

# Educator Excellence Innovation Program

## A summative report on the four years of implementation

### Introduction

The Educator Excellence Innovation Program (EEIP) is a Texas Education Agency (TEA) grant program that funded innovation in teacher support. The overarching goal of EEIP was to enhance educator quality and effectiveness, increase retention, and create positive change in students' academics. Austin Independent School District (AISD) was initially awarded a total of \$2 million over a 2-year period of performance from 2014–2015 through 2015–2016. In 2016, AISD's renewal application was accepted for an additional 2 years of funding through the 2017–2018 school year.

EEIP grant funds were used to:

- Provide full-release mentors (FRMs) to teachers in their first 2 years of teaching and campus-based mentors (CBMs) to teachers in their 3<sup>rd</sup> year of teaching to build the skills necessary for teachers to flourish professionally
- Use targeted peer observation with experienced peer observers (POs) for teachers with 4 or more years of teaching experience
- Review professional literature, teacher practices, student work, and student data during dedicated professional learning community (PLC) time, so that teachers can collaborate pedagogically with peers; improve practice; and ultimately, increase student performance
- Create a compensation plan that includes stipends for mentors and other positions at hard-to-staff campuses in order to retain effective teachers

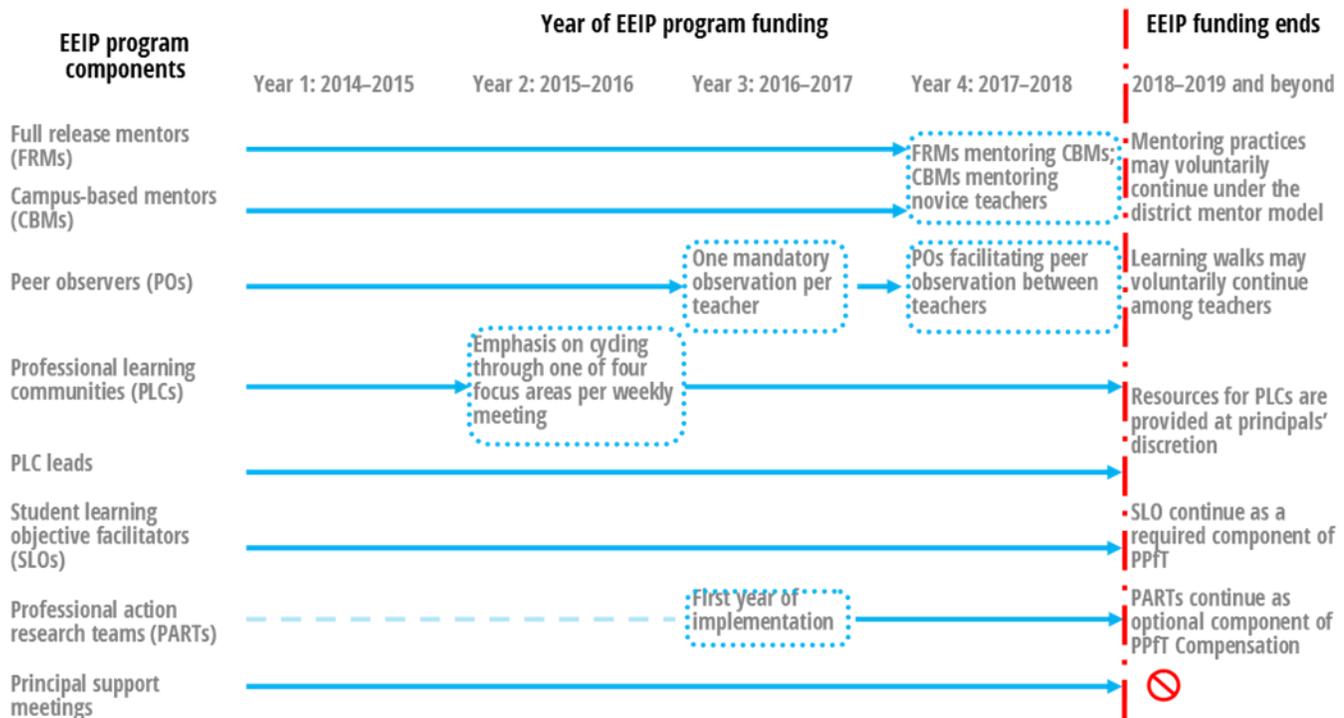
EEIP in AISD supported more than 230 teachers and 4,400 students in each year of the program at six Title I elementary schools in AISD, including Houston Elementary, Langford Elementary, Linder Elementary, Palm Elementary, Perez Elementary, and Widen Elementary.

The main summative findings from the evaluation revealed the following:

- Novice and 3<sup>rd</sup>-year EEIP teachers responded more positively than teachers at comparison schools on many knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitude (i.e., KSAO) items.
- EEIP 3<sup>rd</sup>-year teachers were rated higher on their PPFT instructional practices across all years, on average, than were 3<sup>rd</sup>-year teachers at comparison schools.
- Novice EEIP teachers' retention rates increased relative to rates at comparison schools across all 4 years of the program.

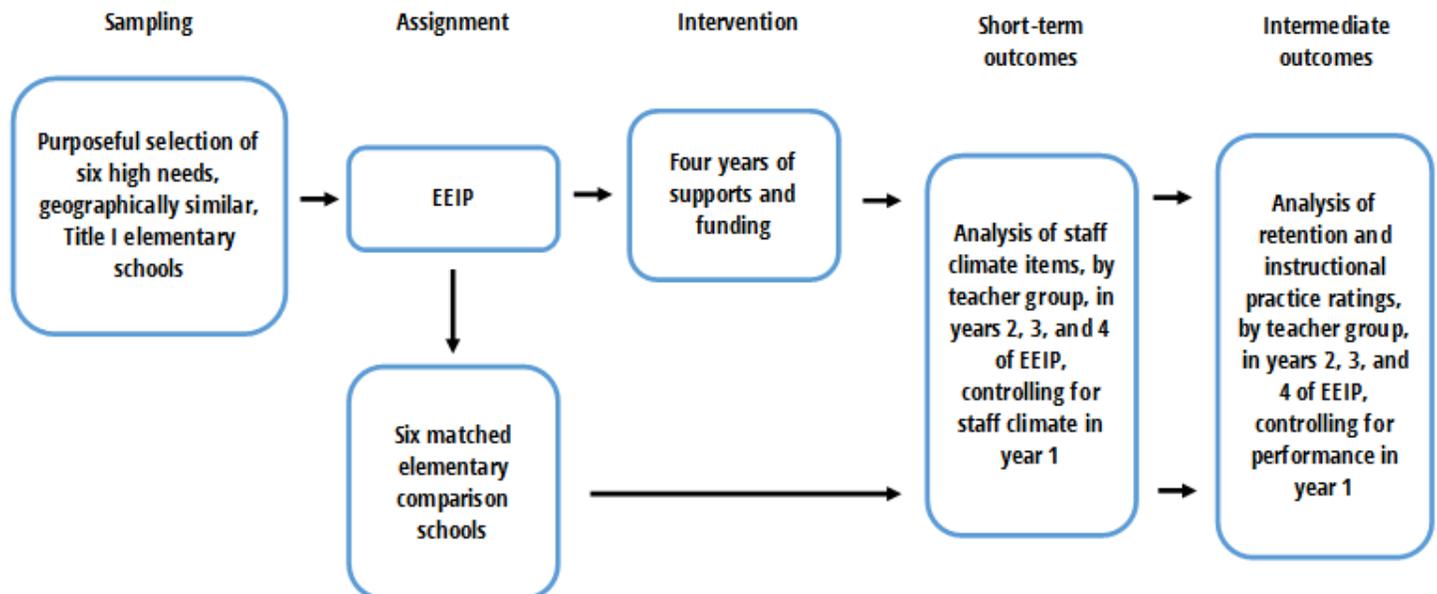
## Program Implementation History

Figure 1. EEIP Timeline Showing Program Components and Refinements Over the 4-Year Award Period



## Evaluation Design

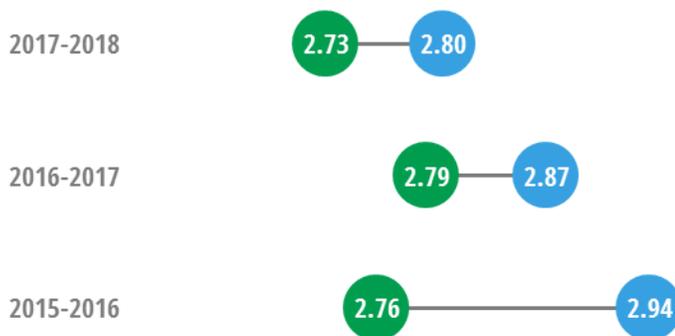
Figure 2. Visual Diagram of EEIP Evaluation Design



## Short-Term Outcomes

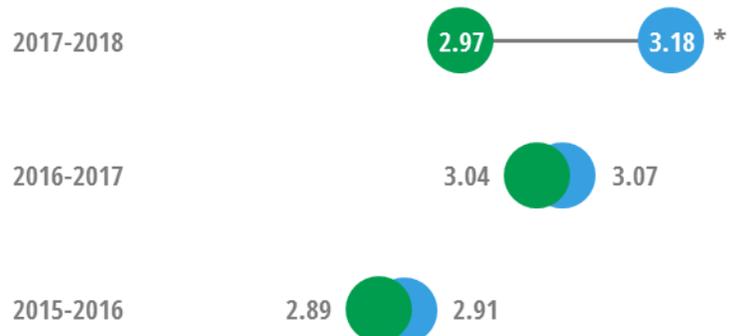
Overall, positive short-term and intermediate outcomes were seen most consistently for EEIP novice and 3<sup>rd</sup>-year teachers across all areas of interest (i.e., teacher knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes, teacher effectiveness, and teacher retention). EEIP was designed mostly with the early-career teacher in mind, with most of the EEIP program components being directed at teachers in their 3<sup>rd</sup> year or less of teaching. Therefore, it fits with the model of the program to see the most positive impacts for early-career teachers. Conversely, due to the limited dosage of EEIP received by more experienced teachers during implementation, positive impacts were generally not found for the experienced teacher group. EEIP novice teachers responded more positively to knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitude items than did novice teachers at matched comparison schools (Figures 3, 4, 5, and 6).

Figure 3. **EEIP novice teachers** rated their attachment to school higher, on average, than did **comparison school novice teachers**.



Source. TELL AISD 2015-16 through 2017-18  
\*  $p \leq .1$ ; \*\*  $p \leq .05$ ; \*\*\*  $p \leq .01$

Figure 4. **EEIP novice teachers** rated their self-efficacy higher, on average, than did **comparison school novice teachers**.



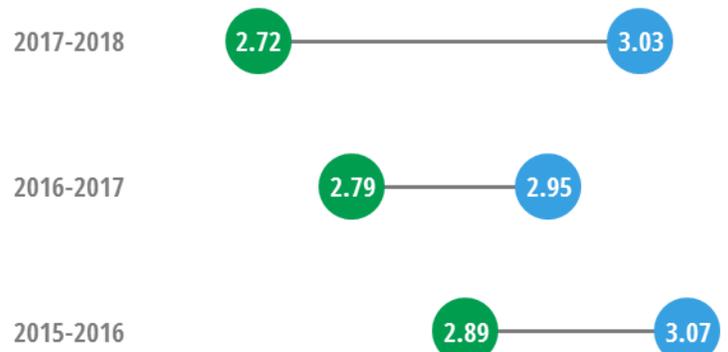
Source. TELL AISD 2015-16 through 2017-18  
\*  $p \leq .1$ ; \*\*  $p \leq .05$ ; \*\*\*  $p \leq .01$

Figure 5. **EEIP novice teachers** rated their collaborative work on PLCs higher, on average, than did **comparison school novice teachers**.



Source. TELL AISD 2015-16 through 2017-18  
\*  $p \leq .1$ ; \*\*  $p \leq .05$ ; \*\*\*  $p \leq .01$

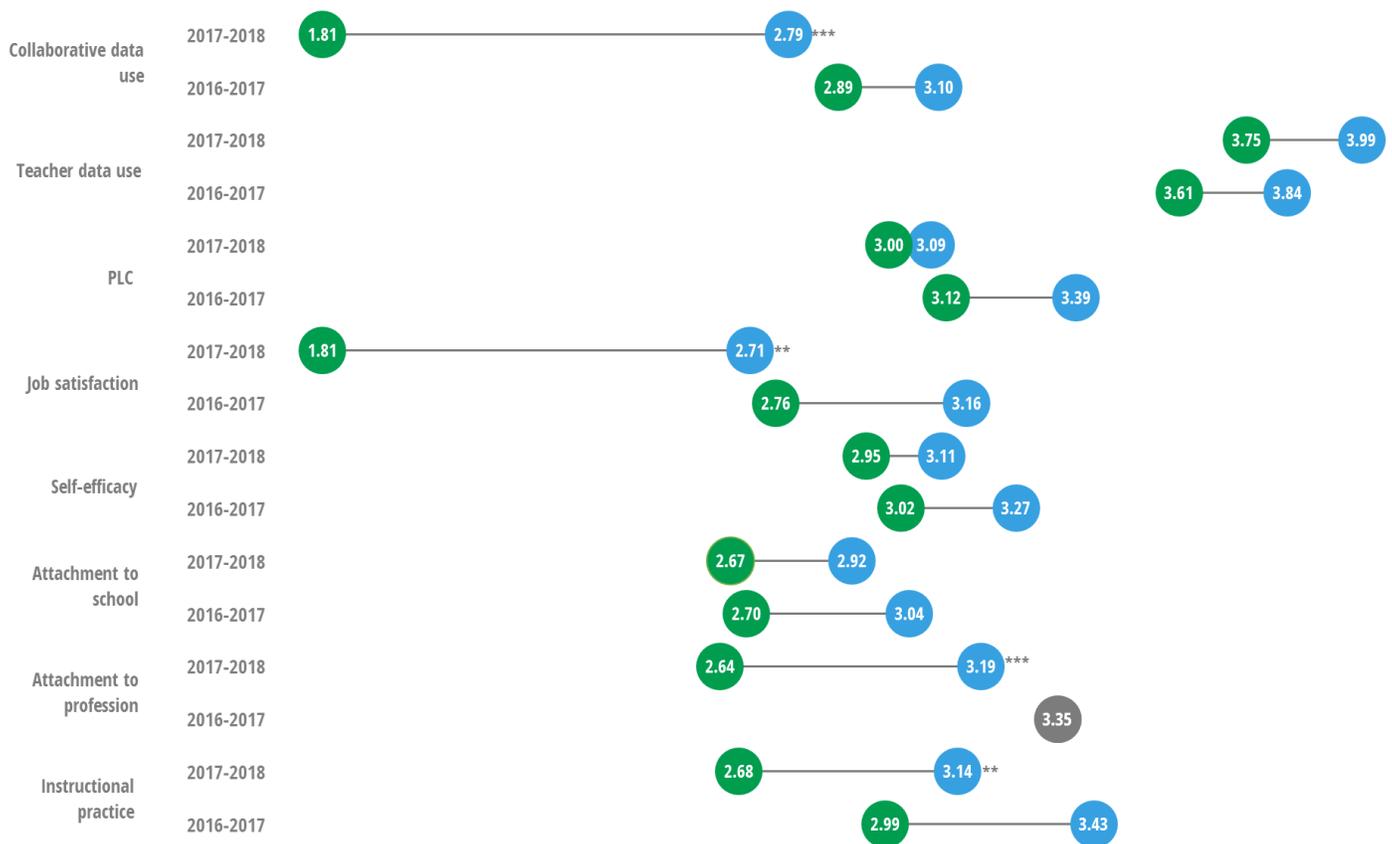
Figure 6. **EEIP novice teachers** rated their collective data use higher, on average, than did **comparison school novice teachers**.



Source. TELL AISD 2015-16 through 2017-18  
\*  $p \leq .1$ ; \*\*  $p \leq .05$ ; \*\*\*  $p \leq .01$

While EEIP novice teachers generally had more positive short-term outcomes than their matched comparison group, the most positive short-term outcomes were observed for 3<sup>rd</sup>-year EEIP teachers. In particular, 3<sup>rd</sup>-year EEIP teachers consistently responded more positively on all but one subscale—in which they were equivalent—than did comparison 3<sup>rd</sup>-year teachers in years 3 and 4 of EEIP implementation (Figure 7). The widespread positive short-term outcomes for 3<sup>rd</sup>-year EEIP teachers in years 3 and 4 is especially interesting because these teachers likely received the greatest dosage of EEIP treatment, first as novice teachers in the early years of implementation and then as 3<sup>rd</sup>-year teachers in later implementation. The 3<sup>rd</sup>-year teachers in years 3 and 4 likely received all possible types of support over the course of EEIP implementation.

**Figure 7.** EEIP 3<sup>rd</sup>-year teachers' perceptions were consistently more positive than those of their matched comparison group on 7 out of 8 TELL AISD subscales examined.



Source. TELL AISD 2015-16 through 2017-18  
 \*  $p \leq .1$ ; \*\*  $p \leq .05$ ; \*\*\*  $p \leq .01$

## Intermediate Outcomes

### Instructional Practices

PPfT instructional practices ratings were used to measure teacher effectiveness within EEIP implementation. The results presented in Figure 8 provide evidence that 3<sup>rd</sup>-year EEIP teachers may have been more effective than their matched comparison group.

**Figure 8.**  
**EEIP 3<sup>rd</sup>-year teachers' instructional practice ratings exceeded those of their matched comparison group.**

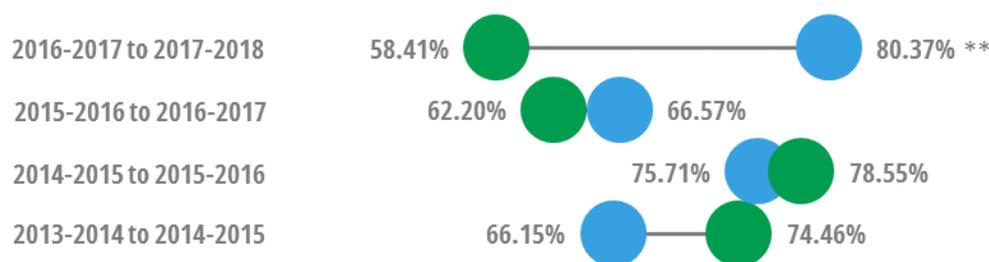


Source. PPFT ratings, 2014-15 through 2017-18  
 \*  $p \leq .1$ ; \*\*  $p \leq .05$ ; \*\*\*  $p \leq .01$

### Teacher Retention

While the pattern of retention varied across teacher groups and program years, by the last year of program implementation, all teacher groups (i.e., novice, 3<sup>rd</sup>-year, and experienced) at EEIP schools were retained at a higher percentage than were teachers at comparison schools. Novice teachers at EEIP schools exhibited lower percentages of retention in relation to novice teachers at matched comparison schools at the beginning of implementation, yet this likelihood of retention increased between 2013–2014 and 2015–2016 and retention rates continued to climb through the 2017–2018 school year. In 2017–2018, EEIP novice teachers were retained at significantly higher rates than novice teachers at matched comparison schools (Figure 9).

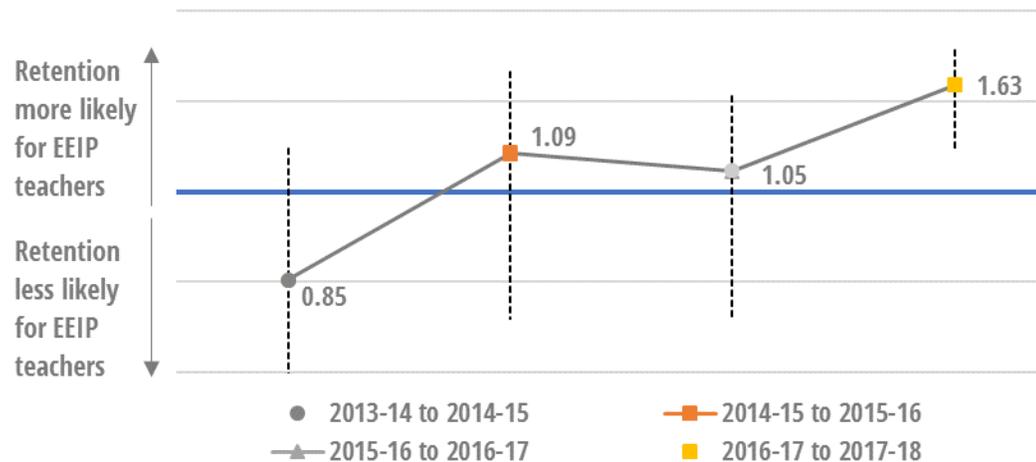
**Figure 9.**  
**Novice teachers were more likely to leave from EEIP schools than from comparison schools in the first 2 years of implementation, but more likely to be retained than novice teachers at comparison schools in the last 2 years of EEIP implementation.**



Source. PEIMS fall snapshot 2013-14 through 2017-18  
 \*  $p \leq .1$ ; \*\*  $p \leq .05$ ; \*\*\*  $p \leq .01$

Risk ratios also were calculated to investigate retention at the individual teacher level. Novice teachers at EEIP schools started with retention rates lower than those at comparison schools but ended up surpassing the retention rates of teachers within comparison schools by the last year of EEIP implementation. Novice teachers at EEIP schools were 1.63 times more likely to be retained than were novice teachers at comparison schools from 2016–2017 through 2017–2018. These risk ratios for novice teachers are plotted in Figure 10.

**Figure 10.**  
**The likelihood of novice teacher retention at EEIP schools improved over the 4 years of EEIP implementation relative to rates at comparison schools.**

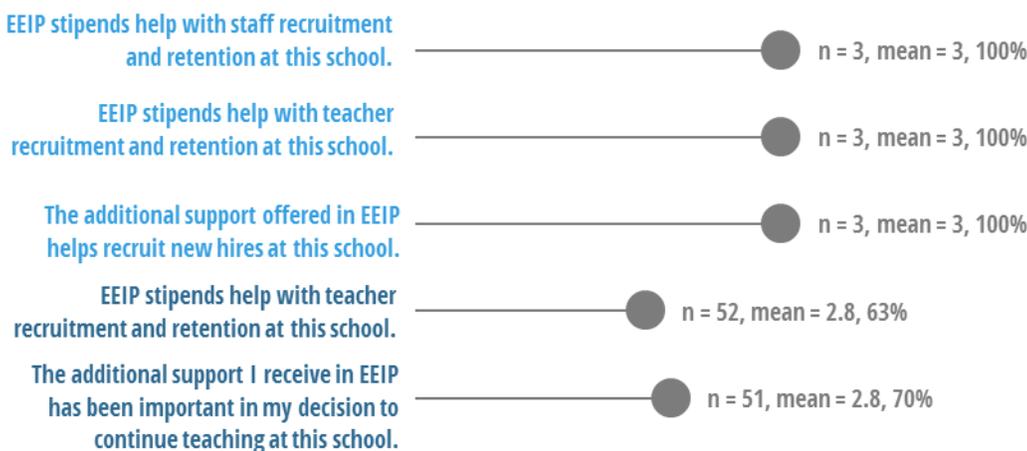


Source: PEIMS fall snapshot 2013-14 through 2017-18  
 \*  $p \leq .1$ ; \*\*  $p \leq .05$ ; \*\*\*  $p \leq .01$

### Perceptions of Recruitment and Retention

At the conclusion of EEIP implementation, EEIP staff were surveyed to collect perceptual data on the effect of the EEIP supports and stipends on recruiting and retention at their schools. EEIP staff were asked to rate their level of agreement with statements about the impact of EEIP. Four EEIP principals responded, and 52 EEIP teachers responded. These findings are reflected in Figure 11 below.

**Figure 11.**  
**The majority of EEIP principals and teachers responding to the survey agreed that EEIP helped with recruitment and retention.**



Source: ECS 2017-18

Note: Strongly agree = 4, agree = 3, disagree = 2, strongly disagree = 1, don't know = 0;  $n = 3$  for principal items due to one principal responding "Don't know" to the three items; additional support = mentoring, observation, PLCs; percentage represents the number of respondents who strongly agree or agree

## Risk Ratios: Explained

Also sometimes called likelihood ratios, these analyses considered the specific number of teachers retained in each teacher group across all schools in the two treatment groups (i.e., EEIP and comparison). Significance was determined through analyzing likelihood (i.e., risk) ratios. These analyses determined how more or less likely retention was to occur at either an EEIP or comparison campus, with a risk ratio of 1 indicating retention was equally likely in both groups, greater than 1 indicating retention was more likely for teachers at EEIP schools, and less than 1 indicating retention was less likely for teachers at EEIP schools. It is important to note that because of larger sample sizes and the lack of statistical control present for the risk ratios, the teacher level and campus level results for retention slightly differ.

## Lessons Learned

While many lessons were learned throughout the implementation of EEIP (see the full EEIP Tech Report for more details), one of the most important areas in which information was learned pertained to what teachers need to succeed in the future. EEIP participants gave their opinions on how to continue the best practices to help teachers succeed from three of the main components of EEIP: PLCs, mentoring early career teachers, and facilitating peer observation among experienced teachers.

### PLCs

- Create dedicated time during the school week for PLC meetings
- Have an ongoing alignment of work and meetings as a vertical team
- Foster an environment that solicits buy-in for PLCs from all teachers
- Review and reflect on data as a team
- Work collaboratively to create common formative assessments

### Mentoring Early Career Teachers

- Offer teachers supports to become professional, organized, and culturally aware as well as direct support from teacher leaders and school administrative leaders
- Provide teachers with mentors who can be in their classroom, who are separate from school leadership (i.e., not a principal direct report), and who have received training in working with new teachers
- Determine appropriate performance expectations for early career teachers as well as appropriate self-expectations for success and growth

### Facilitating Peer Observation Among Experienced Teachers

- Shift mindset at schools to where experienced teachers are open to continued growth throughout their careers
- Observations need to be kept non-evaluative, non-judgmental, and focused on teacher learning goals.
- Communication and encouragement from school leadership on the availability and value of participating in observations
- Keep the observations meaningful to the teachers by having conversations prior to observations about areas to monitor closely

## EEIP Participant Quotes

EEIP participants provided feedback related to the lessons they learned throughout the four years of EEIP. Several of these perspectives are highlighted in the quotes below.

**On the importance of professional development:**

*The work you do to try to make a difference for students by way of teachers DOES make a difference.*

**On the importance of collaboration:**

*My most important lesson, which sounds obvious but I need to be reminded of it, is that opportunities to collaborate and continue to learn with other teachers are vital to my professional growth and feeling of success.*

**On the importance of relationship building:**

*The most important lesson I've learned is how very important building relationships and trust are when working with people. When a strong relationship is built, there is great opportunity for honesty and growth. Once I've established a strong relationship with a teacher, I am able to push and guide them to where they may be very uncomfortable, but they are willing to take the risk because they know they are supported. I've seen many teachers grow exponentially due to the safety of the mentor relationship. In mentoring, it is necessary to have and take the time to develop these relationships.*

## Conclusions

The implementation of EEIP in AISD grew and developed as a program designed to provide supports for teachers to match the local challenges of implementing the supports structures in the six EEIP schools. Throughout the implementation of EEIP, positive impacts were seen in a variety of areas. In relation to comparison schools:

- Novice and 3<sup>rd</sup>-year teachers at EEIP schools had overall more positive perceptions of their knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes than novice and third-year teachers at comparison schools.
- Third-year teachers at EEIP schools were rated higher on PPFT instructional practices' strands than were 3<sup>rd</sup>-year teachers at comparison schools.
- Novice teachers at EEIP schools experienced higher rates of retention than did novice teachers at comparison schools.
- The majority of EEIP staff surveyed felt that EEIP helped with recruitment and retention at their school

These findings reinforce the importance of mentorship supports for teachers early in their careers, specifically teachers in their third year or less of teaching, with regard to increased knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes, application of strong instructional practices, and retention at their schools. Much was learned from the successes of PLCs, early career teacher mentoring, and peer observation in EEIP. To continue EEIP practices in AISD after EEIP funding has ended, teachers and administrators can capitalize on the learning gained about supporting early career teachers through the implementation of EEIP by identifying opportunities to enhance existing support structures (e.g., teacher induction and mentoring programs) with support structures similar to those used in EEIP.

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