiences in 2008–2009. Most strikingly, evidence suggests that attitudes of highest needs pilot staff were more favorable toward REACH than were those of non-highest needs staff, and that REACH may have influenced their decisions about whether to remain at those schools. Teachers at highest needs REACH schools were less likely to report they often look for non-teaching jobs than were their peers at highest needs comparison schools, and although transfer requests were not significantly less frequent from highest needs pilot schools than from their comparisons, the pattern indicates movement in the desirable direction at highest needs schools. Additionally, novice teachers at highest needs pilot schools (who were not eligible to make requests for transfer within AISD) reported significantly more favorable experiences with their mentors than did their peers at comparison schools, and focus group results suggest retention rates for novice teachers reflect this benefit to REACH schools.

Teachers at highest needs REACH schools reported more positive levels of climate areas (e.g., collegial leadership and achievement press) than did their peers at comparison schools, and ratings for both collegial leadership and professional teacher behavior were significantly more likely to have improved from the prior year at highest needs pilot schools than at comparison schools. However, results were less favorable for non-highest needs REACH staff. Non-highest needs pilot school staff did not rate their school climate differently than did their comparison school peers, and data suggest less support for the REACH program among teachers at non-highest needs pilot schools than among their highest-needs REACH peers. Focus groups revealed that some teachers and principals, particularly at non-high needs campuses, did not fully support REACH. (See Appendix Table A.4 for an overview of results by program goal and hypothesis.)

In an international review of performance-based pay programs for teachers, Lavy (2007) noted that one of the major weaknesses of performance-based pay programs for teachers are "opaque" goals that make it difficult for teachers to understand the true nature and value of the program. This lack of understanding leads to decreased support for the program and an increased level of skepticism concerning whether the most qualified teachers are in fact receiving the bonuses they deserve. To address this issue, Lavy recommended that performance-based pay programs clarify the overarching goals of the program (e.g., student growth) and include long-term goals (e.g., stable, high quality campus faculty).

Such strategies have been echoed when examining the development of effective performance-base pay programs from a business perspective. McAdams and Hawk (2000)

analyzed performance-based pay programs in the business industry and found the best models for effective performance-based pay programs ensure employees understand the goals of the program and are knowledgeable enough about the program that they are able to change and influence program goals to fit their personal needs. Furthermore, McAdams and Hawk believe effective performance-based pay programs are characterized by the amount of time employees spend thinking, discussing, and communicating with co-workers (both in good times and in bad times) regarding different methodologies they have used to reach their goals. In the school context, teachers need to understand that everyone is working toward the same goal (e.g., increasing student learning), which in turn allows for collaboration among teachers and administrators to achieve student growth in the future. Data from year 2 suggest no difference between pilot and comparison schools in the behaviors associated with professional learning communities. For the REACH program to be successful, principals must actively support the collaboration of staff on SLOs. If an individual fails to "buy in" to the program, the likelihood of program success begins to decline (Terpstra & Honoree, 2005).

Unfortunately, those who are top performers in their field and who perceive performance-based pay more negatively may be more likely than others to leave performance-based programs because they believe they will have an easier time finding a new job elsewhere (Terpstra & Honoree, 2005). In the school context, high-quality teachers who do not see the value of REACH may be likely to shun the program and leave their REACH campus for another location. Terpstra and Honoree believe that the best way to combat this type of behavior is to ensure that the "standards…or degrees that represent different levels of performance should be clear, unambiguous, and well defined" (p. 57). For REACH, the D2 assessments were a step toward standardization of rigor; unfortunately, the challenges associated with D2 did not allow for the realization of the potential benefits. However, the value of novice teacher mentoring and *Take One!*® seemed apparent to most participating staff.

The REACH mentoring program received praise from both novice and veteran teachers alike, who described a variety of ways REACH mentors facilitated professional growth on their campuses and were a critical factor in novice teachers' decisions to remain at their schools for the coming year. The ratings regarding mentoring experiences of REACH novice teachers were significantly more positive than for those of their comparison school peers, particularly in the areas of professional growth and instructional planning. This reflects the significant amount of time mentors spent each week helping novice teachers plan lessons, set goals, gather resources, and co-teach. Non-highest needs staff might feel more favorable toward REACH if they also were able to experience elements of the mentoring program.

Additionally, teachers who participated in *Take One!*® provided a favorable review of its value to their teaching. Although fewer teachers participated in *Take One!*® in 2008–2009

than did in 2007–2008, most participants reported positive experiences with the program, and all said they would recommend it to others in the future. Expansion of professional development opportunities such as this may prove critical to the success of the initiative by helping all teachers recognize the value of changing practices to achieve student growth in addition to high performance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To increase support for the program among pilot school staff, REACH staff should regularly and explicitly discuss the goals of REACH, including the value of using SLOs and school-wide growth to measure student growth in conjunction with traditional accountability indicators that measure student performance level without consideration of growth (e.g., TAKS). REACH participants at highest needs schools are reminded more regularly about the program than are those at non-highest needs schools due to the additional stipend opportunities and the presence of REACH mentors on their campuses. Because non-highest needs schools do not have as much exposure to the program, the principal and designated campus SLO experts must regularly facilitate conversations among campus staff regarding the goals of the program and its intended value to their work. Also, although linkages between the REACH mentoring program and student achievement have not yet been established, its value to teacher perceptions is clear. Providing some elements of the mentoring program to staff at non-highest needs schools may prove beneficial with respect to increasing their support for and fidelity to REACH.
2. To maximize the influence of SLOs on student achievement and professional learning communities, principals should encourage staff to collaborate with grade level and/or subject area teams during the SLO development process and encourage special area teachers, assistant principals, librarians, and instructional coaches/specialists to collaborate across pilot schools as they develop SLOs. Collaboration also would allow staff to create common strategies, share best practices, and provide support for each other throughout the SLO process.
3. To improve the SLO experience for participants who are not classroom teachers, REACH staff should provide additional guidance to assistant principals and librarians regarding appropriate learning objectives and target performance levels and should assist them with strategies for maximizing time with students.
4. To facilitate the use and ensure the quality of D2, REACH staff should collaborate with D2 consultants to continue improving materials, training, and documentation related to the D2 system so pilot school staff are able to use the system easily. In addition, AISD staff should examine all D2 assessments for validity and reliability, and D2 consultants should improve the quality of D2 assessments, particularly those for 3rd- and 5th-grade math.
5. To alleviate problems associated with student test fatigue, REACH guidelines should include a post-testing window of at least 8 weeks so SLO assessments can be scheduled optimally around TAKS.

6. To address participant concerns about the frustration encountered during the SLO approval process and end-of-year audit, particularly with regard to target-setting and overturning SLO decisions, REACH staff should provide teachers with information regarding their guidelines and process for approving SLOs, including a description of their process for consultation with district curriculum content area specialists when questions arise regarding the rigor of SLOs. Information also should include a summary of the SLO audit that occurs at the end of the school year.

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APPENDIX

Table A.1. Mean Differences for Responses by Teachers at Pilot Campuses, by Need

				Independent samples test		
	Campus need status	**Mean**	***SD***	***t***	***df***	***p* <**
I am satisfied with the support I receive from AISD REACH staff.	Non-highest need	2.96	0.72	-1.407	334	0.16
	Highest need	3.08	0.70			
Participating in REACH has been a positive experience for me.	Non-highest need	2.46	0.96	-3.879	328	0.00
	Highest need	2.88	0.87			
My colleagues generally support the work that we're doing for REACH.	Non-highest need	2.45	0.87	-5.801	314	0.00
	Highest need	3.02	0.74			
I feel that my good work is being rewarded by REACH.	Non-highest need	2.49	1.01	-4.082	322	0.00
	Highest need	2.94	0.84			
If given the choice, I would choose to continue in the REACH pilot.	Non-highest need	2.4	1.00	-5.326	317	0.00
	Highest need	3.01	0.88			
Using Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) has improved my teaching.	Non-highest need	2.14	0.80	-3.925	324	0.00
	Highest need	2.53	0.80			
I often consider my SLOs when planning and conducting my daily work.	Non-highest need	2.3	0.88	-3.806	325	0.00
	Highest need	2.68	0.78			
My principal is enthusiastic and positive about the REACH program.	Non-highest need	3.15	0.54	0.519	322	0.60
	Highest need	3.11	0.51			
My principal has supported my work with the REACH pilot.	Non-highest need	3.06	0.63	-0.055	323	0.96
	Highest need	3.06	0.57			

Source. Spring 2009 Employee Coordinated Survey

Table A.2. Teachers Who Agree or Disagree With Statements About the D2 Formative Assessment

	% Agree	**% Disagree**
My experience using the D2 formative assessment was generally positive.	39%	61%
The tests that I used were of high quality.	47%	54%
There were problems with the content of the test that I had to use.	58%	42%
I encountered problems with the technical side of the D2 system.	69%	31%
Using the D2 formative assessment should be optional, not required.	85%	15%
Using the D2 formative assessment made the SLO process easier for me.	36%	64%
I would use the D2 formative assessment even if it weren't required.	35%	65%
The D2 formative assessment gave me useful information about my students.	46%	54%

Source. Spring 2009 Employee Coordinated Survey

Table A.3. Summary of REACH Mentor Activities, by level

	Elementary mentors				Secondary mentors			
	Hours per session			Avg hrs/	Hours per session			Avg hrs/
Activity	**Min**	**Max**	**Mean**	**Week**	**Min**	**Max**	**Mean**	**Week**
AISD meeting/training	1.00	8.00	4.06	1.09	0.50	8.00	3.77	0.42
Article/book study	0.25	6.00	1.24	0.92	0.25	4.00	1.22	0.99
Campus meeting/training	0.25	8.00	1.94	2.18	0.50	8.00	2.60	1.74
Classroom observation	0.25	8.00	0.84	3.44	0.25	7.00	1.00	3.42
Co-teaching	0.25	8.00	1.28	2.93	0.25	8.00	1.79	2.85
Communication/ documentation	0.25	5.75	0.81	5.28	0.25	8.00	1.06	6.18
Conference	0.25	8.00	0.82	6.39	0.25	8.00	0.84	3.18
Dept/grade level meeting	0.25	7.00	1.41	1.00	0.50	8.00	1.16	1.02
Gathering resources	0.25	8.00	1.36	4.71	0.25	8.00	1.48	6.37
ILP	0.25	2.50	1.01	0.32	0.25	3.75	1.12	0.40
Lead professional development activities	0.25	8.00	1.52	1.12	0.50	8.00	2.09	0.26
Master teacher observation	0.25	4.25	1.14	0.54	0.50	8.00	3.14	0.17
New teacher support meeting	0.25	2.50	1.10	0.18	0.25	6.00	1.34	0.92
Planning	0.25	8.00	1.20	7.63	0.25	8.00	1.25	5.53
Room setup	0.25	8.00	1.71	0.95	0.25	8.00	1.78	0.64
REACH training	1.00	8.00	5.38	3.59	0.50	8.00	5.02	3.55
Other	0.25	8.00	1.23	2.38	0.25	8.00	2.31	2.19

Source. District REACH mentor database

Table A.4. Summary of Findings, by Goal and Hypothesis

Goal	Interim hypothesis	Year 2 finding	
		highest needs	non-highest needs
Rewards for educators	• REACH participants will feel more favorably towards the program and strategic compensation than do non-participants.	✓	✓
	• Highest needs and non-highest needs participants will report favorable experiences in the pilot.	✓	●
Teacher retention	• REACH will influence pilot teachers to remain on their campuses.	✓	●
	• REACH teachers will be less likely to request transfers than their comparison school peers.	✗	✗
	• REACH teachers will feel more attached to the profession and their schools, and will be more satisfied with their work environment than will their comparison school peers.	✗	✗
	• REACH teachers will feel more satisfied with their work environment in 2008-09 than 2007-08.	●	●
	• REACH novice teachers at highest needs campuses will report greater attachment to the district than will their comparison school peers.	✗	n/a
	• REACH novice teachers at highest needs campuses will report greater support from their mentors than do novice teachers at their comparison schools.	✓	n/a
Student achievement	• REACH staff will report greater achievement press, collegial leadership, and professional teacher behavior (factors related to student achievement in AISD) than will their comparison school peers.	●	✗
	• REACH staff will report greater improvements in achievement press, collegial leadership, and professional teacher behavior in 2008-09 from the prior year than will their comparison school peers.	●	✗
	• REACH participants will perceive a relationship between SLOs and student achievement.	●	✗
	• REACH participants will report collaboration in professional learning communities about teaching and learning as a result of the SLO process	●	●
	• REACH participants will report greater collaboration in professional learning communities about teaching and learning than do their comparison peers.	✗	✗
	• *Take One!* participants will report satisfaction with the program as a form of high quality professional development.	✓	✓

Note. ✓ indicates hypothesis supported; ✗ indicates hypothesis not supported; ● indicates hypothesis partially supported

AUSTIN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Publication Number 08.53

August 2009