

Districts of Innovation Report – Taylor County

Cohort I - 1st Monitoring Year 2014-15 School Year

Monitoring Districts of Innovation

The administrative regulation 701 KAR 5:140 directs the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) to monitor the implementation of the Districts of Innovation plans. The specific requirements for monitoring are found in Section 4 as follows:

Monitoring of Plan Implementation. (1) District and school innovation plans shall:

- (a) Be incorporated within the overall district comprehensive plan; or
- (b) Replace the district comprehensive plan.

(2) At the completion of the second year after plan approval and each year thereafter for the term of the approval status, a district approved as a District of Innovation shall annually provide data to the commissioner that shall include the following:

(a) Number of students served by the innovation plan, total number and by socio-economic status, race or ethnicity, gender, disability, and grade level;

(b) Number of students served by the innovation plan not on track to graduate from high school, total number and by socio-economic status, race or ethnicity, gender, disability, and grade level;

(c) Documentation of student progress toward graduation and college and career readiness;

(d) Total number of certified teachers participating in the innovation plan and their roles and responsibilities;

(e) Documentation of certified and classified staff operating in a non-traditional school environment;

(f) Documentation of any extended learning opportunities in which students in the school of innovation participate for the purposes of earning or recovering credit, including qualifications of instructors, time spent, and student outcomes; and

(g) Other measurable outcomes specific to the district's innovation plan as described in the initial application or through modification of the original plan.

(3) At the end of the second year after plan approval and each year thereafter for the term of the approval status, a district approved as a District of Innovation shall receive an annual site visit from a review team selected and trained by the department. The purpose of the visit shall be to monitor progress and interview staff and students to collect qualitative data on the effect of the innovation plan and for future research needs.

The 2014-15 school year was the second year of innovation plan implementation for the first cohort of Districts of Innovation, and thus the first year when monitoring was required. These districts are: Danville Independent, Eminence Independent, Jefferson County and Taylor County. Monitoring was contoured to meet the specific Innovation Plan for each participating district.

A 3-part rubric was developed for the monitoring process. Parts 1 and 2 referred specifically to requirements listed in the regulation and the MOU signed by each district. Part 3 was tailored to the individual innovation plan of each district.

Monitoring was discussed with the districts as a whole during the 2013 district of innovation retreat and again at the fall 2014 retreat. Districts of innovation were asked for input on what additional measures they felt would provide evidence of the effects of the innovation plan.

Staff met with superintendents and/or leadership team members in each of the districts of innovation to discuss the monitoring rubrics which had been provided to each district after the 2014 retreat. Districts of innovation were asked to complete the rubrics by February 15, 2015.

Two site visits to Taylor County included a meeting with the leadership team and tours of the high school and elementary school. KDE staff met with the principal of the elementary school and visited several classrooms. Reports from additional KDE staff visiting Taylor County to follow-up on other programs also provided positive feedback. Taylor County also presented to the Next Generation Leadership Academy and the superintendent made presentations to state and national organizations about the implementation of the district's innovation plan.

Monitoring Summary:

Taylor County has made steady progress in the implementation of its innovation plan.

Topic: Incorporation

As required by 701 KAR 5:140, the district has incorporated the innovation plan into the district comprehensive improvement plan.

Topic: Leadership Team

The district has established a district leadership team that meets monthly. The district reports that all members of the leadership team are involved in the planning and implementation of activities to move the innovation plan forward. The district has appointed Charles Higdon as the point of contact.

Topic: Website

According to the signed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), all districts of innovation were required to "post to any website specified by the KDE, all non-proprietary products and lessons learned from the implementation of the district's plan". KDE established a District of Innovation SharePoint web site, presented this at the 2013 Districts of Innovation retreat, and verified that all districts could access the site. None of the districts utilized the site. The Division of Innovation has been working to refine the posting process and has not penalized any District of Innovation for failing to post.

Topic: Student data reporting per 701 KAR 5:140

Required documentation of student demographic data and student progress toward graduation and college and career readiness was provided through the School Report Card links.

Topic: Certified and Classified Staff

As required, the district provided a link to a list of certified teachers participating in the innovation plan. The district has three main programs incorporated into the innovation plan: The Cardinal Academy, STARS Program and Virtual Program. All teachers in the district participate in the innovation plan with the following holding key roles:

Cardinal Academy: Scott Franklin, Director; Tim Peterson, Advisor; Lindsey McPherson, Advisor; Geoff McPherson, Advisor; Jennifer Fitzpatrick, Advisor; Troy Young, Advisor; Lauren White, Advisor.

Roles/responsibilities: Regularly meet with students on caseload, oversee student progress on culminating projects, connect with community leaders for potential internships and job shadowing opportunities, work with students seeking assistance or enrichment with content

STARS Program: Kelly Milburn

Roles/responsibilities: Schedule students for teacher intern opportunities, organize and monitor summer reading program for elementary students and train high school (mentor) students, monitor attendance and expectations

Virtual Program: Jennifer Fitzpatrick

Role and responsibilities: Oversee and monitor all student online activity

Staff Recommendation:

KDE recommends that the district provide additional narrative for the 2015-16 school year highlighting specific teachers who have created unique learning opportunities for students as part of the innovation plan.

Topic: Cardinal Academy and Virtual Academy

Seven faculty members serve in the role of advisors to Cardinal Academy students in a non-traditional setting. Virtual Academy faculty also serve in non-traditional roles as facilitators to online learning. Both the Cardinal Academy and Virtual Academy offer extended learning opportunities. The Virtual Academy offers opportunities for credit recovery as well as accelerated learning. Information on the qualifications of instructors in these two programs was inadequate. Other extended learning opportunities include a modified work-study program for those students on the verge of becoming drop-outs. Personalized schedules are designed for these students that enable them to complete high school and thus the district reports a 0% dropout rate.

Staff Recommendation:

KDE requests that the district provide additional information about the qualifications of the instructors in the Cardinal Academy, and describe what measurable outcomes are being used to document student progress.

Waiver Requests

The district requested a waiver of **funding (based on average daily attendance) and state mandated test taking requirements** so that students can take the tests upon completion of the course or grade and not have to wait until the end of the semester/year. The district provided this information:

“TCHS created a Cardinal Academy where students can design their own daily learning schedules. “

“Once students have completed a self-paced learning course by mastering the standards, they move on to the next course – ex. When a student completes Math 7 they move on to Math 8. The number of students completing high school coursework and taking college courses continues to grow.”

The district requested a waiver of the Kentucky Educational Excellence Scholarship (**KEES funding statute**) so that funds can pay for early college credit classes while students are still in high school. This waiver was denied. However, the district moved forward using resources from the Race to the Top grant. The district reported “a small amount of funds were allotted for students for college/career readiness, and district set aside high school funds for partial scholarships for students who wish to take the Medical Nursing Assistant certification at Campbellsville University to enable students to gain an early start on their medical careers. TCHS helped approximately 15 students with this financial burden.”

The district requested a waiver of **Education Professional Standards Board (EPSB) certification restrictions on subject areas** so that current teachers can teach additional subjects. The purpose of this waiver was to allow awarding of credit from certified professionals and allow teachers to provide instruction outside of their current content/grade level certifications. This waiver was denied and the district did not pursue a remedy.

The district requested a waiver of **class size restrictions** to permit multi-age, self-paced classrooms, with individualized learning stations where students learn standards at their own pace. The district report stated:

“Through the District Race to the Top (RTTT) grant awarded to the Ohio Valley and Green River Educational cooperatives, all schools have gone through the Leader In Me training program, and as a result, teachers have built a capacity for creating a sense of community and personalizing learning for all students. Students still test with their original grade level, however performance-based students enrolled in high school courses do take the End of Course assessments, but their scores cannot “count” until they reach

ninth grade. The district continues to modify and refine the multi-age, self-paced classrooms at all levels.”

The district requested a waiver of **graduation requirements specific to subject matter** so that the district may tailor specific subjects to student interests and the student’s service plan. The district report stated:

“Students who are online and learn at their own pace are able to co-op and work to earn money once they have completed required courses and are on track to graduate. Students who are unable to find a job are able to do work-based experience through the many programs offered at TCHS to help meet the needs of those students and their service plans. Approximately six to eight students benefit from this approach each year. A variety of pathways are available to Taylor County students to insure they graduate and can be college and career ready.”

Miscellaneous Plan Components

As part of the District Race to the Top (RTTT) grant awarded to the Ohio Valley and Green River Educational cooperatives, professional development needs have been met through the Leader in Me training and the 7 Habits of Highly Effective People for 2014-15. The RTTT grant also provided professional development (through the KidFRIENDLy grant program) for personalized learning. Approximately \$9,000 was allotted to the district for professional development opportunities for 2014-15.

Staff Recommendation:

KDE recommends that the district make specific connections to professional development (PD) opportunities listed in the innovation plan and indicate which have been used, add any new, and provide documentation that requirements specific to the innovation plan have been met.

The district was asked to briefly describe how the District Parent Advisory Council has been involved with the implementation of the innovation plan. The district was asked to report on how parents have been involved in the STEM Classroom of Innovation and the anywhere/anytime learning opportunities available for their children. Documentation was not provided about the items discussed at these meetings. A follow-up meeting with the district point of contact revealed that these meetings were more general in nature and not solely tied to the innovation plan.

Staff Recommendation:

KDE recommends that minutes be kept of these meetings and that the district document action items which result from this collaboration. It was suggested that the innovation plan be on the agenda for every meeting and that more documentation be kept on parent involvement.

Overall Findings:

Taylor County has been implementing its innovation plan and demonstrating success with college and career readiness and 0% drop out rates. The plan is personalized and based on competencies, yet is able to conform to state testing requirements. Students in the Taylor County schools have a variety of options to help them succeed. Some of the initiatives could be documented in a more deliberate manner in order to be able to specifically match innovation plan activities with student success. Data documenting the outcomes of the innovation plan tied to the district's goals need to be provided in future reports. The use of charts and graphs would be helpful in visualizing the progress of the plan.