

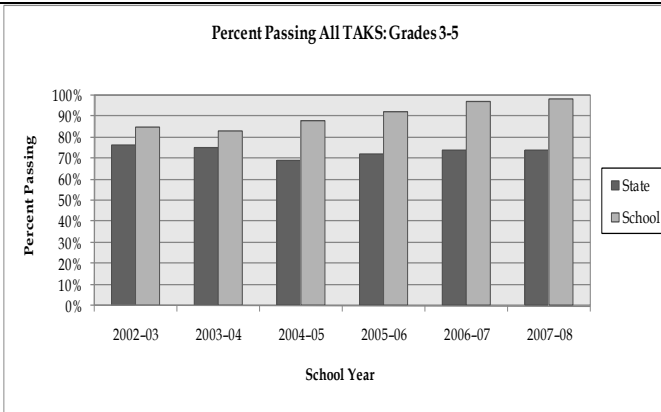
<b>VERTICAL TEAMS</b>	
<p><b>CAMPUS</b> Taylor Ray Elementary School <i>Exemplary 2007-08</i></p> <p><b>DISTRICT</b> Lamar CISD</p> <p><i>U.S. Blue Ribbon School 2007-08</i></p>	<p><b>PROGRAM SUMMARY</b></p> <p>The <b>goal</b> of Taylor Ray Elementary’s program is to improve student performance in all subject areas.</p> <p><b>Key strategies</b> include creation of core subject-area vertical teams to build and support teacher leadership in improving instruction, ongoing data review, and collaborative analysis of student work.</p> <p><b>Outcomes</b> include an increase in the percentage of students passing all subject-area TAKS and performing at the Commended level.</p> <hr/> <p><b>EFFECTIVENESS</b></p> <p>With the implementation of TAKS in 2002-03, 85% of Taylor Ray Elementary School students passed all TAKS, compared to the state average* of 76%, with 3% performing at the Commended level, compared to the state average* of 9%.</p> <p>In 2007-08, 98% of students passed all TAKS, compared to the state average* of 74%, with 23% performing at the Commended level, compared to the state average* of 18%.</p>

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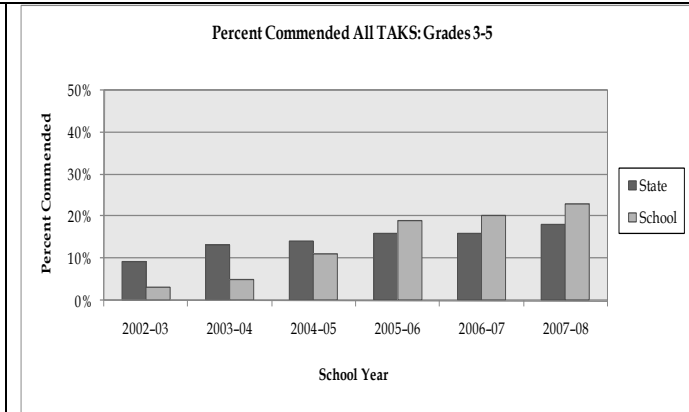
\* State averages are weighted averages based on the grade level(s) of the practice.

Please take one minute to answer the feedback survey (six questions).

[Best Practices Feedback Survey](#)



Source: AEIS; TAKS Statewide Performance Results - 2003-2008



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### CONTEXT/IMPLEMENTATION

#### Demographics (2007-08)

Grade Levels Served	EE-05	Campus Enrollment	701
<b>Ethnic Distribution</b>		<b>Economically Disadvantaged</b>	512 73.0%
African American	43 6.1%	<b>Limited English Proficient (LEP)</b>	196 28.0%
Hispanic	556 79.3%	<b>At-Risk</b>	447 63.8%
White	98 14.0%	<b>Mobility (2006-07)</b>	99 18.1%

Source: AEIS

#### Background

- The campus serves a high poverty, highly mobile student population with 28% of students identified as limited English proficient (LEP).
- Prior to implementation of the practice in 2002-03, staff reported that there was a lack of consistency in instruction between and across grade levels. The principal wanted to build teacher leadership capacity to guide high quality instruction that was coherent and consistent.

*Procedures*

- The campus principal established four 10-member vertical teams, one in each core subject area, to cooperatively develop and implement a vertically aligned curriculum and instructional program across grade levels. All core-area and noncore-area teachers (physical education, fine arts, and special education teachers) and counselors were assigned to one of the four vertical teams. Because core-area teachers in lower grades taught all core subjects, the principal assigned them to one content area team. To lead the teams, the principal identified subject-area teachers from the upper grade levels whose students performed well on TAKS in that subject area and who were respected by other teachers. The principal made these assignment decisions the first two years of implementation in order to balance personality dynamics and buffer the impact of negative attitudes.
- The principal established an initial schedule of one vertical team meeting every six weeks. Later, after staff became committed to the teams, the principal adjusted the meeting schedule to one meeting per month.
- Vertical team meetings were held for one hour at the same time for all subject areas after school. The principal and assistant principal “floated” between meetings or facilitated those at which they expected controversial issues to be discussed.
- The principal also established a grade-level meeting, which was scheduled for the day after the vertical team meeting. All core-area teachers of the grade level (and the noncore-area teachers and staff assigned to represent the grade level on the four vertical teams) attended the meetings. The purpose of the grade-level meetings was to allow the vertical team representatives from each of the four content areas to report on curricular adjustments and recommended strategies identified by the vertical teams. Grade-level teachers then discussed how to implement those recommendations in each of the core subject areas. Initially, the principal reviewed minutes of grade-level meetings to monitor discussion and implementation of vertical team recommendations.
- In early implementation of the teams, the principal and assistant principal developed the agenda for the vertical team meetings, which always included review of data and a desired outcome for the meeting.
- Teams were asked to establish “group norms” – protocols or expected attitudes, procedures, and behaviors to clarify how teams would work together – in alignment with Rick DuFour’s Professional Learning Community model. Examples of common norms established by the campus’ vertical teams included: beginning and ending on time; being prepared for meetings; taking turns bringing snacks to meetings; participating actively; listening; being “present” during the meeting and not doing other work; and being open to other people’s ideas.

- Vertical team leaders received training from a variety of sources focused on establishing group norms, developing agendas, and defining roles for team members. Training for teachers and/or campus teams consisted of district professional development in data usage, including a yearly refresher on analysis of state test data. Campus administrators and the counselors also provided an annual overview on data usage, and teachers who were veteran to the campus provided informal training for new teachers.
- Team members were required to bring their grade-level data from an identified assessment to the vertical team meeting with the expectation that they had identified a strength and weakness in an area of student performance and prepared a draft action plan focused on those strengths and weaknesses. The team collaboratively reviewed data and discussed successful strategies and necessary interventions. Vertical team members were then charged with reporting at their grade-level meeting the following day on what strategy the vertical team had recommended to address issues identified in the data. The teams generally developed an assessment or sample student product that teachers could use in the classroom aligned with the recommended strategy. Vertical team members were responsible for collecting data on the use of the strategy and products for the grade level and reporting back on the success of the recommended strategy at the next vertical team meeting.
- Vertical team members who taught noncore subjects also integrated recommended strategies for their grade level and reinforced content objectives in their teaching to support core-area instruction. For example, art teachers used reading word cards to introduce new content at the beginning of a lesson, which was a strategy recommended for reading instruction. Staff reported that sometimes the supplemental core-area instruction provided through noncore courses was the “hook” to engage students in the content.
- By the second and third year of implementation, staff reported that enough trust and leadership had developed that vertical team members were holding each other accountable for the participation and performance of their grade levels in implementation of vertical team recommendations. For example, when a team recommended collaborative grade-level planning, grade-level representatives on the team were asked to report on progress in this activity and held accountable if the grade level had not participated in the activity.
- In the third year, though the vertical team structure remained the same, team membership became more flexible, and teachers were allowed to choose which vertical team they wanted to serve on so that they could be on teams in their strongest subject area or areas of interest. Teams also began to develop their own agendas.
- Members were required to bring at least two examples of student work from each grade-level to each vertical team meeting for discussion about successful teaching or strategies for improving instruction. Team members

also often discussed standards for what a student product would look like at one grade level and how it would look at another. For example, science vertical team members shared what a fifth-grade science journal looked like. Other members of the team then discussed what similar products would look like in the lower grades and piloted their use.

- Regular review of data and student work allowed vertical teams to identify which teachers might need additional support and resources or if grade-level data indicated a larger issue with the curriculum.
- As teachers across the campus started seeing success in terms of student achievement, the vertical teams gradually became the identified structure for guiding instructional decisions. For example, the teams identified programs and products for a subject area that were to be adopted and used in every classroom. As part of this process, team members reviewed products, met with vendors, piloted programs, and made recommendations for adoption. If approved by the principal, these recommendations were non-negotiable, and implementation was monitored by the vertical teams.
- The principal and assistant principal regularly conducted walk-throughs to ensure that all teachers were implementing vertical team recommendations. For example, if the mathematics vertical team had recommended an emphasis on small group instruction, the principal and assistant principal would be looking for this strategy when observing mathematics teaching in classrooms.
- Staff reported that the only costs associated with the practice were for leadership training for vertical team leaders.

*Lessons Learned*

- Staff reported that finding the right individuals to lead the teams could be a challenge. Sometimes strong teachers did not have the necessary leadership skills and needed additional training so staff perceived them as leaders.
- Staff also reported that vertical team members needed to understand the purpose of what they were asked to do and how it would impact student success. For example, due to the large amounts of available data, the principal worked to help the teams make clear decisions about what data to analyze and how to use it to improve instruction.
- Buy-in for vertical teams was facilitated by administrators providing structured guidance at the outset to limit barriers, provide structure for the team, and focus on success. Once teachers saw how the teams' work improved

student outcomes, buy-in and empowerment were self-sustaining, and administrators moved into monitoring roles.

- Based on the success of the vertical teams, a technology vertical team was established in 2008-09 to work on integration of technology into instruction across the curriculum.

*Campus-Reported Resources*

- DuFour, R., & Eaker, R. (1998). *Professional Learning Communities at work: Best practices for enhancing student achievement*. Bloomington, IN: National Educational Service.
- National Association of Elementary School Principals. (2008). *Leading learning communities: Standards for what principals should know and be able to do* (2nd ed.). Alexandria, VA: Author. Note: Taylor Ray Elementary School is featured in this second edition of the book. See [http://www.mespa.net/sites/2961a8e8-4b04-4b38-8da2-75542594a9f1/uploads/REVISED\\_Principal\\_Standards\\_08.pdf](http://www.mespa.net/sites/2961a8e8-4b04-4b38-8da2-75542594a9f1/uploads/REVISED_Principal_Standards_08.pdf)

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