

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) Texas High Performance Schools Consortium

Updated June 12, 2012

Eligibility

Question 1.1: Is there an eligibility list for participation in this program?

No, there is not an eligibility list. Eligibility criteria are outlined in the “Eligibility for Participation” section of the Program Guidelines.

Question 1.2: Can districts submit joint applications with other districts?

No. Each eligible district wishing to participate must submit its own application.

Question 1.3: Can an eligible district apply if some of its campuses are ineligible?

In its application, a district must designate which campuses will participate in the consortium, should the district be selected. An applicant district is not required to include all campuses and may include only campuses that meet the outlined eligibility requirements.

Question 1.4: Can you clarify the distinction between a district applying, as opposed to one campus applying with respect to the difference in application fee and responsibilities?

Districts may apply on behalf of one or more of their eligible campuses. Campuses are not eligible to apply independently. The application fee is \$500 for each district applicant, regardless of the number of participating campuses.

Question 1.5: May we use 2009-2010 or 2010-2011 Accountability data to determine eligibility?

Legislation and rule require applicants to use the most recent state academic accountability rating to determine eligibility. Applicants this cycle must use ratings under the 2010-2011 State Accountability System.

Expectations of Participating Districts

Question 2.1: What are the requirements and expectations of the selected districts?

The requirements and expectations of selected districts are outlined in the Program Guidelines for the Request for Application (RFA) to Participate in the Texas High Performance Schools Consortium, as well as in Texas Education Code (TEC) §7.0561 and Texas Administrative Code §102.1201. Generally-speaking, selected districts are expected to attend Consortium meetings and collaborate on the development and subsequent implementation of a legislative proposal for submission to the Governor and legislature.

Question 2.2: What is the project period?

Applicant districts are expected, at a minimum, to participate in the Consortium from the date of district selection, scheduled for August 2012, through the second statutory reporting deadline (December 2014). The legislation authorizing the Consortium expires in January 2018.

Question 2.3: Will districts need to reapply each year, and, if so, may we modify the campuses participating at reapplication?

Currently, there are no plans for requiring districts to reapply each year. Requests to change participating campuses will be subject to commissioner approval and will be limited by statutory requirements to maintain diverse representation.

Question 2.4: Will each district implement its own separate accountability plan, or will all districts implement the same one?

The purpose of the Consortium is to bring together a group of high-performing schools to collaborate on the design of a next-generation accountability plan. Districts will not be implementing separate plans.

Question 2.5: You mention under the digital learning category that courses should be offered through the Texas Virtual School Network. Must the Consortium recommend the Texas Virtual School Network be the provider, or can we leave it to individual schools to select a provider?

Specific Consortium recommendations will be determined by participating districts; however, the Texas Virtual School Network is specifically mentioned in the Consortium's authorizing legislation. It is assumed that the Consortium will leverage existing state-owned resources in its recommendations.

Question 2.6: How often will district representatives meet as a part of the Consortium work? How long will each meeting be? How many people will a district be expected to send to each meeting?

Details regarding meeting structure, frequency, and length will be determined as a part of the Consortium's operating procedures to be developed by the commissioner with the input of districts selected to participate in the Consortium.

Question 2.7: What work will district representatives be expected to do between meetings?

Action items will be created and assigned to participating districts by the Consortium in collaboration with agency leadership.

Question 2.8: Will all Consortium participants be required to implement the same objectives, strategies, and actions and propose the same waivers, or will participating districts be allowed some independence with regard to their individual Consortium-related implementation activities?

See Question 2.4.

Application Requirements

Question 3.1: Can you provide clarification on the requirement that a school district or its participating campus(es) have received either national, statewide, or regional public

acknowledgement? What are acceptable acknowledgements? Is there a limitation on the award date of the public recognition?

The requirement for national, state, or regional public acknowledgement should conform to the following specifications:

- Be awarded by an organization that relies on expertise in the education field
- Reflect district or campus accomplishments for academic excellence or innovative practices in the consortium principles

There is no comprehensive list of such awards or public acknowledgements. This requirement was written broadly in order to allow a district to demonstrate its experience and expertise with the work to be performed by the consortium; however, examples of such awards or public acknowledgements may include, **but are not limited to**:

- Broad Prize
 - Awarded each year to honor urban school districts that demonstrate the greatest overall performance and improvement in student achievement that reduces achievement gaps among low-income and minority students
- Texas Business and Education Coalition Honor Roll Middle and High Schools
 - TBEC Honor Roll schools must have performed at a high level of achievement for at least three consecutive years on all subjects tested
- Sylva Charp Award for District Innovation in Technology
 - International Society for Technology in Education recognizes a school district nationwide that has shown effectiveness and innovation in the application of technology district-wide
- Magma award by American School Journal
 - The Magma Awards recognize districts across the country for outstanding programs that advance student learning and encourage community involvement in schools
- Quality Texas Foundation's Award for Performance Excellence
 - Using the Malcolm Baldrige criteria for excellence in education, the Quality Texas Foundation reviews and evaluates Texas school districts, at their request, to identify performance excellence
- Blue Ribbon School designation

There is no limitation on the award date for any public recognition the applicant wishes to include. However, acknowledgements reflecting recent achievements are stronger evidence of the applicant's suitability for participation in the consortium.

Question 3.2: Are curricular goals limited to the core content areas?

Neither legislation nor rule limits curricular goals to the core content areas.

Question 3.3: Are the learning outcomes for the curricular goals to be based on the high priority learning standards a district has worked on, or are they to be based on the next generation learning standards described in section 2a of the program guidelines?

Curricular goals recommended by the applicant to be considered for inclusion in Consortium's legislative proposal should be grounded in research and based on the applicant's experience

and outcomes. Curricular goals may address both high priority learning standards as well as next-generation learning standards.

Question 3.4: Does the inclusion of multiple campuses reduce an applicant's competitiveness? Could applicants be asked to revisit the list of participating campuses later in the selection process?

District applications will be evaluated using the selection criteria described in the program guidelines. The campuses selected should enhance the proposal and support the district's participation plan. Applications will be reviewed on their merit, and the applicant should submit the highest quality proposal possible including campuses the applicant feels are best suited to inform Consortium work and implement its recommendations.

However, because the overall Consortium's composition must be representative of various aspects of the Texas education system and may not exceed five percent of the total student enrollment, the commissioner may request that specific participating districts alter their list of participating schools during or after selection to satisfy a specific aspect of the Consortium composition requirements. The applicant should not, however, rely on agency guidance during the participant selection process.

Question 3.5: Please clarify the intent and expectations of the section of the application titled "Curricular Goals." How does this section differ from the section addressing High Priority Learning Standards for the purposes of the Consortium? Please provide clarification regarding the expectation that curricular goals be detailed when learning standards are not expected to be detailed in other portions of the application.

Each applicant district is advised to address both curricular goals and high-priority learning standards in sufficient detail to adequately communicate to reviewers its dedication to innovation and implementation of Consortium principles. It is recommended that applicants review the Selection Criteria and consider the stated weight of each section and selected components when structuring the narrative.

Question 3.6: Can you provide further clarification of what constitutes proof of financial stability? Will a current audit letter be considered sufficient documentation for public school districts?

All public school districts and open-enrollment charter schools must be in compliance with submitting the required annual audit for the immediate prior fiscal year to TEA in the time and manner requested by TEA, and the audit must be determined by the TEA Division of Financial Audits to be in compliance with the applicable audit standards. All applicants must be deemed by TEA to be financially stable at the initial time of preliminary selection. The TEA Division of Financial Audits determines financial stability based on the required annual audit for the immediate prior fiscal year.

Audit requirements are outlined in [Texas Education Code \(TEC\) §109.41](#).

Question 3.7: How will the proposed action plan (6-9 research-based recommendations and detailed curricular goals) be utilized by Consortium participants?

Submitted action plans providing recommendations based in research and district experience will form the basis for Consortium discussions and ultimately will be used to inform development of the Consortium's legislative proposal.

Question 3.8: How far back does the award timeline go?

See Question 3.1.

Question 3.9: Is it permissible in the Letter of Commitment to add pages for additional participating campus principal signatures?

Yes.

Question 3.10: Would it be permissible to incorporate single-spaced tables into the required project narrative, rather than double-spaced tables?

Yes.

Question 3.11: Additional examples of public acknowledgements were submitted with a request to indicate if those examples would be acceptable.

The quality and strength of public acknowledgements will vary widely. The most helpful guidance TEA can provide is that districts should ensure that the public acknowledgement(s) included in their application meets the criteria listed in the application guidelines (see Question 3.1) and that the level of difficulty or competitiveness involved is described in the application.

Exemptions, including Assessment and Accountability

Question 4.1: Please clarify the request and receipt of assessment and accountability waivers for Consortium participants.

Each applicant's plan must include a description of any waiver(s) of existing prohibitions, requirements, or restrictions that the district believes is needed in order to successfully implement innovative practices that address those consortium principles designed to form the basis for a next-generation assessment and accountability system. The Consortium will consider these waiver recommendations for inclusion in the legislative proposal to be presented to the legislature in December 2012.

Question 4.2: If a district or campus is selected for participation in the Consortium, would they continue to administer STAAR and be part of the current accountability system?

Districts will continue to administer STAAR and be a part of the current accountability system while the Consortium develops its legislative proposal. The type of waivers recommended for implementation will depend upon the nature of the legislative proposal. The legislative proposal is then subject to approval.

Question 4.3: Will members of the Consortium be able to opt out of the state accountability system and opt into the system created by the Consortium? If so, for how long can they opt into the newly-developed alternative system?

The purpose of the Consortium is to make recommendations to the commissioner and to the legislature regarding next-generation and accountability systems and potential waivers that would be required in order to implement those systems. Participation in an assessment or accountability system different from the one currently mandated in statute depends upon the approval of the legislative proposal and the accompanying waivers.

Question 4.4: Will districts not participating in the Consortium be able to opt out of the standard state accountability system and opt into the system created by the Consortium?

See Question 4.3.

Question 4.5: Will participating districts be accountable for following determined accountability measures in lieu of state accountability measures?

See Question 4.3.

Question 4.6: If a district is approved to join the Consortium, what is the process for monitoring the accountability piece for the district's future plans for implementation of the various principles?

Strategies for monitoring accountability will be addressed in the Consortium's legislative proposal.

Question 4.7: Can you clarify whether the waivers referred to in the RFA are for (a) participating districts to possibly be granted as part of their participation in the Consortium, (b) only for the Consortium and/or the commissioner to propose to the legislature for changes in statutes and regulations and/or to the U.S. Department of Education, or (c) both?

The use of waivers recommended for implementation will depend upon the nature of the legislative proposal. The Consortium's legislative proposal will be submitted for approval.

Question 4.8: While the Consortium districts are implementing their accountability plan, will the participating schools be required to participate in the state accountability process?

Districts and campuses will continue to participate in the standard accountability system, pending approval of the legislative proposal. See Question 4.3.

Funding

Question 5.1: Will selected districts receive grant funding for participating in the Consortium?

The statute creating the Consortium was not designed to provide funding to districts. However, the statute does allow districts to accept gifts, grants, or donations from any source, including a private or public entity.

Question 5.2: Will smaller districts be required to pay the same amount of fees to participate as larger districts?

All districts must pay the \$500 application fee to submit an application. In addition, districts that are selected to participate in the consortium will be required to pay a participation fee of from \$2,500 to \$10,000 (minus the application fee) depending upon size factors such as the number of campuses participating.

Question 5.3: What is the agency's Tax ID number?

TEA is currently developing a response to this question for those districts whose business office requires that information for submission of the application fee. Additional details will be posted on the Consortium website.