T-BAR Retrospective
Executive Summary Evaluation

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T-BAR Retrospective: Executive Summary

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The Teacher-Based Reform Grant Pilot Project (T-BAR) was funded by the US Department of Education’s Improving Teacher Quality State Grants Program (ITQ) through the California Department of Education from 2009-2013. Statewide, it served approximately 750 teachers. This report focuses on one of the regional T-BAR master grants – the PacTIN region, which served approximately 300 teachers located in coastal counties from Ventura through Del Norte County. The PacTIN region provided funding to teams of teachers in three funding cohorts, beginning in 2010. Table 1 shows the number of districts, schools and teams in each cohort, along with the total funding provided for each cohort and the average award per team. The teams receiving awards designed their own professional development experience, based on their learning needs and the student needs in their local context. The specific content areas, grade spans, and activities of the teams varied widely.

This report is based on a survey of all participating teachers, administered in Fall of 2014, and a case study examination of three teams from the first cohort of funded projects. The goal of this retrospective examination is to (a) identify any commonalities across the region in process and outcomes and (b) provide information to inform future efforts to systematically support teacher-driven professional development using a framework that can lead to systemic improvement in schools and districts based on this model.

Table 1. PacTIN Cohorts and Teams

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohort</th>
<th>Total # Teams</th>
<th># Districts</th>
<th># Schools</th>
<th>Total # team members</th>
<th>Total awarded to cohort</th>
<th>Average awarded per team</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cohort 1</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>$611,007</td>
<td>$29,095</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohort 2</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>$660,461</td>
<td>$20,013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohort 3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>$253,357</td>
<td>$14,903</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>$1,524,825</td>
<td>$21,476</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Survey results suggest that, even with the widely varying project foci and local contexts, the majority of teacher across the cohorts felt that their participation (a) increased their confidence and pedagogical knowledge, (b) improved their classroom instruction strategies, and (c) eased their transition to Common Core standards and expectations. They also report improvement in their students’ engagement and learning outcomes and in their ability to identify and meet individual student needs. For example:
• Nearly all (94%) report that their students’ learning outcomes have changed as a result of their T-BAR provided professional development experience.
• About two-thirds of the respondents report a shift in their expectations of and ability to engage their students as a result of PacTIN and in their ability to deliver high quality instruction.
• Most (at least 75%) report modifying or creating new curriculum to meet their students’ specific needs (89%), 82% said their participation increased their capacity to meet the needs of their students, 75% agreed that the project helped them think more systematically about their teaching practice.
• The vast majority of teachers (at least 90%) report increased confidence in their teaching ability and having made changes in their teaching, curriculum, and use of technology as a direct result of participation. For example, 91% report their project participation helped them integrate new strategies into their daily classroom practice, 92% agreed that their T-BAR project provided them with a better understanding of some aspect of their teaching practice, and 93% agree that their participation helped them transition to teaching in the Common Core.

Other outcomes for many participants include increased collaboration and opportunities for collaboration as well as growth in their ability and opportunity to provide leadership at their site, and in some cases, district. For example:

• Nearly all participants (89%-92%) report routinely collaborating with members of the PacTIN team and other teachers at their school. Somewhat fewer (65-77%) report routinely collaborating with teachers outside their schools or disseminating PacTIN learning with other teachers via trainings, workshops, conferences or publications.
• A considerable proportion (60% or more) of the teachers report taking on additional teacher leadership roles – e.g. serving as mentors, coaches, participating in peer observations – since having participated in PacTIN. About a quarter have taken formal leadership roles as instructional coaches/professional trainers, department lead/chair or providing BTSA support and fewer (3-6%) have become district or school administrators.

In terms of how T-BAR may have contributed to systemic changes at the school or district level, evidence is encouraging, but mixed. Teachers tend to report more collaboration and mutual respect among teachers, some specific systemic changes, and some improvement in trust and interaction with site or district administrators. For example:

• In terms of changes at their school respondents attribute to their PacTIN participation, most (75% or more) report more support for teacher collaboration and leadership, increased respect among colleagues and administrators for teacher expertise, greater trust among teachers, and more access to resources. Among the items addressing school level change, the lowest rated item (65-70% agreement), both overall and within each cohort is “greater trust between teachers and administrators.”
• In spite of a general sense of improving climate and trust at their schools, only 32-58% of the respondents report specific changes in organizational structures as a result of their participation. Highest rated overall were “grade/content level routines connected to PacTIN related content/pedagogy have been established” (58%) and “school has established or increased common professional learning time for teachers” (54%). Lowest rated were “school/district has formally adopted PacTIN related content pedagogy (33%) and “school/district has secured/reallocated fund to support PacTIN related content/pedagogy” (32%). These items do not vary as much as one might expect across the cohorts, given that the earlier cohorts have had more time to see system changes.

• A good proportion (72%) of the teachers said that their participation had provided an opportunity to influence teaching practices at their school site – particularly among Cohort 1 teachers.

• Few respondents (24%) report a shift in the amount of support and feedback they receive from their administrator as a result of their participation. While this suggests that the projects may have not attracted widespread administrative support, it does not account for whether or not they already had sufficient support and feedback prior to their project.

Case study results tend to align well with and elaborate on the themes identified in the survey results. The three case study teams each received three years of funding support. Each team focused on different content and grade levels but had some common features, including (a) focus on a specific target learning need and population, (b) recognition of the value of collaboration to both their own learning and the success of their project, and (c) refining their interventions and activities as they progressed over time. The teams all mentioned how valuable the learning experience was for them and for their targeted students. They also tended to follow a common pattern of spending the first year on team development and developing a common language, followed by refining the implementation of their intervention by iterative testing and feedback in year two, with year three focused on augmentation of the initial intervention to serve additional learners’ needs and/or dissemination of their project learning to other teachers either at their school or district-wide via trainings and workshops.

The teams’ experiences varied in terms of (a) how widely their project was appreciated or adopted by colleagues, (b) the extent to which they had or gained administrative support, and (c) the extent to which they actively disseminated their learning among colleagues through workshops and trainings. Perhaps most significantly, the case studies illuminate the importance of context in shaping not only the focus of the projects but also in the challenges teams face in implementing them. The impact of administrative support (or lack thereof) was particularly important in terms of the extent to which teams were (a) able to share their learning across the system and impact either school or district practice and (b) evaluate their efforts using student level data collected at the school or district level.
In summary, this retrospective look at the impact of the T-BAR project in the PacTIN region suggests that this model of professional development has strong and lasting impacts on participants’ individual professional learning and pedagogical practice. It supports teachers in pursuing knowledge and skills that are uniquely suited to their personal learning needs, their students’ learning needs, and the local context. It provides opportunities for teachers to learn from and collaborate with one another to develop, test, and refine interventions that meet specific student needs in their schools and districts.

For this teacher-led approach to have an impact, particularly a lasting impact, beyond the specific group of participating teachers and their close colleagues, it appears that administrative recognition, support, and participation is important. It can be a delicate balancing act to retain the teacher-driven character of the T-BAR model while garnering administrative buy-in that supports, without necessarily controlling, program activities. In particular, allowing the teachers the time to collaborate, refine, and test their intervention over the course of possibly several years may entail re-alignment of or identifying new funding sources to support and disseminate the work (absent external funding such as T-BAR, although the average awards per team were fairly modest).

Administrators often have been trained to demand fast results with fairly narrowly defined evidence of success and programs that are “scalable.” For the past decade educational policy has supported, and sometimes required, the traditional “one size fits all” model of professional development that is expected to be implemented “with fidelity” across multiple contexts. Administrators may need to redefine their expectations about the results of professional development to fully appreciate the value of teacher initiated, locally developed interventions that are responsive to local needs and adaptable over time and setting.

There is an emerging interest in the field of education in adapting organizational development learning to the context of schools and districts (e.g. information science). The T-BAR model of teacher driven change and learning is compatible with this new perspective that recognizes schools and districts as entities capable of becoming continuous improvement learning environments with innovations emerging from all levels of the organization, not just from top level leadership or external entities.
Map of PacTIN School Locations
For an interactive map, please go to:
https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=zk2nYHDmnNbw.keCW22wDTxSY

PacTIN Schools

Cohort 1
- Bancroft Middle School
- Sunset Continuation High School
- Six Rivers Charter High School
- Laurel Tree Learning Center
- Orick Elementary School
- Mendocino High School
- Ord Terrace Elementary School
- George C. Marshall Elementary School
- Mission High School
- Santa Barbara High School
- Taylor (Ida Redmond) Elementary School
- Ponderosa Elementary School
- Renaissance High School
- Lawrence E. Jones Middle School
- Casa Grande High School
- Northwest Prep Charter School
- El Verano Elementary School
- Frances Harper Junior High School
- Patwin Elementary School
- Waggoner Elementary School
- Woodland High School

Cohort 2
- Rosa Parks Elementary School
- Deer Valley High School
- Rodeo Hills Elementary School
- Freedom High School
- Heights Elementary School
- Del Norte County High School
- Stanwood A Murphy Elementary School
- Marina High School
- Natividad Elementary School