

# Amphitheater Unified School District Project EXCELL!



Project EXCELL! serves students in nine high-need inner-city schools (K-12) and two high-need rural schools among the Amphitheater Public Schools in the greater Tucson area.

The differentiated compensation system supports academic achievement and will enable the district to recruit, develop, and retain high-quality educators.

## Needs Assessment Results and General Information

The Amphitheater Unified School District (AUSD) makes up the second largest school district in the greater Tucson area and serves some 17,000 students. The median county income is 16 percent below the national average. AUSD encompasses a high stress area of Tucson in terms of crime, drugs, and poverty. In the pilot schools, between 31 and 93 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Large academic disparities exist between these schools and the non-target schools. Pass rates on standardized exams range between a 3 and 25 percentage point difference.

## Background

Building on its historic efforts to improve achievement, design a differentiated compensation program, and develop a nationally recognized career ladder system, AUSD is instituting its TIF grant to build on its successes. The EXCELL! Grant will be used to improve and expand the existing system following an analysis of where improvements were needed.

The analysis indicated specific targets, such as increased incentives to engage more participation in the career ladder program, inclusion of principals, and compensation for school improvement and schoolwide achievement gains. In addition, the grant will be used to develop a plan of frequent classroom observations and analysis of classroom assessments. Monies will also be used to replace the existing outdated data management system. Professional development will be expanded for all educators, and principal incentives will be introduced.

## Incentives

The Project EXCELL! differentiated compensation program gives educators the opportunity to earn up to \$10,000. The system is based on three performance objectives: (1) student achievement, (2) leadership, and (3) participation in professional development. Each component will be assessed via a comprehensive portfolio system that is combined with direct observations. Successful completion in all three areas is required to obtain the maximum incentive.

<b>Location(s)</b>	Tucson, Arizona
<b>Award Date</b>	June 2007
<b>Duration</b>	5 years
<b>Partners</b>	None

## **Evaluation**

Teacher effectiveness will be measured by multiple assessments. These assessments will be coupled with the development of an educator evaluation instrument designed to determine the extent to which 21st century skills are incorporated to strengthen school and student performance. In addition, ongoing mentoring for principals will support and prepare them for rigorous objective evaluations. Instructional Support Leaders at each school will evaluate teacher portfolios and will conduct classroom observations.

## **Resources**

AUSD has supported performance-based compensation and has the existing infrastructure for supporting new efforts. Instructional coaching and ongoing staff development will aim to build further capacity to sustain the program beyond the grant period. Existing entitlement grants and pay for performance mechanisms will play a major role in post-grant funding.

## **Data Systems**

The current data management system is outdated and has serious deficiencies. Project EXCELL! will institute a new system capable of meeting the needs of the project and the district beyond the grant period.

## **Year 2 Activities**

2008-09 was the first full implementation year for the project. Amphitheater focused on increasing student achievement through quality data analysis, curriculum alignment, assessment, and by enhancing research-based pedagogy through quality professional development and increasing leadership opportunities. Design Teams made up of teachers

and administrators further developed the classroom performance assessment component and created quality indicators for teacher and school administrator reflections. The new data management system was installed, and preliminary training for the system was offered. The new system was put into operation over the summer of 2009. The value-added student achievement analysis model was further refined. A new teacher evaluation system and a new principal evaluation system were approved by the Amphitheater Governing Board in May of 2009, and both are in place for the 2009-10 school year.

## **Outlook for Year 3**

Project EXCELL! continues to have a high rate of participation with 96 percent of eligible staff signed on for 2009-10. New teacher and principal evaluation systems are in place. All teacher evaluators and the principal evaluator were trained on the new systems over the summer of 2009. A new data management system was put into place and the district is currently involved in training and making the necessary adjustments to establish this new technology tool. The value-added data analysis model is offering our schools a new avenue to examine student achievement gains. Training sessions for teachers in various relevant topics such as classroom assessment, collaboration, differentiation of instruction, and data analysis are being offered at the district level. There is evidence of increased collaboration among teachers throughout the project schools, which will expand and improve this year.