



**California's Improving
Teacher Quality State Grants Program
Teacher-Based Reform (T-BAR)
Master Grant Pilot Project: [Summary Report](#)**

March 2013

California's Improving Teacher Quality State Grants Program Teacher-Based Reform (T-BAR) Master Grant Pilot Project: Summary Report

This report summarizes the work of a grant pilot project funded by the California Department of Education to develop innovative teacher based professional learning communities throughout California.

T-BAR History and Background

The US Department of Education's Improving Teacher Quality State Grants Program (ITQ)ⁱ provides funding to states to support partnerships of postsecondary institutions and K-12 local education agencies (school districts, county education offices) that provide high-quality, sustained professional development to teachers, with the goal of improved student achievement. Californiaⁱⁱ uses these federal ITQ funds to conduct grant competitions and support initiatives that target improving the curriculum knowledge and instructional competence of California's teaching workforce.

California's 1994 ITQ grant competition, the Francis P. Collea Teacher Achievement Award Program (TAAP), differed from previous competitions in that the goal was to provide a small team of classroom teachers with 'seed monies' for designing their own professional learning plans linked to a school-based project. While TAAP was discontinued in 1996, an evaluation of the program concluded that "by linking professional development directly to school-based projects, TAAP was able to capitalize on each of these principles: teachers are more likely to learn those things that interest them; teachers are more likely to learn those things they perceive a need to know; and, learning is reinforced through use."ⁱⁱⁱ

In 2009, California ITQ released a Request for Proposals (RFP) for the Teacher-Based Reform Grant Pilot Project. The goal was to adhere to the underlying principles that guided TAAP while scaling up the original model with a more efficient, regional approach to program administration. For purposes of the competition the state was segmented into four geographical areas of roughly equal populations, with the intent to fund one Master Grant in each area.

The T-BAR RFP solicited proposals from colleges and universities, who in partnership with a federally designated high need K-12 school district, would be responsible for managing the T-BAR Pilot Project within their designated region. The first two T-BAR Master Grants were awarded to the University of California, Davis/Humboldt State and the University of California, Los Angeles in 2009; the remaining two awards went to Chico State University and University of California, Riverside in 2010. Each Master Grantee was to be funded for three years, during which time they would serve a single cohort of teacher participants beginning in 2010 (TIIP and PacTIN) and in 2011 (T PD Inc. and SCRIBES) but augmentation funding released in 2011 and again in 2012 extended the project end date and allowed three of the regions to serve additional cohorts.

To date, T-BAR Master Grantees have been allocated over \$9 million, most of which (approximately 70%) provides direct support for the professional learning activities of the participating teachers. Between 2009 and 2012 T-BAR served 749 teachers drawn from 99 districts; 41% of which are federally designated as high need. A conservative estimate is that 32,000 students have been impacted thus far. Participation numbers will change, as T-BAR activities are ongoing. The Project end date is slated for September 2014.

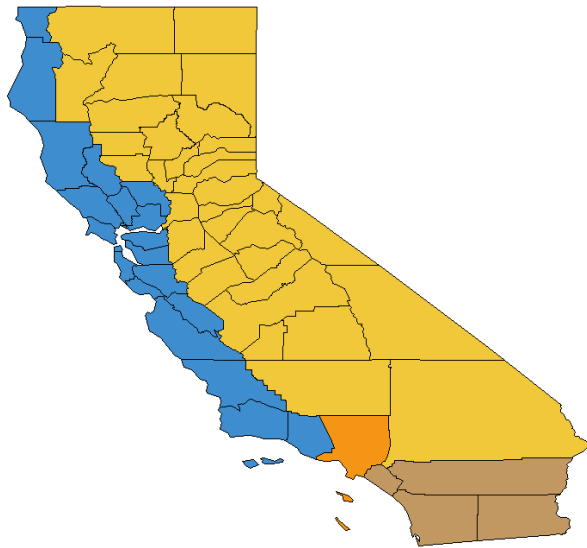
T-BAR Start up and Early Implementation

The T-BAR RFP stated three major goals: (1) to provide support to teams of teachers in support of school reform; (2) to guide a more efficient, regional approach to program administration; and (3) to supplement that administration with a rigorous research program focused on teacher-based school reform.

All four regions developed an application process that incorporated the specific requirements for funding Project Teams detailed in the Master Grant RFP. Among these parameters was the requirement that the process identify teams of 3-5 teachers who would be responsible for implementing a school-based reform project designed to enhance teaching and learning in the classroom. These teams were to be unspecified as to grade level, discipline and methodology, and the applicants needed to make the case that their projects were both needed and had a good chance of succeeding. Additionally, each team was to present a professional learning plan, tied to the reform project, for activities to be completed during their two years of funding. Examples of allowable activities included attending conferences, conducting research at a university, internships at museums or libraries, formal university coursework, or other appropriate learning activities.

Master Grantees were given explicit guidance regarding the use of funding; up to \$30,000 was to be made available to each selected team based on actual, allowable expenses and the Master Grantees were required to work with each of their Project Teams to 'purchase' associated participation fees and travel costs on their behalf and/or to reimburse team members for incurred costs. Award monies could not be used for teacher salaries or stipends, nor could funds be used for school/district indirect costs. Remaining funds were used to provide administrative oversight, carry out research activities and to cover indirect costs of IHE partner(s).

In general, T-BAR directors reported high satisfaction with the overall implementation processes and practices they have put in place across the regions to communicate with and monitor their respective Project Teams.



LA County = TIIP
 Coast = PacTIN
 Inland = T PD Inc.
 South = SCRIBES

T-BAR Master Grantees

PacTIN - Pacific Coast Teacher Innovation Network

Lead IHE: UC Davis School of Education CRESS Center
 IHE Partner: Humboldt State University, Humboldt
 Science & Mathematics Center
 LEA Partner: Pajaro Valley USD

<http://teachergrants.ucdavis.edu>

TIIP - Teacher Initiated Inquiry Projects

Lead IHE: UCLA School of Education
 IHE Partner: UCLA Div. of Social Science
 LEA Partner: Los Angeles USD

<http://centerx.gseis.ucla.edu/partnerships-grants/tiip/>

SCRIBES - Southern Counties Reform Initiative Benefiting Teachers and Students

Lead IHE: UC Riverside Education Extension
 IHE Partner: CSU San Bernardino Chemistry Dept.
 LEA Partner: Cochella Valley USD

<http://www.extension.ucr.edu/scribes/>

Teachers' PD Inc. - Teacher's Professional Development for Inland California

IHE Lead: CSU Chico, College of Communications and
 Education
 IHE Partner: CSU Chico College of Natural Science
 LEA Partner: Yuba City USD

Other: CSU Fresno, CSU San Bernardino; CSU Fresno,
 Central Valley Educational Leadership Institute; CSU
 Bakersfield, Dept. of Teacher Education

<http://www.csuchico.edu/teacher-grants>

General and Specific Characteristics of T-BAR Applicants

Master Grantees provided participation data for Cohorts 1 and 2. A total of 621 applications were submitted; of those 30% (184) were funded (102 as part of Cohort 1 and 82 as part of Cohort 2).

In addition to partnering with a federally designated high need district, T-BAR Master Grantees were encouraged to target other high need districts. Forty one (41%) of the 99 districts served are designated as high need. Elementary (36%) and high schools (40%) represent the highest percentage of school types. Significantly fewer (11%) numbers of middle schools are served.

Master Grantees also provided copies of funded Cohort 1 and 2 applications, which were coded to identify specific characteristics of T-BAR applicants.

While regional directors were not sure they had effective mechanisms for distributing the call for applications to as wide a group of teachers as possible, each region received an adequate pool from which to select projects with strong potential, funding about 30% of the applications received and supporting the work of approximately 749 teachers. Considering the low overall project attrition rate, it would appear that the project selection processes within each region were effective. Funded projects covered the full range of school types and a wide range of topical areas.

Among the funded projects, teachers identified the need to support their students' engagement/motivation, and development of critical thinking or "21st century" skills most often. The academic focus for the majority of projects centered on English language skills (particularly for elementary school teachers), followed by STEM fields (most common among high school based projects), and integrating technology in the classroom. The majority of participating teachers chose to attend off-site professional development workshops and conferences as at least part of their professional learning. Most teachers expected to improve their instructional practice, content knowledge and/or collaboration skills.

Overall Effectiveness of T-BAR Implementation Framework

The T-BAR professional learning framework is intended to be teacher driven, situated in a school and designed to address the particular needs of the Project Teams. During interviews, each of the T-BAR directors alluded to the value of professional learning that is driven by voluntary participation, autonomy (in terms of trusting teachers to identify and address localized problems), and providing resources for an implementation component (there is a requirement that Project Teams both engage in professional learning and translate that learning into practice). T-BAR directors used the word "empowering" to describe the programs' impact on teachers and noted that it is "impressive" what a team of teachers can accomplish over a two-year period. Directors also mentioned how much they have come to appreciate the value of having "wobble room" both in how they administer the project and in the degree of flexibility they are able to provide the Project Teams.

Among the perceived “strengths” associated with the implementation framework are the following:

Replicable statewide professional learning framework. T-BAR operational guidelines were largely determined by California ITQ and are controlled through the Master Grantees’ use of similar application and vetting processes. While fairly non-specific (must build on effective professional learning research, must address underlying principles, and must support job-embedded professional learning), these guidelines seem to be enough to ensure consistency in how T-BAR is being implemented across the regions.

Structure supports teacher autonomy. Managing fiscal resources through the IHE is perceived of as being helpful in protecting those resources from interference (i.e., principals who want to re-direct project funds to meet their agenda rather than the teachers,’ districts wanting to funnel funds through the institution so that they can assess indirect costs, etc.)

Low project attrition. The reimbursement structure seems to be a contributing factor in terms of the low Project Team attrition rates being reported. While the low attrition rates may also be related to characteristics of participating teachers and flexibility of team membership (e.g., individual team members can be replaced if current members are lost to lay-offs, career moves, maternity leaves, etc.), the fact is that the reimbursement structure provides Master Grantees with the option of re-purposing unspent dollars to support new teams when an existing team discontinues or is defunded.

Rewards motivated teachers and supports teacher leadership/shared decision-making. In addition to creating a venue, which appears to meaningfully engage participating teachers, the self-selected group structure encourages accountability and adherence to a collaborative leadership model.

Among the “challenges” associated with the implementation framework are the following:

Geographical challenges. T-BAR adapted a regional approach to project administration in a deliberate attempt to mitigate the challenges of serving a state the size and population of California. Even so, these geographical considerations impact the extent and nature of the work possible within each region.

Project may be under-resourced in terms of administrative costs and research support. All of the Master Grantees felt that there were insufficient resources to adequately cover administrative costs, evaluate the program’s impact and support research activities.

Project requires a complex, reimbursement-based fiscal process. The use of a funding model based on the reimbursement of actual expenses has proven to be labor intensive for both staff supported by project funds, as well as other IHE staff who provide indirect support processing transactions.

Information dissemination challenges. There are few, if any, mechanisms in place statewide or at the regional level for relaying information about the project directly into the hands of targeted teachers, and there is no way of knowing if teachers who might have best benefited from participation actually had access.

Inconsistent access to technology. While technology seems to be useful in facilitating a statewide professional learning model T-BAR Master Grantees found that some participating school sites block access to incoming e-mails and others do not allow e-mail attachments, which sometimes complicated communication and monitoring efforts.

Diverse range of interventions. While diversity is a goal and strength of this approach, it does make grant administration and developing any systematic description or measures of outcomes challenging. In effect, there are as many different interventions as there are Project Teams.

T-BAR Research, Process and Outcomes

UC Davis conducted phone interviews with the four regional directors and convened all the research teams for a meeting to discuss both their research findings and to solicit their feedback and recommendations. Interviews and discussion prompts were fairly open-ended, leaving flexibility for surfacing issues and thoughts during the conversations. We identified a few over-arching questions about both process and outcomes – notably we wanted to explore director and researchers’ perspective on the strength and weakness of the T-BAR model to influence (a) teacher professional development and growth, (b) school change, and (c) student outcomes. The T-BAR research teams are investigating similar questions as part of their work. Their data collection and analyses are not yet complete, although some preliminary findings are discussed below.

During our researcher convening, the participants provided brief overviews of their individual research plans and preliminary findings. All research plans included teacher surveys and additional qualitative data collection (e.g. case studies, portfolios, team reports).

What are the characteristics of effective/less successful T-BAR Project Teams?

During interviews, T-BAR directors indicated their belief that T-BAR appeals to teachers who see themselves as professionals, tend to be in “mid-career” with several years of teaching experience, and that Project Teams tend to be formed by teachers who are already strong leaders or who have that proclivity. During discussions, researchers tended to concur with these generalizations.

Characteristics of effective T-BAR Project Teams

- * Organized team leader who communicates effectively with team, school administrator, and the funder
- * Functions as a small learning community: strong collaboration with shared responsibility for work; active team; plan and make decisions collaboratively about next steps based on their combined learning
- * Explicit academic content area or pedagogical focus
- * Ability to leverage resources (e.g., apply for additional funding; stretch financial resources in ways that allow taking full advantage of opportunities for professional learning)
- * Supportive administrator (or at least not undermining)
- * Engage/involve other teachers and administrators (e.g., make presentations to whole school, present to School Board)

Characteristics of less successful T-BAR Project Teams

- * Have less skilled team leads (e.g., unable to build buy-in of team members; inability to manage internal conflict)
- * Face a lack of time (e.g., teams that simply don't put in the time or who have unsupportive administrators, or where the school structure does not support time for teacher collaboration)
- * Have lost team members due to lay-offs, maternity leave, career moves, etc.

Is T-BAR an effective vehicle for teacher and school change?

Despite some challenges and the fact that data collection and analyses are not yet complete, information regarding the efficacy of T-BAR is beginning to emerge. More detailed information and insights will be forthcoming in the T-BAR researchers' reports.

Researchers report increased confidence and self-perceived effectiveness among teachers, improvements in curricula, student learning and engagement, and improved leadership skills. Researchers also report that project participation provided a "rebirth" of teachers' enthusiasm for teaching. This is captured in their propensity to collaborate with other teachers, to engage in reflective learning, and in an increased sense of efficacy. There was also a sense that student centered projects often resulted in community building for the entire school, and sometimes the larger community (parents attending, etc.). While the researchers did not report on any direct measures addressing student outcomes, most felt that students of participating teachers likely experienced increased engagement and the development of specific skills and knowledge.

T-BAR directors' perceptions are that some Project Teams have driven change at their schools and a few have far exceeded expectations. They report that Project Teams have had a positive influence on the broader school community in that the amount of time teachers engage in professional conversations has increased and more resources are being shared. Another positive change is that the team's projects provide administrators with an opportunity to recognize they have leadership on site and that all answers do not lie with outside experts. T-BAR directors believe that the initiative has the potential to encourage and build leadership skills and several offered examples of teachers who have taken on

leadership positions because of their involvement with T-BAR. Citing anecdotal data, T-BAR directors also provided examples of tangible results in terms of student achievement.

This early work suggests a number of potentially useful research directions, including the following: School culture/school leadership; Ability to benefit; Teacher effectiveness; Teacher retention; Student engagement; Cost effectiveness; Teacher choice, and Sustainability. These areas were highlighted as the most promising research directions during discussions with the research teams.

Conclusion and T-BAR Policy Implications

We suggest that the T-BAR model of providing modest funds to a self-selected group of teachers, who choose the problem they want to address and the manner in which they do so, may be a way to provide “opportunities for sustained, collegial PD of the kind that produces changes in teaching practice and student outcomes” and that is aligned with the growing consensus on what constitutes effective professional learning^{iv}.

In terms of the extent to which the T-BAR model fosters systemic, long-lasting impacts on student achievement, we do not yet have systematic or comprehensive data. T-BAR directors believe that while promising, a necessary next step for T-BAR to have a sustained impact on student achievement would be to find a way to identify and support Project Teams that have the greatest potential for scaling-up/expansion and/or dissemination.

When asked about whether the T-BAR model provides an efficient (cost-effective), regional approach to providing professional development to a statewide initiative, neither T-BAR directors nor researchers have definitive answers (neither do we). It is clear that the T-BAR funding formula is notably different than the more common California ITQ model in which the majority of funds go directly to the institutional partners. For this reason, we recommend careful consideration of how the T-BAR model fits within the continuum of professional learning opportunities and also of professional learning communities. Our conversations with regional directors and researchers and review of the early research findings suggest that T-BAR or something like it has great potential to continue to energize local educators and engage them as full partners in solving educational challenges in their local context.

Given that teachers’ professional learning is key to California’s educational reform agenda^v, it makes sense to explore policies and program models that support teachers’ acquisition of new skills and knowledge, and in particular those that have the potential to be successful within the confines of current fiscal constraints and reduced resources.

We believe that there are many interesting practical and research questions to be pursued in order to fully develop this model and understand how and when it can most effectively be deployed to maximize its potential to develop and retain effective teachers and support student engagement and learning.

Acknowledgments

At the request of California ITQ, UC Davis generated several reports summarizing the T-BAR implementation process and early findings. The reports are available online at: <http://education.ucdavis.edu/post/cees-projects>.

We gratefully acknowledge the California's Improving Teacher Quality State Grant Program, a unit of the California Department of Education, for requesting and funding preparation of this report. We also wish to thank the four regional T-BAR project directors for generously taking the time to participate in telephone interviews and provide copies of program implementation documents, as well as the researchers who participated in a daylong convening during which they shared preliminary findings and helped identify a number of promising areas for additional research. Collectively, these individuals enriched our understanding of T-BAR and its potential to develop and retain effective teachers and support student engagement and learning.

The views expressed in this document are those of the authors and should not be attributed to the California Department of Education.

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ⁱ ITQ is an initiative of the US Department of Education Title II, Part A of No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), as an evolution of the Eisenhower Grants Program.

ⁱⁱ California's ITQ State Grants Program was administered by The California Postsecondary Education Commission (CPEC) from its inception until 2011 when Governor Brown eliminated CPEC funding. CPEC was established in 1974 as the State planning and coordinating body for higher education by Assembly Bill 770 (Chapter 1187 of the Statutes of 1973), Education Code Section Education Code 66900-66906. In 2012 fiscal and administrative oversight of all ITQ grants and initiatives was turned over to the California Department of Education.

ⁱⁱⁱ CPEC publication, *Developing Teaching Professionals: The California Eisenhower State Grant Program Experience 1996-1998*, "Assessing TAAP: Teacher Achievement Award Program." See also *An investigation of the impacts of teacher-driven professional development on pedagogy and student learning*. Colbert, J. A., Brown, R. S., Choi, S., & Thomas, S. (2008). *Teacher Education Quarterly*, Spring 2008. Pp. 135-154.

^{iv} Darling-Hammond, L. (2009). *Powerful learning: What we know about teaching for understanding*. New York, NY: Wiley.

^v California Department of Education. (2012). *Greatness by Design: A report by State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson's Task Force on Educator Excellence*. Sacramento, CA: CDE.