

PROJECT 720
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PROJECT 720 OVERVIEW AND UPDATE

Project 720, Year Four and Going Strong!

Since taking office in 2003, Governor Rendell has made educational improvement a singular priority for his administration. Governor Rendell recognizes that today's high school students are tomorrow's innovators, inventors and entrepreneurs, and that Pennsylvania must invest wisely in programs that will inspire young Pennsylvanians to excel beyond high school. In order to be ready for postsecondary education and careers in the global economy of the 21st Century, our students need to be highly skilled, better prepared and more innovative than ever before when they leave high school.

To achieve that vision, a key part of the Governor's plan for improving educational outcomes has been implemented in the form of Project 720, a statewide program of competitive grants to encourage and support high schools' reform initiatives. The 2008-09 school year marks the fourth year of supporting innovation and increased rigor in high schools through Project 720.

Named for the number of days a Pennsylvania student spends in school from 9th through 12th grades, Project 720 ensures that all students have access to *rigorous* college-preparatory courses in core subject areas, additional Advanced Placement courses and smaller learning environments for more intentional and focused teacher-to-student interaction.

All participating grantee school districts agree to implement the core components of Project 720, as follows:

- Creation of a rigorous college and career preparatory program for all students;
- Strengthening the academic infrastructure with a focus on increasing achievement for all students;
- Creation of personalized learning environments with a focus on small learning communities and school counseling;
- Providing teachers with up to date professional development in 21st Century skills, specifically targeting data-driven instructional practices and meeting the needs of diverse learners.

The grant program, administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE), steadily grew between the years 2005-06 through 2007-08. In 2005-06, the legislature allocated \$5.3 million to provide grants to 77 high schools in 67 local education agencies (LEAs). In the 2007-08 school year, approximately 166,000 students in 140 LEAs benefited from Project 720 and its \$11 million budget. At the end of that school year, Cohort 1 – i.e., the group of 67 LEAs that began participating in 2005 – completed their three-year grant commitment and “graduated” from Project 720.

In 2008-09, a total of \$5.3 million has been allocated to sustain grant funding for 75 LEAs in Cohorts 2 and 3. These funds enable the LEAs to continue implementation of planned reforms according to the specific strategies outlined in their grant applications. FY 2008-09 is the last year of funding for Cohort 2 high schools. In FY 2009-10, a total

of \$2.8 million will be used for the third and final year of grant funding for the remaining 43 Cohort 3 LEAs with 45 high schools enrolling approximately 52,000 students.

The 2008-09 Mid-Year Report

At mid-year, it is critical from a project support and progress-monitoring perspective that PDE and its partners and stakeholders look at the areas of greater and lesser participant success in implementing reforms. Just as instruction in schools is expected to be guided by data reflecting student progress, so does PDE inform its plans for providing technical assistance and direct support to grantees by measuring progress made and marking areas where implementation progress has been slower or encountered more substantial barriers and challenges. That is the core purpose of the mid-year data survey of participants.

This **Project 720 Overview and Update** section of this Mid-Year Report sets the context for the implementation progress data presented in the second part of the report, **Project 720 Mid-Year Progress**. This first part describes overall project goals, reviews selected highlights of previously reported accomplishments of participating LEAs, previews PDE's plan for the year-end Project 720 performance report, and finally describes the exciting and innovative Project 720 Credential program that is on the drawing board as the successor to the current high school reform efforts.

The **Project 720 Mid-Year Progress** section then is devoted to presenting data on the progress of the 2008-09 participants in terms of their implementing the 45 specific Action Steps common to all grantees. Action Steps are the operational components of the four Goals described in the section to follow. They are the action template for putting reform into motion on the school level. Each LEA and school determines the specific form their implementation will take.

Goals and Action Steps

All participating grantees commit to achieving the four Project 720 Goals. The four Project 720 goals comprise a comprehensive reform agenda. Grantees are implementing successful strategies to achieve their goals using specific interventions outlined in grant applications. Among other implementation strategies, schools are using funds to incorporate elements such as the following:

- **Using literacy coaches** – i.e., master teachers on staff who provide professional development to other staff and intensive individualized instruction to students;
- **Flexible teaching schedules** to match allotment of instructional time and effort to learning objectives/requirements, to allow for meeting time for staff to integrate plans thematically across curriculum content, and to address individual student needs;
- Restructuring groupings of students and staff along the lines of **small learning communities** and **career academies**;
- **Acquiring and implementing technology as an instructional tool**;
- **Assigning staff to serve as “family advocates”** for a specified set of students to facilitate communication and cooperation;
- **Hiring outside expert consultants** for professional development or to support implementation of new instructional models/curriculums

All Project 720 grantees share a commitment to achieving the four major goals listed below. The goals are operationally defined in terms of 45 Action Steps distributed across the four goal domains – Action Steps are the concrete programmatic reform strategies. (See ANNEX 1 at the end of this report for the complete list of the 45 Action Steps nested within goals.) They are the observable and therefore measurable markers of participants' progress and success in achieving the major goals of their three-year participation.

Over the four-year course of Project 720, emerging best practices, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) standards, and school improvement strategies have changed the educational landscape. In response, PDE has shifted the emphasis of the four goals and redefined a number of the Action Steps, which have also been augmented from the initial 26 to the present 45. Each set of Goals and Action Steps has evolved in ways that are highlighted in commentary under each goal below.

Goal One: Implement a rigorous college and career preparation curriculum for all students.

Goal One has not shifted from its initial focus. It remains the key to reform: LEAs will ensure that every student graduates ready for college and career by providing a rigorous academic pathway for every student along with intensive support structures, staff, and program elements to enable him or her to meet the challenges inherent in setting the academic bar high.

The 14 Action Steps under Goal One now are broken out to specify student subgroups whose specific needs are to be met with instructional modifications and accommodations. This is consistent with emerging best practices such as differentiated instruction as well as with NCLB school and student AYP assessment rubrics.

One notable new Project 720 Action Step under Goal I is that LEAs engage with the **Classrooms for the Future (CFF)** program. CFF is a state-wide high school reform initiative to enhance instructional methods and settings, to enable teachers to use technology as an effective tool for educating students, and to prepare students to enter and successfully compete in the ever-expanding high-tech global marketplace.

In 2008-09 CFF is in its third year of implementation. It is creating academic learning environments adapted to mirror the technology-rich home and community environments in which students are growing up. This is a context that students find engaging – as borne out in observational impact evaluations in participating schools – and that piques their interests. Engagement and motivation are two critical components to boosting student achievement and enhancing the readiness of graduates to meet the demands of postsecondary school and work.

In terms of funding, CFF is providing \$200 million over three years to equip English, math, science and social studies classrooms with enhanced technology, laptop computers and other state-of-the art resources. An additional \$39 million in state and federal funds has been devoted over the same three-year period to providing teachers and school leaders extensive training on how to best harness the power of technology to increase

student achievement and ensure students are ready for college and the high-tech global job market. Therefore, by guiding Project 720 schools to take advantage of CFF, PDE is leveraging the funds from two streams to maximize their impact on instruction and student learning.

Goal Two: Evaluate school district policies and systems to strengthen the academic infrastructure and increase student achievement.

Goal Two has retained the same wording, but the emphasis has been more sharply focused and more finely differentiated in terms of its component Action Steps. The operational emphasis is now more strictly focused on building and redesigning structures that academically support students across all the respective subgroups, both in mastering the regular school curriculum and in pursuing important learning opportunities *outside* the school, such as field-based learning (e.g., internship experiences), CTCs and dual enrollment in college level courses. The first Action Step under Goal Two calls for analyzing how these two spheres of learning interrelate – the clear expectation being that the analysis will lead to greater coordination of curricular content between the two.

In the original Goal Two construct, the strengthening of academic infrastructure encompassed Action Steps specific to professional development for staff. In a significant shift in emphasis, professional-development-related Action Steps have been much expanded and re-allocated to comprise a separate goal dedicated exclusively to continuous staff development to ensure that each school becomes a learning community.

Goal Three: Implement a highly personalized environment that provides consistent advising, mentoring and the development of individual plans to guide the high school experience.

Goal Three initially read, “Design and implement data-informed student advisory services.” Goal Three in its evolved form still does imply the use of student data to develop “learning plans” tailored to each individual. It now expands and more explicitly defines advisory, mentoring and counseling services in operational terms – for example, it adds the specific practice of assigning to each student a “faculty advisor” with whom to maintain an ongoing one-to-one connection. Overall, the elements of Goal Three reflect the growing emphasis and awareness in public education that the active presence of a caring adult, one who knows the student as an individual in all his/her dimensions, is a critical factor for students in staying in school and engaging with the learning process.

Goal Four: Provide continuous professional development to build a learning community for staff and partners.

Goal Four was initially cast as “Provide multiple pathways to prepare students for postsecondary success.” As noted above, Goal Four has been re-dedicated to professional development, and the operational objectives that had been under Goal Four have aptly been reorganized as elements of Goal Two with its substantial focus on alternative learning spheres. The enlarged scope of professional development Action Steps again reflects an emerging understanding: intensive, ongoing professional

development activities can be decisive in building a school community in which everyone is working in concert to achieve learning goals.

The elements of these Action Steps incorporate updated instructional strategies, notably the practice of using a student's performance as a guide to differentiate the forms of instruction used to match the forms to which the student best responds. The professional development counterpart to the above-described **Classrooms for the Future** is the push to ensure that teachers have the skills to integrate the available information and communication technology and audiovisual technology.

In the Site Visit survey of 17 Cohort 1 LEAs conducted by PDE in 2008 and described in the next section below, a striking and consistent observation was the investment made by the schools in professional development. The activities and programs were highly diverse. They ranged from subject-matter-specific instructional strategies to methods of coordinating content across subject areas all the way to school-wide models that organized instruction on themes that encompassed all grades.

Recently Reported Project 720 Accomplishments: Lessons Learned from Site Visits

In the first two years of conducting Project 720, 2005-06 and 2006-07, PDE produced mid-year and year-end reports presenting program evaluation data that reflected the many ways participating schools strengthened their academic programs, improved their instructional methods and supports, and implemented Action Steps through adoption of best practices models. Those reports were based on data supplied by grantees in response to extensive and detailed questionnaires from the PDE project oversight team.

The 2007-08 school year would see the first cohort of 67 Project 720 LEAs arriving at the end of their three-year commitment. Anticipating that, the PDE team made the decision to take a hands-on evaluation approach in lieu of the questionnaire-based reports and conduct a round of intensive site visits at a number of the exiting schools. It turned out that 17 LEAs participated in the site visit activity. The Site Visit program was conceived to probe more deeply and gain a finer-grained look at the on-the-ground experiences, strategies, accomplishments and challenges of the school leaders and staff who carried out the diverse reform initiatives. On-site observations and interviews would offer Project 720's leadership team practice-based insights to apply in supporting the active grantees to help them get the most from their participation.

The 17 site visits were conducted in the spring of 2008. Site visit teams combined PDE staff and outside educational consultants. Teams spent an entire day on each visit and followed a standard agenda and protocols for classroom observations and group interviews with staff and students. The site visit protocols focused on identifying accomplishments, instructional programs and professional development strategies that had been successfully adopted with project funds, and Promising Practices that represented particularly innovative and creative efforts by school districts to create more effective learning environments and meet the Project 720 goals.

Additionally, a critical part of the teams' charge was to gather data on LEAs' arrangements and plans for *sustaining* the reforms implemented under Project 720 in years to come. Schools' real

success in fulfilling the mission of reform requires *both* that schools' project-supported activities have improved educational programs *and* that there are plans, mechanisms and identified funding sources in place to carry on, optimize and deepen the reforms that have been undertaken.

The full PDE **Site Visit Report**, issued in September, 2008, organized information generated by the site visits in extensive tables broken out across seven categories. The review below offers selected summary highlights of that large array of information.

Themes in the Site Visit Findings

Specific reform initiatives observed in the site visits clustered around major themes. The themes relate to raising the level of achievement for all students and doing a better job of preparing young people to meet the challenges of postsecondary education and training and/or of entering 21st Century careers. Themes included:

- **“Safety Net” Programs and services** support and intensify learning and skill development of struggling students who are not achieving proficiency or those at risk of disengagement (e.g., after-school/evening/Saturday tutoring, credit recovery, READ 180)
- **Increasing Rigor** by raising the bar of graduation requirements (e.g., senior project, increased core course credits) and providing increased opportunities for more intellectually and socially challenging educational experiences (e.g., Advanced Placement, Dual Enrollment, internship)
- **Enhanced future-oriented counseling and information services** that offer support and timely information from high school entry through senior year to scaffold students' progress in choosing and following a path toward preparation for adult career and citizenship (e.g., Futures Planning Center, freshman orientation programs)

The reform initiatives observed and discussed across the 17 Project 720 sites visited included certain repeatedly implemented strategies. Instructional leaders and teams brought in tools, programs and models with demonstrated potential to promote the accelerated development and growth of student skills and knowledge. These frequently adopted models and programs are described in **ANNEX 2** of this report, **EVIDENCE-BASED PROGRAMS & MODELS IMPLEMENTED AMONG PROJECT 720 SCHOOLS**.

How Funds Were Applied

The largest expenditures reported were on personnel hired under the grant to staff new programs and on purchased services that were most frequently associated with professional development or consultants. The effective implementation of the above-referenced evidence-based program innovations required that staff be trained to apply them with students in the classroom. Several schools hired staff to operate Futures Planning Centers and others used the money to add Academic Coaches to support faculty in adapting new instructional methods and curriculum and to develop competence in using assessment data to inform instructional planning.

Accomplishments

Most of the reported accomplishments represented implementation of new programs and models and their integration into overall school operations. As noted above, these accomplishments most often were aimed at: enhanced and expanded Safety Net practices and programs to boost

the academic performance of struggling students; increasing academic rigor in the high school curriculum; and/or building futures-oriented counseling and information services and resources. In several cases data was provided on student outcomes (e.g., higher graduation rates). Most of the visited schools reported on numbers of students engaged in Dual Enrollment and the number of Advanced Placement courses offered. Increasing participation in these programs has been pointedly promoted by Project 720 as a way of bolstering academic rigor in the schools.

Professional Development/Curriculum & Program Development

Professional development was by far the area of greatest investment of project funds and efforts across the sites. Training often centered on models and materials for empowering teachers to design and deliver instructional approaches that meet students where they are functioning and raise their skill levels along a systematic, structured pathway. Concretely, this meant providing training and in-house coaching in designing data-driven instruction, in using differentiated instruction for diverse learning styles, and in adopting literacy- and numeracy-development curriculums and programs, e.g., READ 180, Plato, and Penn Literacy Network (PLN).

Some approaches strengthen instruction by creating a cooperative learning culture and community among faculty working together to implement new modalities and practices. Adopt-an-Anchor, PLN, Reading Apprenticeship, Learning Focus, Understanding by Design and the America's Choice Model all encourage, facilitate and essentially require faculty to collaborate in creating a school environment infused with higher aspirations and expectations. (Narrative descriptions of all the referenced programs and models are found in **ANNEX 2**.)

Promising Practices

Exceptionally innovative practices and programs ran the gamut from parent engagement strategies to whole-school restructuring, from recruiting retired professionals as mentors to establishing a Futures Planning Center that provides for students to travel to visit college campuses. One common characteristic among almost all of them is that they were undertaken with a strong and determined commitment from the instructional leadership as well as positive buy-in from the faculty and other staff.

Other Promising Practices were based on engaging community members and resources or applying an existing model in a different way. One district obtained extraordinary support from seven local foundations to sustain and enhance reforms in the years to come. A technical high school partnered with eight postsecondary career and technical training institutions to articulate a dual-enrollment-type arrangement enabling students to learn occupational skills and earn credits.

Sustainability Efforts

Because Project 720 has had such a visible and favorable impact on so many of these schools, most reported that their school boards were expected to support sustainability to the maximum extent practicable under budgetary demands. Many schools are pro-actively developing and leveraging multiple sources of present and future support inside and outside of the educational system itself. One innovative tactic has been to develop a local dedicated fund from which to provide incentives to students to reward efforts to raise their skill levels.

Project 720 Looking Forward -- Coming Attractions

The 2008-09 Year-End Report will look beyond LEAs' reported implementation progress to report the *impacts* of that implementation in concrete terms of the education that is being delivered to students and in terms of measurable student learning outcomes. Specifically, participating LEAs will be asked to compare data from the 2007-08 school year and the 2008-09 school year so that we can measure the impact of Project 720 in terms of the increases on a number of key student outcome indicators. For each of the following student outcomes (these represent a sample of the year-end data elements), PDE will be able to answer the question, "From 2007-08 to 2008-09, how many more..."

- seniors graduated having completed the Project 720 core curriculum as defined by the courses required in the guidelines?
- seniors are receiving scholarships and grants for postsecondary opportunities?
- students took the SAT/ACT?
- students took Advanced Placement courses?
- students scored 3 or higher on at least one Advanced Placement test?
- students participated in internships, service learning, and apprenticeship programs?
- students participated in dual enrollment, broken out by subgroups?
- college credits were earned by students participating in dual enrollment?
- seniors completed at least one world language course?
- 9th graders took and passed Algebra I?
- 9th – 12th grade students had an opportunity to learn about college and career options?
- out-of-school students re-enrolled either in regular classes or alternative schools that offer comparably rigorous coursework?

All of these data elements are directly linked to Project 720 Goals and Action Steps. All of them are potentially powerful indicators of meaningful and positive student outcomes linked to the implementation of the Action Steps. "Potentially" of course implies that the data will reveal whether that potential has been realized for these student cohorts. Given past years' outcomes on many of these indicators, and given the strong commitment of participants to implementing the reform agenda, PDE looks forward with confidence.

Looking Further Forward: A Long-term Legacy, the Project 720 Credential

Building on the success of Project 720 and again guided and urged on by the leadership of Governor Rendell, PDE and the Middle States Commission on Secondary Schools (MSCSS) have agreed to forge a partnership to enable districts in the state to receive an accreditation entitled the **Project 720 Credential**. This credential would be an MSCSS credential which would signify that students who are awarded the Credential are ready for careers and college without the need for remediation. This would be a significant statement for a student to make, given that at present over 30 percent of Pennsylvania high school graduates entering the Pennsylvania higher education system need remedial English and/or math courses before they can succeed in the regular college courses.

The goal of this partnership between PDE and MSCSS is to improve the likelihood of students going to college or entering life-sustaining careers upon graduation from high school. The principles behind the credential designation – elaborated below – would serve as a framework for developing a common understanding of what rigorous high school education looks like. They constitute a pervasive practice of teaching and learning that leads to success for all high school students in Pennsylvania. Although all schools would meet the criteria of awarding the credential, only students who participate in the Project 720 Credential program of study would earn the credential upon their graduation.

It is proposed that the Project 720 Credential would be awarded to students who successfully meet all of the following requirements:

- Score proficient or higher on the PSSA;
- Pass end-of-course assessments in English, Math, Science and Social Studies in grades 11 and 12;
- Score at a certain level on career approved assessments;
- Complete a business internship with a culminating project; and
- Maintain a GPA of 2.75 or higher throughout high school.

There are multiple benefits of this credential for students, school districts and institutions of higher education. A summary of projected benefits is highlighted below.

For **students**, the Project 720 Credential promises to:

- Ensure they have the knowledge and skills needed for today’s 21st Century global economy
- Align postsecondary scholarships for students who attend high schools with the credential
- Increase college-going rates among students of low-income and disadvantaged backgrounds
- Enable students to enter directly into, and succeed in, college-bearing courses, thereby saving students and their parents time and money on costly remediation courses.
- Provide for students meeting the rigorous criteria a stipend and direct admission to college-level coursework (without remediation) at participating postsecondary institutions

For **LEAs**, the Project 720 Credential promises to:

- Provide a process that immediately identifies academic rigor at Pennsylvania’s high schools
- Provide school districts the opportunity to partner with two- and four-year postsecondary education institutions
- Help to narrow the Expectations Gap between school districts and postsecondary education institutions
- Align the Middle States accreditation process to Pennsylvania’s school improvement planning process, Getting Results Gen. 5, thereby eliminating redundancy

- Align the credential to the Pennsylvania Career, Education and Work Standards

For institutions of higher education, the Project 720 Credential promises to:

- Provide an avenue to college for students who would normally not be bound for higher education, thereby increasing post-secondary enrollments
- Bring a diverse pool of students to institutions, thus aiding institutions in meeting federal requirements
- Decrease the time and energy focused on remediation at the postsecondary level
- Decrease the time for students to receive a degree with less remediation needed
- Increase the chance for student success in higher education
- Help institutions determine how and where money would be best allocated for financial assistance to academically prepared students
- Enable institutions to partner with school districts in their communities
- Help narrow the Expectations Gap between school districts and higher education
- Serve as a model for PreK-16 alignment of local, state, and federal school improvement efforts with MSCSS and MSA-CHE accreditation standards
- Ensure a high standard is met for admission
- Improve accessibility to higher education for Pennsylvania students

A draft credential has been developed with proposed assessments, and on February 23, 2009 a Focus Group of college and K–12 educators and Superintendents, and representatives of the Workforce Investment Board and MSCSS met at the Harrisburg offices of PaTTAN (Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network) to discuss the feasibility of the proposed Credential. Every participant left the meeting expressing the consensus view that the Project 720 Credential was the right concept.

PDE staff and Project 720 staff convened in April, 2009 to kick off the effort by drafting an implementation blueprint with a timeline and budget. The next step will be to re-convene the Focus Group, expanded to bring together various stakeholders from around the state and the nation, to discuss the practical issues and intricacies of implementation. Input from practitioners and policy-makers at the high school, college and career levels will be essential to create a Credential and process that will deliver the anticipated benefits.

The Project 720 Credential program will carry forward the learning and efforts of the hundreds of school staff and leaders who have contributed to the success of the project. The program fulfills the long-term vision of Project 720 that reform goals be realized and become integral to high school education in a lasting way – not only for students attending participating schools now and in the future but for students attending all high schools in the state for a number of years to come.

PROJECT 720 MID-YEAR PROGRESS

The 2008-09 grantees responded to PDE's request for data on their progress-to-date in implementing the 45 Action Steps and one "Process Requirement" (i.e., to establish a local advisory team to participate in school improvement efforts). The aggregated responses of 74 LEAs as to their implementation status on each of the Action Steps are represented in the table **IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS REPORTED AT MID-YEAR 2008-09**.

The data in the table are broken out by cohort. The 32 LEAs of Cohort 2 at mid-year of 2008-09 are halfway through their final year of the three-year Project 720 grant period. The 43 Cohort 3 LEAs at the 2008-09 mid-point (with 42 reporting for the present mid-year analysis) have completed one and-a-half grant years and will continue on through the 2009-10 school year.

In the mid-year questionnaire, PDE asked each LEA to characterize its **degree of implementation** for each Action Step according to a four-level scale: **Fully implemented, Partially implemented, Planned for this year but not implemented, Not planned for this year**. The content of each Action Step is fully spelled out in the table for ease of understanding.

In the table, the numbers in each column across any given row show the number of LEAs reporting that respective level of implementation on the Action Step represented in that row. The **percent of LEAs** in each cohort reporting full implementation for each Action Step is displayed to the right of those four columns. These percentages are meant to facilitate comparison between the progress made by Cohort 2 and Cohort 3. The 11th column represents the differential between the percentage of Cohort 2 LEAs at full implementation on each respective Action Step and the percentage of Cohort 3 LEAs at full implementation. Finally, at the end of the table are means for the three percentages across all 45 Action Steps – i.e., the mean percentages of Cohort 2 and Cohort 3 LEAs at full implementation across the 45 Action Steps and the mean difference in percentages between the two cohorts.

PDE recognizes that implementation is incremental, both within and across the three years of project participation. The data presented in the table are a point-in-time snapshot of the progress Cohort 2 and Cohort 3 LEAs have made toward implementing the Project 720 goals. For all the LEAs implementation is by design a work in progress at this point. The data reveal areas where progress toward goals has been greater and several areas where the majority of LEAs are still in the planning stages. PDE will use these profiles to inform technical assistance consultations with participants during the 08-09 and 09-10 school years.

What the numbers reveal

On the broadest scope of interpretation, the mean percentages at the bottom of the table reflect that Cohort 2 has constructively used the additional year of Project 720 funding and support to progress further as a group in implementation progress relative to Cohort 3. In fact, across all the goals and steps, Cohort 2 at a mean 69% has *64% more* of its LEAs in full implementation on average than Cohort 3 at a mean of 42%. This is attributable to Cohort 2 LEAs' having had two and-a-half years of participation as against Cohort 3 LEAs' one and-a-half years. PDE sees this as strong evidence of the broad impact of project participation on making these schools more

effective learning communities. PDE anticipates that the Cohort 3 schools will progress over the next year to reach if not exceed the 69% level as well.

The table reveals the Goal areas and Action Steps where participants have achieved the greatest strides, and these might be considered areas of “High Project Impact”. The table reveals other broad and specific areas that have proved to be more challenging. In some of those challenging areas the impediments may be of a structural nature – i.e., less responsive and more resistant to the efforts of educators and the application of additional resources. In other challenging areas, however, that may be considered “Low Project Impact” areas, targeted technical assistance and the addition of strategic resources could accelerate the progress of implementation.

High Project Impact areas in PDE’s analysis are those in which the Cohort 2 full implementation percentage is in the range of 70% or greater while the differential with Cohort 3 is in the range of 30 percentage points or greater. Applying this definition, by far the most consistent and striking set of High Project Impact Action Steps is under Goal 4, continuous professional development. The Goal 4 Action Steps as a set have the highest percentage at full implementation compared to the other Goal-specific sets – a Cohort 2 mean over 80%, with Cohort 3 at 52%. This trend dovetails with the earlier-noted 2008 site visit evaluation finding that the greatest concentration of project resources was devoted by the visited Cohort 1 schools to professional development.

Other notable High Project Impact areas included:

- All students completing rigorous science and math courses
- District participation in Classrooms for the Future
- Implementing validated instructional programs and tutoring for students achieving below grade level in reading and math
- Innovative dual enrollment opportunities for at-risk youth
- Educational opportunities for out-of-school and other disconnected youth
- Counseling programs developed in collaboration with counselor, parents and mentor
- Counselors work with students who would not normally take pre-college assessments to get them to take the exams
- Faculty advisors meet with students to monitor progress on culminating projects

In Low Project Impact areas, implementation has been markedly less robust among participants in both cohorts. As a set, implementation percentages for Action Steps under Goal Two reflect that as a group they were the most challenging on average. Goal Two is to evaluate school district policies and systems, and content analysis of the Action Steps suggests that some of these undertakings imply specialized expertise (e.g., Analysis of how field-based opportunities are connected to the curriculum and are extensions of the classroom setting...) and/or the assignment of staff and/or the restructuring of administrative functions or reallocation of personnel. The refinement and redesign of Career and Technical Center (CTC) opportunities implies strong coordination with the CTC and shared buy-in, which may or may not be present.

Other notable Low Project Impact areas included:

- All students completing 2 years of a World Language

- Postsecondary institutions that graduates frequently attend have been identified and follow-along data on their success has been collected
- Individual learning plans have been developed for all students
- Develop a structure that ensures multi-year relationships between students and adults

Where expertise and staffing are at issue, PDE has resources to apply in response to these findings. PDE's Project 720 team will look to focus technical assistance and targeted resources on those Low Project Impact areas that promise to be responsive to such intervention.

IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS REPORTED AT MID-YEAR 2008-09

KEY: **FI** = Fully Implemented; **PI** = Partially Implemented; **NI** = Planned for this year but not yet implemented; **NP** = Not planned for this year
%FI = Percentage of Cohort in Full Implementation; **% DIFF** = Difference between %FI for Cohort 2 and %FI for Cohort 3

ACTION STEPS WITHIN GOAL AREAS	COHORT 2 2006-09 (n = 32)					COHORT 3 2007-10 (n = 42)					% DIFF
	FI	PI	NI	NP	%FI	FI	PI	NI	NP	%FI	C2 – C3
Goal One: Implement a rigorous college and career preparation curriculum for all students.											
All students will complete 4 years of college preparatory English	26	5	1	0	81.25	25	11	2	4	59.52	<u>21.73</u>
All students will complete 4 years of math including Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II	21	9	1	1	65.63	10	19	7	6	23.81	<u>41.82</u>
All students will complete 3 years of science including Biology, Chemistry, and Physics or Physical Science	27	0	1	4	84.38	22	11	3	6	52.38	<u>29.00</u>
All students will complete 3 years of Social Studies including Civics, American and World History	31	1	0	0	96.88	35	4	1	2	83.33	<u>13.55</u>
All students will complete 2 years of a World Language	8	10	4	10	25.00	6	9	1	26	14.29	<u>10.71</u>
All courses have been aligned with and meet State standards	29	2	0	1	90.63	33	7	2	0	78.57	<u>12.06</u>
The relationship between grades and test scores has been examined across the school/district to determine equivalency in grades and the range of scores	20	10	2	0	62.50	10	11	6	15	23.81	<u>38.69</u>
Modifications and accommodations are in place enabling English Language Learners to take and successfully complete the college and career preparation curriculum	22	4	0	6	68.75	27	8	0	7	64.29	<u>4.46</u>
Modifications and accommodations are in place enabling poverty-impacted students to take and successfully complete the college and career preparation curriculum	28	3	0	1	87.50	28	8	0	6	66.67	<u>20.83</u>

ACTION STEPS WITHIN GOAL AREAS	COHORT 2 2006-09 (n = 32)					COHORT 3 2007-10 (n = 42)					% DIFF
	FI	PI	NI	NP	%FI	FI	PI	NI	NP	%FI	C2 – C3
Modifications and accommodations are in place enabling students with disabilities to take and successfully complete the college and career preparation curriculum	27	5	0	0	84.38	31	7	0	4	73.81	<u>10.57</u>
Interventions are provided for students who are performing below grade level in order to provide additional support and time in reading, writing and math instruction	25	6	1	0	78.13	19	18	5	0	45.24	<u>32.89</u>
District participation in Classrooms For the Future	26	4	0	2	81.25	11	17	4	10	26.19	<u>55.06</u>
Participation and success (as defined by a score of 3 or higher on the AP test) in Advanced Placement courses has increased	16	9	1	6	50.00	10	15	7	10	23.81	<u>26.19</u>
Postsecondary institutions your students most frequently attend have been identified and data collected on the success of these students i.e., remedial rates in college math and English, and retention through the second year of college	9	10	4	9	28.13	5	7	2	28	11.90	<u>16.23</u>
Goal Two: Evaluate school district policies and systems to strengthen the academic infrastructure and increase student achievement											
Analysis undertaken of how field-based opportunities are connected to the curriculum and are extensions of the classroom setting, i.e. internships, service learning, dual enrollment, and apprenticeships	12	14	2	4	37.50	4	25	4	9	9.52	<u>27.95</u>
Research-validated instructional programs have been identified and implemented for students who have not achieved grade-level standards in reading and mathematics	22	10	0	0	68.75	10	22	7	3	23.81	<u>44.94</u>
Before, during and/or after school tutoring programs are offered to students who are below grade level standards in math and reading	22	8	1	1	68.75	16	17	6	3	38.10	<u>30.65</u>

ACTION STEPS WITHIN GOAL AREAS	COHORT 2 2006-09 (n = 32)					COHORT 3 2007-10 (n = 42)					% DIFF
	FI	PI	NI	NP	%FI	FI	PI	NI	NP	%FI	C2 – C3
Modifications and accommodations are provided for English Language Learners enabling them to successfully complete field-based opportunities connected to the curriculum	22	3	0	7	68.75	24	7	0	11	57.14	<u>11.61</u>
Modifications and accommodations are provided for poverty-impacted students enabling them to successfully complete field-based opportunities connected to the curriculum	24	3	0	5	75.00	19	8	3	12	45.24	<u>29.76</u>
Modifications and accommodations are provided for students with disabilities enabling them to successfully complete field-based opportunities connected to the curriculum	25	3	0	4	78.13	24	8	1	9	57.14	<u>20.99</u>
Senior year has been designed to ensure that all students have met standards and are heading for postsecondary education or careers	24	7	0	1	75.00	21	14	2	5	50.00	<u>25.00</u>
Large high schools have been replaced with smaller schools and/or smaller learning communities (SLCs) ranging from 300-600 students	18	1	11	2	56.25	11	4	10	17	26.19	<u>30.06</u>
Governance structures have been redesigned to move decisions about staffing and budgeting down to the small school or SLC leadership level	15	6	2	9	46.88	11	7	1	23	26.19	<u>20.69</u>
The district's highest need students, particularly 9th and 10th graders, have been targeted, placing them in smaller classes in core subjects, deploying the strongest and most highly qualified teachers to team them, and providing time before, during, and after school for additional instruction	15	13	1	3	46.88	10	22	3	7	23.81	<u>23.07</u>
Opportunities for students at the Career and Technical Centers have been refined and redesigned so that they are academically rigorous and aligned with the goals of Project 720	9	20	1	2	28.13	10	16	4	12	23.81	<u>4.32</u>

ACTION STEPS WITHIN GOAL AREAS	COHORT 2 2006-09 (n = 32)					COHORT 3 2007-10 (n = 42)					% DIFF
	FI	PI	NI	NP	%FI	FI	PI	NI	NP	%FI	C2 – C3
Innovative dual enrollment approaches that provide at-risk youth with opportunities to take college-level work while pursuing their diploma, e.g., Early College and Middle College High Schools have been created for those for whom it is appropriate	21	5	0	6	65.63	14	9	2	17	33.33	<u>32.30</u>
Educational opportunities are offered beyond the school day for out-of-school and other disconnected youth that offer small class sizes and opportunities for accelerated credit acquisition based on demonstrated competencies	23	5	0	4	71.88	9	8	1	24	21.43	<u>49.45</u>
Goal Three: Implement a highly personalized environment that provides consistent advising, mentoring and the development of individual plans to guide the high school experience											
School counseling programs for all students have been developed collaboratively with a counselor, parent(s)/guardian and mentor	22	5	1	4	68.75	11	13	5	13	26.19	<u>42.56</u>
Structured, dedicated time for is set aside for counseling activities for all students.	24	6	0	2	75.00	17	13	2	10	40.48	<u>34.52</u>
Individual learning plans have been developed for all students	9	7	1	15	28.13	8	8	8	18	19.05	<u>9.08</u>
A structure has been developed that ensures multi-year relationships between students and adults that promotes a rise in the number of adult mentors to students	16	10	0	6	50.00	9	12	12	9	21.43	<u>28.57</u>
Counselors work with students who would not normally take assessments such as the PSAT, SAT, ACT and college placement exams in order to get them to take such exams, and help them by interpreting their assessment scores	24	6	0	2	75.00	17	11	3	11	40.48	<u>34.52</u>
Faculty advisors meet regularly with students to monitor progress toward completion of culminating projects	25	5	0	2	78.13	22	9	3	8	52.38	<u>25.75</u>

ACTION STEPS WITHIN GOAL AREAS	COHORT 2 2006-09 (n = 32)					COHORT 3 2007-10 (n = 42)					% DIFF
	FI	PI	NI	NP	%FI	FI	PI	NI	NP	%FI	C2 – C3
Goal Four: Provide continuous professional development to build a learning community for staff and partners											
A professional development calendar has been developed	28	4	0	0	87.50	36	6	0	0	85.71	<u>1.79</u>
An evaluation instrument for professional development activities was developed and utilized following all professional development activities	25	6	0	1	78.13	29	8	0	5	69.05	<u>9.08</u>
An instrument to monitor ongoing professional development strategies was developed and utilized	22	8	0	2	68.75	21	10	2	9	50.00	<u>18.75</u>
Technology was used as an instructional tool for professional development	28	4	0	0	87.50	25	15	0	2	59.52	<u>27.98</u>
Professional development activities were provided to staff that reflected data analysis and data driven instructional practices	28	4	0	0	87.50	30	11	0	1	71.43	<u>16.07</u>
Professional development activities were provided to staff that reflected differentiation using evidence-based instructional strategies to meet the needs of all students	28	4	0	0	87.50	20	17	1	4	47.62	<u>39.88</u>
Professional development activities were provided to staff that reflected 21st Century Skills that provided teachers with the skills necessary to integrate technologies into their daily instructional practices	23	9	0	0	71.88	13	23	3	3	30.95	<u>40.93</u>
Opportunities throughout the year were provided to staff for the transfer and application of newly-acquired skills to classroom practices	27	4	0	1	84.38	20	19	2	1	47.62	<u>36.76</u>
Professional development activities were provided to staff in multiple ways, including mentoring, reflection, study groups, peer coaching and videotape analysis	24	5	1	2	75.00	18	18	0	6	42.86	<u>32.14</u>

ACTION STEPS WITHIN GOAL AREAS	COHORT 2 2006-09 (n = 32)					COHORT 3 2007-10 (n = 42)					% DIFF	
	FI	PI	NI	NP	%FI	FI	PI	NI	NP	%FI	C2 – C3	
Time was provided for sharing professional resources on a regular basis	25	5	0	2	78.13	16	18	1	7	38.10	<u>40.03</u>	
Student performance was used as an anchor for professional development	28	4	0	0	87.50	19	19	1	3	45.24	<u>42.26</u>	
Teachers were trained to use innovative pedagogy, e.g., project-based instruction and other contextual approaches	22	10	0	0	68.75	14	22	2	4	33.33	<u>35.42</u>	
Process Requirements												
Formed a broad-based local work team to serve on your school improvement team that included school administrators, teachers, guidance counselors, support staff, students, parents, local employers, and representatives from postsecondary institutions, community groups, workforce organizations, your Intermediate Unit and your local participating Career and Technical Center	20	10	0	2	62.50	10	22	4	6	23.81	<u>38.69</u>	
Mean of Full Implementation Percentages & Cohort Differences:					<u>68.96</u>						<u>41.93</u>	<u>27.03</u>

ANNEX 1

PROJECT 720 GOALS AND ACTION STEPS

Goal One: Implement a rigorous college and career preparation curriculum for all students.

- All students will complete 4 years of college preparatory English
- All students will complete 4 years of math including Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II
- All students will complete 3 years of science including Biology, Chemistry, and Physics or Physical Science
- All students will complete 3 years of Social Studies including Civics, American and World History
- All students will complete 2 years of a World Language
- All courses have been aligned with and meet State standards
- The relationship between grades and test scores has been examined across the school/district to determine equivalency in grades and the range of scores
- Modifications and accommodations are in place enabling English Language Learners to take and successfully complete the college and career preparation curriculum
- Modifications and accommodations are in place enabling poverty-impacted students to take and successfully complete the college and career preparation curriculum
- Modifications and accommodations are in place enabling students with disabilities to take and successfully complete the college and career preparation curriculum
- Interventions are provided for students who are performing below grade level in order to provide additional support and time in reading, writing and math instruction
- District participation in Classrooms For the Future
- Participation and success (as defined by a score of 3 or higher on the AP test) in Advanced Placement courses has increased
- Postsecondary institutions your students most frequently attend have been identified and data collected on the success of these students i.e., remedial rates in college math and English, and retention through the second year of college

Goal Two: Evaluate school district policies and systems to strengthen the academic infrastructure and increase student achievement.

- Analysis undertaken of how field-based opportunities are connected to the curriculum and are extensions of the classroom setting, i.e. internships, service learning, dual enrollment, and apprenticeships
- Research-validated instructional programs have been identified and implemented for students who have not achieved grade-level standards in reading and mathematics
- Before, during and/or after school tutoring programs are offered to students who are below grade level standards in math and reading

- Modifications and accommodations are provided for English Language Learners enabling them to successfully complete field-based opportunities connected to the curriculum
- Modifications and accommodations are provided for poverty-impacted students enabling them to successfully complete field-based opportunities connected to the curriculum
- Modifications and accommodations are provided for students with disabilities enabling them to successfully complete field-based opportunities connected to the curriculum
- Senior year has been designed to ensure that all students have met standards and are heading for postsecondary education or careers
- Large high schools have been replaced with smaller schools and/or smaller learning communities (SLCs) ranging from 300-600 students
- Governance structures have been redesigned to move decisions about staffing and budgeting down to the small school or SLC leadership level
- The district's highest need students, particularly 9th and 10th graders, have been targeted, placing them in smaller classes in core subjects, deploying the strongest and most highly qualified teachers to team them, and providing time before, during, and after school for additional instruction
- Opportunities for students at the Career and Technical Centers (CTCs) have been refined and redesigned so that they are academically rigorous and aligned with the goals of Project 720
- Innovative dual enrollment approaches that provide at-risk youth with opportunities to take college-level work while pursuing their diploma, e.g., Early College and Middle College High Schools have been created for those for whom it is appropriate
- Educational opportunities are offered beyond the school day for out-of-school and other disconnected youth that offer small class sizes and opportunities for accelerated credit acquisition based on demonstrated competencies

Goal Three: Implement a highly personalized environment that provides consistent advising, mentoring and the development of individual plans to guide the high school experience.

- School counseling programs for all students have been developed collaboratively with a counselor, parent(s)/guardian and mentor
- Structured, dedicated time for is set aside for counseling activities for all students.
- Individual learning plans have been developed for all students
- A structure has been developed that ensures multi-year relationships between students and adults that promotes a rise in the number of adult mentors to students
- Counselors work with students who would not normally take assessments such as the PSAT, SAT, ACT and college placement exams in order to get them to take such exams, and help them by interpreting their assessment scores
- Faculty advisors meet regularly with students to monitor progress toward completion of culminating projects

Goal Four: Provide continuous professional development to build a learning community for staff and partners.

- A professional development calendar has been developed
- An evaluation instrument for professional development activities was developed and utilized following all professional development activities
- An instrument to monitor ongoing professional development strategies was developed and utilized
- Technology was used as an instructional tool for professional development
- Professional development activities were provided to staff that reflected data analysis and data driven instructional practices
- Professional development activities were provided to staff that reflected differentiation using evidence-based instructional strategies to meet the needs of all students
- Professional development activities were provided to staff that reflected 21st Century Skills that provided teachers with the skills necessary to integrate technologies into their daily instructional practices
- Opportunities throughout the year were provided to staff for the transfer and application of newly-acquired skills to classroom practices
- Professional development activities were provided to staff in multiple ways, including mentoring, reflection, study groups, peer coaching and videotape analysis
- Time was provided for sharing professional resources on a regular basis
- Student performance was used as an anchor for professional development
- Teachers were trained to use innovative pedagogy, e.g., project-based instruction and other contextual approaches

ANNEX 2

EVIDENCE-BASED PROGRAMS & MODELS IMPLEMENTED AMONG PROJECT 720 SCHOOLS

ACADEMIC COACHES

Academic Coaching, also known as Literacy Coaching/Numeracy Coaching, is one model of professional development that has shown potential to improve the knowledge, skill, and practice of teachers, thus enhancing student achievement. It is a key component of many initiatives across Pennsylvania. These initiatives focus on reading, mathematics, and technology integration. At the secondary level, Project 720 supports the implementation of a coaching model as part of the overall high school reform project to improve instruction and heighten student performance in reading and mathematics. Further supporting and leveraging Project 720, the **Pennsylvania High School Math and Literacy Coaching Initiative** provides qualifying high schools with one math and one literacy coach for every 600 students. Funded through a \$31 million Annenberg Grant, this three-year initiative provides teachers, instructional coaches, and school leadership teams with staff development to improve academic literacy and enhance coaching skills. The intent is that high schools develop into collaborative learning communities whose culture promotes a collective responsibility to improve student achievement.

ADOPT-AN-ANCHOR INITIATIVE

Adopt-an-Anchor is one of many tools that the PDE has developed to help schools and districts better understand the Assessment System and how it links to quality teaching and learning. Adopt-an-Anchor is designed specifically to support teachers and leaders in schools and districts in making solid decisions about using the Pennsylvania Assessment Anchors to drive high-quality, aligned instruction across the curriculum. Schools can: compare their profile to PSSA proficiency, looking in particular for areas of high need and low adoption; compare their profile to the PSSA test blueprint to see how areas of school-wide emphasis compare with state testing emphasis; within content areas, take a more fine-grained look at adopting anchors by specific course to see if and how they should best be distributed through the department; use the short list of adopted anchors as a tool for selecting materials.

AMERICA'S CHOICE

From researching the highest performing education systems in the world, America's Choice has created internationally-benchmarked solutions tailored to American schools. Comprehensive designs and instructional systems for mathematics and literacy have been implemented in more than a thousand schools across the country. Among their programs: mathematics and literacy interventions, school design for at-risk schools, English Language Learners programs, coaching and other professional development.

DISTINGUISHED EDUCATORS (DE)

This initiative was developed by the PA Department of Education to assign experienced educators (many are retired administrators), using a variety of strategies, to assist struggling districts in planning and implementing effective school reform. Some districts may be required to work with DEs for corrective action. DEs may serve as coaches or mentors for administrators, drive prescriptive district-level solutions to improve school improvement, or link with school improvement activities across the state.

GRADUAL RELEASE OF RESPONSIBILITY

Pearson and Gallagher (1983) introduced a scaffolding model of explicit reading instruction, using four stages: modeling/explanation of strategy; guided practice; independent practice with feedback; application in real reading situations.

PENN LITERACY NETWORK (PLN)

The Penn Literacy Network (PLN) is a comprehensive professional development/curricular enhancement program based in the Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania. PLN has provided on-site credit-bearing or non-credit bearing seminars, workshops, and coaching programs to more than 22,000 Pre K-12 educators across the United States and in Ireland in the areas of reading, writing, mathematics, science, and technology since 1981.

READ 180

READ 180 is comprehensive reading intervention program for struggling readers in grades 4-12. Using high-interest interactive software, with video segments, with direct teacher instruction, modeled and independent reading, READ 180 was based on research conducted at Vanderbilt University, and is published by Scholastic Education. READ 180 Enterprise Edition (EE) has been the subject of numerous scientifically based research evaluations, including quasi-experimental, correlational, and descriptive studies. The studies report reading gains for various populations and subgroups of students, including middle and high school students, English language learners, students in special education, and Native Americans. Results from third-party evaluations show that struggling readers in READ 180 EE show progress, often substantial, in learning to read. Impressive gains are reflected on students' reading scores on standardized tests, such as the Stanford Achievement Test-9 (SAT-9), TerraNova, and the Scholastic Reading Inventory.

READING APPRENTICESHIP

Reading Apprenticeship is an approach to secondary literacy instruction, to help young people become more powerful readers. With a repertoire of research-based reading strategies, it draws on what teachers know and do as discipline-based readers, and on adolescents' unique strengths as learners. It makes the reading processes, motivations, strategies, knowledge and understandings visible to the teacher and to the students. The dimensions of Reading Apprenticeship, woven into subject-area teaching through "metacognitive conversations" include: Social, Personal, Cognitive and Knowledge-

Building. This framework and supporting materials were developed by the Strategic Literacy Initiative, a collaborative research, development, and service organization based in San Francisco at WestEd (offices in several states at Washington, DC). It is supported by numerous foundations, school districts and school reform networks.

4SIGHT PDE MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEM (MIS)

4Sight assessments are one-hour tests that mimic the formats, coverage, look, and feel of many state assessments. In PA, overall scores predict students' scores on the PSSA. 4Sight produces scores on key sub-skills designed around state standards, for example: interpreting text, drawing conclusions, geometry. Scores provide focus for professional development efforts to ensure student success. The Success for All Foundation developed 4Sight. It is dedicated to the development, evaluation, and dissemination of proven reform models for preschool, elementary, and middle schools, especially those serving many children placed at risk. As of 2005, the Foundation served about 1,300 schools in 46 states, and assisted related projects in five other countries. Programs in elementary reading, writing, math, preschool, and middle school are in use. The quantity and quality of research on Success for All, and the positive outcomes found in almost all studies by over 50 investigators in 18 different research institutions worldwide, clearly establish that Success for All is highly effective in increasing student reading.

STUDY ISLAND

Study Island is a leading provider of web-based state assessment preparation programs and standards-based learning programs. In PA, the program is organized into topics covering all of the Pennsylvania Assessment Anchors tested on the PSSA in grades 2 through 8, 9/10, and 11. Academic material is organized in topics that contain a lesson and assessment questions with explanations. For each subject (math, reading), students must take a pre-test, complete content groups covering all the Assessment Anchors, and pass a post-test in order to complete the program. Teachers have access to a private page where they can view usage statistics and results for each student, a group of students, and the school as a whole. Teachers can also compare their students' performance against other students in Pennsylvania. Study Island is used by over six million students in over 15,000 schools. According to their 2007-2008 teacher survey: 97 % say it helped increase test scores, 94% say their students enjoy using it, and 96 % plan on renewing it.

UNDERSTANDING BY DESIGN (UBD)

UbD is a curriculum design model, using a backward planning design, emphasizing teaching for student understanding. Three stages are: Identify desired results; Determine acceptable evidence; Plan learning experiences and instruction (McTighe and Wiggins, 2004). The conceptual base for UbD instruction and assessment practices is guided by both theoretical research in cognitive psychology and results of student achievement. A wide range of schools, districts, regional service agencies, universities, and other educational organizations nationwide use UbD in their work. Among them are: Intel's Teach for the Future Program, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, California State Leadership Academy, Corporation for Public Broadcasting, Texas Social Studies Center.