Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System FAQ

A. Overview

1. *What is T-TESS?

   T-TESS is the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System. It is a new teacher evaluation system for the state of Texas designed to support teachers in their professional development and help them grow and improve as educators. It is being piloted by approximately 60 districts in the 2014-2015 school year, will be implemented as a refined system in the 2015-2016 school year in approximately 200 districts, and is scheduled to be rolled out statewide in the 2016-2017 year.

2. What are the components of T-TESS evaluation?

   T-TESS has three measures of teacher effectiveness. The three measures are:

   - Observation
   - Teacher Self-Assessment
   - Student Growth

   Entering the pilot year, the following percentages were assigned to determining the overall rating – Observation 70%, Teacher Self-Assessment 10% and Student Growth 20%. In the spring of 2015, rules (Texas Administrative Code) will define specifics as to the process and methodology used for determining scores.

3. How was T-TESS developed?

   T-TESS was developed by a steering committee comprised of teachers, principals, and representatives from higher education and educator organizations. They began their work in the fall of 2013 by updating teacher standards and, through the spring of 2014, continued with building a rubric tied to the standards. While the Texas Comprehensive Center at SEDL and the Texas Education Agency (TEA) facilitated the process, T-TESS is a system designed by educators to support teachers in their professional growth.

4. *What is the timeline for T-TESS development and implementation?

   During the 2014-2015 school year, T-TESS will be piloted in approximately 60 districts across the state. TEA will take feedback from pilot districts to refine T-TESS for implementation in

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approximately 200 districts during the 2015-2016 school year. Statewide rollout will occur during the 2016-2017 school year. However, it should be stressed the agency is committed to collecting feedback from districts that use T-TESS and will continue to improve and refine the system beyond the 2016-2017 school year.

5. *How will the TEA support school districts toward implementing the new system?

   TEA, in conjunction with the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET), will provide statewide "train the trainer" sessions at Education Service Centers (ESCs) during the spring of 2015 to prepare a cadre of experts to train district appraisers for the 2015-2016 refinement year. ESCs will continue to build up their training capacity during the 2015-2016 school year in order to support statewide rollout during the 2016-2017 school year. Similar to what is currently in place with the existing teacher appraisal system, ESCs will continue to build support systems for districts as they implement best practices in evaluation, including professional development and guidance for appraisers on pre-conferences, post-conferences, coaching teachers, and utilizing teacher and instructional leaders in the observation process.

6. Why move away from PDAS?

   When PDAS was implemented in 1997, it was a step forward from the previous state evaluation system. Over time, however, PDAS drifted from its original intent – to be a professional development system for teachers – and became a system focused more on compliance with rules. In addition, education has evolved in the last 17 years, and T-TESS seeks to update the tools of evaluation to complement what's happening in classrooms throughout the state and to align with what many districts are already doing on their campuses – creating open, collaborative campus environments with a constant focus on instructional and professional improvement.

7. Will Texas school districts be required to use T-TESS when it is ready for statewide rollout?

   As the Texas Education Code indicates, districts have the option of creating their own evaluation system. T-TESS will replace PDAS as the state recommended evaluation system.

8. How will teacher and principal preparation align with T-TESS?

   One of TEA's major ongoing initiatives is to better align preparation, evaluation, professional development, mentorship and career pathways around a set of standards and practices that act as a foundation and bring the entire timeline of an educator's career into alignment. One of the first steps was to establish the teaching standards as the curricular base of preparation for teaching candidates. In addition, preparation programs will be trained on the new teacher evaluation system so that they can build in both aspiring teachers and principals the skills necessary to be effective teachers and appraisers of teachers.

9. Are other districts and states implementing similar evaluation systems?

Yes. The components of T-TESS – observation, teacher self-assessment and student growth – are components used in many districts throughout the state and in many states throughout the nation. They provide for three sources of information that create a more complete picture of a teacher's effectiveness.

B. Rubric

1. What are the components of the rubric?

   The full rubric is available here:
   http://txcc.sedl.org/our_work/tx_educator_evaluation/Teacher_Evaluation_Rubric_4.24.14_V2.pdf.

   The rubric has four domains:
   - Planning
   - Instruction
   - Learning Environment
   - Professional Practice and Responsibilities

   There are sixteen total dimensions within those four domains, five in Instruction, four in both Planning and Professional Practice and Responsibilities, and three in Learning Environment.

2. What is the difference between the PDAS rubric and the T-TESS rubric?

   Although good instruction is captured in both rubrics, the biggest differences between the two are:

   - T-TESS strives to capture the holistic nature of teaching – the idea that a constant feedback loop exists between teachers and students, and gauging the effectiveness of teachers requires a consistent focus on how students respond to their teacher's instructional practices. For those reasons, each of the observable domains in T-TESS focuses on both teachers and students rather than separating them out into separate domains, as under PDAS.
   - In order to capture a better distribution of teaching practices, T-TESS has five performance levels where PDAS had four. All teachers, regardless of their relative effectiveness, should be able to see within the performance levels of T-TESS some practices that they can strive toward in their goal setting and professional development plan.
   - The descriptors in T-TESS differ from PDAS in that T-TESS articulates different practices between performance levels whereas PDAS differentiated between the performance levels based on how often a teacher did the same practice. T-TESS strives to show that accomplished and distinguished teachers often do different things than developing teachers rather than simply doing the same practices more frequently.
   - T-TESS also strives to capture feedback built into the rubric itself. Any teacher can, after self-assessing on the rubric or getting feedback from their appraiser, find practices in

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the performance levels above their practice that they can work toward in professional development.

C. **Self-assessment**

1. How does the self-assessment in T-TESS differ from PDAS?

   As often implemented, the self-assessment in PDAS was a single submission in the fall that was rarely referred to or used as a tool for professional growth. T-TESS uses the teacher self-assessment as an ongoing process to promote and track goals and professional development. Teachers and appraisers agree on goals and a development plan to attain those goals, and, like in PDAS, the teacher submits the plan in the fall. Unlike PDAS, the teacher keeps the document living, tracking progress toward those goals, professional development undertaken to achieve the goals, and revisions to goals as the teachers context changes over the year.

2. Teachers don't often get to choose their professional development. How can they set a development plan?

   The professional development plan would incorporate all forms of professional development, not just the traditionally provided courses offered by outside entities or to whole staff. Professional development could include working within professional learning communities (PLCs), with an instructional coach, a department chair or another teacher on particular practices identified as improvement goals. It could also include self-directed professional development that seeks literature, online videos or modules that address particular practices that the teacher identified as improvement goals.

3. What's the process for the self-assessment?

   During the first year of T-TESS implementation, teachers will identify their improvement goals and map out a plan to achieve those goals. The goals and professional development plan can be established in a meeting with an appraiser or independently, although the appraiser does need to agree with the goals and the plan established. Teachers will submit that document to their appraisers and will then maintain that document throughout the year, tracking their progress in professional development and revising goals as needed because of changing circumstances. During the end-of-year conference, teachers and appraisers will go over the progress made in achieving goals (although on-going conversations about goals and development should ideally occur throughout the year) and set new goals and a new professional development plan for the next year based off of progress the teacher made during that school year and the ongoing discussions between appraiser and teacher about areas for refinement based on the observation process.

   At the beginning of the next school year, teachers will have the ability to examine student growth data and make any revisions to their goals and professional development plan, as necessary. Teachers will also make revisions based on changing circumstances, such as a new

teaching assignment. Teachers will then submit their goals and plan to their appraiser, and the process will repeat itself.

T-TESS seeks to establish with this process that:

- Development is an ongoing process for all teachers regardless of their level of proficiency
- Development isn't isolated in single-year snapshots of performance but is continuous and consistently building off prior efforts and attention
- Teachers have a say in and monitor their own goals and growth throughout the year with appraisers seeking to provide the support that teachers need to achieve their goals

D. **Student Growth**
1. What are student growth measures?

Student growth measures how much a student progresses academically during his or her time with a particular teacher. It takes into consideration a student's entering achievement when measuring how much the student grew over the year, and, as opposed to measuring student proficiency on a single assessment, student growth isn't concerned with whether or not a student passes a test.

By measuring growth, a teacher who has students who enter multiple years behind grade level could still demonstrate his or her effectiveness based on how much those students progress during that year. Students who move from three years behind to two years behind make considerable growth, and although a proficiency measure would still show those students as unable to pass the test, student growth would capture the remarkable progress (two years worth) those students made during their time with that teacher.

Student growth also incentivizes teachers to teach to all students – those who are unlikely to meet certain levels of proficiency and those who are likely to meet them regardless of how much they learn in a year. Measuring growth means that teachers can focus on the entire class, striving for each student to progress appropriately throughout the year, not just those students that hover around the proficiency line.

2. How will student growth data be a part of the evaluation process?

Student growth data should be used just as observation data and self-assessment data – as information that will help to inform teachers about their strengths and potential areas of focus for professional development so they can better impact all students the following year. Student growth is one measure in a multiple measure evaluation system, and the inclusion of student growth data in a formative evaluation process provides for a more complete understanding of

5

October 23, 2014
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which students a teacher has reached and how much the teacher has reached them in a given year.

3. What are the options for measuring student growth for teachers?

    At this time, districts have four options for measuring student growth: 1) value-add scores for teachers in tested subjects in grades 5 through End-of-Course exams (EOCs); 2) student learning objectives (SLOs); 3) portfolios; and 4) district-level pre- and post-tests.

    Districts can choose more than one of those measures, provided that there is consistency throughout the district for a particular grade and subject. If a district decides to use portfolios for Art I, then all district Art I teachers would need to use portfolios. 2nd grade generalists could use SLOs in that scenario, but all 2nd grade generalists would need to use SLOs.

    TEA will work with pilot districts, ESCs and experts in alternative growth measures to build the resources and guidelines that administrators and teachers will need to implement student growth measures.

    As indicated in FAQ #D.2, the purpose of student growth data is to provide teachers with a better sense of how much of an impact their instruction has had on the academic progress of all their students, regardless of the student's achievement level, and, most importantly, from that data make informed decisions about professional development that will allow teachers to better impact all students the following year. Although a score does need to be calculated, the value of a student growth measure lies primarily in the feedback it provides to teachers so that they can improve their practice.

4. What is a value-added measure (VAM)? How is it calculated? Is it fair?

    A set of FAQs focused specifically on VAM can be found here: https://tea.sas.com/

5. When will student growth data be available?

    Student growth data won't be available until after the end-of-year (summative) conference between a teacher and an appraiser. For alternative growth measures (those measures that aren't value-add), that data will be completed by the end of the school year. For value-add measures (VAM), that data will be available during late August/early September.

    The timing of finalized student growth data reinforces two critical concepts in T-TESS. First, no single year student growth data should be the trigger in any substantial decisions a district or campus makes about a teacher. Student growth is one of multiple measures of a teacher's practice, and decisions should take into consideration more than just single year student growth. Second, in a formative evaluation process like T-TESS, the timing of student growth data reinforces the ongoing loop between evaluation, feedback, and development. Discussions about a teacher's practice should be ongoing and should evolve over the course of the year.

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Student growth data can be analyzed when available and should be taken into consideration when a teacher modifies or adjust his or her goals and professional development plan at the beginning of a new school year.

6. Will teachers be fired if their students do not demonstrate growth?

    The idea behind T-TESS is to provide teachers with more information and support as they develop as educators, not to create a punitive system. Personnel decisions have always been district decisions and not something TEA promotes as the driving force behind teacher evaluation. That said, districts make personnel decisions based on multiple factors, and the TEA will continue to communicate to districts that single-year student growth data should not be the sole factor in any employment decisions.

E. **T-TESS Pilot Year**

1. What school districts will be participating in the T-TESS pilot program?

    A list of participating districts is available here:
    http://txcc.sedl.org/our_work/tx_educator_evaluation/pilot_districs.php

2. What role do pilot districts play in the development of T-TESS?

    Pilot districts will build on the work done by the teacher steering committee by providing feedback on the evaluation tools, the evaluation process, training, support and identifying what additional concerns need to be addressed prior to statewide rollout of T-TESS. Their feedback will be instrumental in refining the system so that the purpose of T-TESS, supporting teachers in their pursuit of improving their craft, can be realized.

3. What will pilot districts implement during the pilot year?

    For scoring purposes, the observation process and the teacher self-assessment.

    The teacher steering committee that built this system during the spring of 2014 were very focused on the necessity of getting what would be the foundation of the system right – turning evaluation from a compliance driven process to a formative process that includes ongoing dialogue between appraiser and teacher, actionable feedback that provides insight into instruction and professional development decisions, and establishing a process that destigmatizes evaluation and leads to open, collaborative campus environments. In the minds of the teachers on the steering committee and teachers and principals we've talked to throughout the state, this needs to be the central focus of the pilot year.

    That was the driving factor around keeping student growth outside of the scoring process during the pilot year. Pilot year feedback needs to focus on the underpinnings of the system. Student growth is clearly an important part of the system, and one that will require adjustments along the way as the state begins to implement it. The state and districts will get better at alternative growth measures as they move forward. The hope is that all involved will stay focused on the

point of student growth data – to provide another piece of information that will let teachers know what to focus on pedagogically so they can better reach all students moving forward.

4. Will pilot districts implement both PDAS and T-TESS?

No, pilot districts will appraise those teachers who are a part of the pilot on T-TESS only. Pilot districts will need to adopt T-TESS as their locally approved appraisal systems through their school board.

5. How will student growth be a part of the pilot year?

Although the pilot year will not include a student growth measure in the final evaluation score, pilot districts will provide feedback to TEA and ESCs on the quality of guidelines and resources surrounding students growth, additional needs district will have while implementing measures of student growth, and how TEA and ESCs can better support districts as they begin implementation of student growth as a component of an appraisal system.

Value-add data will be provided to pilot districts in August/September, once it becomes available, and will be used by pilot districts for formative purposes.

6. Will there be additional training dates for those who miss the summer training or are late hires?

Yes, TEA and NIET will work to schedule a few additional training dates in various locations throughout the state to train those appraisers that either couldn't attend summer training or were late hires.

F. T-TESS Pilot Year Process
1. How is a teacher's total score calculated?

For the pilot year, a teacher's end-of-year score will include observation results and the teacher self-assessment. Since student growth will not be a part of a teacher's evaluation score, then that 20% won't be included in the final score. The relative weight of the observation results to the teacher self-assessment (70% to 10% or 7 to 1), will remain for the pilot year, making observation results count for 87.5% of the overall score and the teacher self-assessment counting for 12.5% of the overall score. The online system will calculate scores for appraisers.

2. Can only principals and assistant principals appraise teachers under T-TESS?

Although principals and/or assistant principals need to be the ones to conduct end-of-year conferences and determine end-of-year scores, instructional coaches, department chairs and other instructional leaders can be trained and certified as appraisers to assist in conducting walkthroughs and observations.

3. What is discussed in the end-of-year (summative) conference?

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For the pilot year, the end-of-year conference will be a discussion of the teacher's areas of reinforcement and refinement for that school year, the teacher's progress toward accomplishing goals and following through with his or her professional development plan, and a time to establish goals and a professional development plan for the following school year.

Once districts move into year two of T-TESS implementation, the end-of-year conference will include those same discussions, but will also address the teacher's development over time. Goals, development plans and discussions of observation results and student growth should include results and progress over multiple years, as possible, although each evaluation year will be self-contained regarding evaluation scores.

4. What is the timeline for a teacher to request a 2nd observation?

   As under PDAS, a teacher has ten working days after the observation post-conference to request a 2nd observation.

5. What is the timeline for when the end-of-year conference must be held?

   As under PDAS, the end-of-year conference must be held no later than 15 working days before the last day of instruction.

6. When are the end-of-year (summative) scores shared with the teachers?

   End-of-year scores must be shared with teachers within two working days after the end-of-year conference.