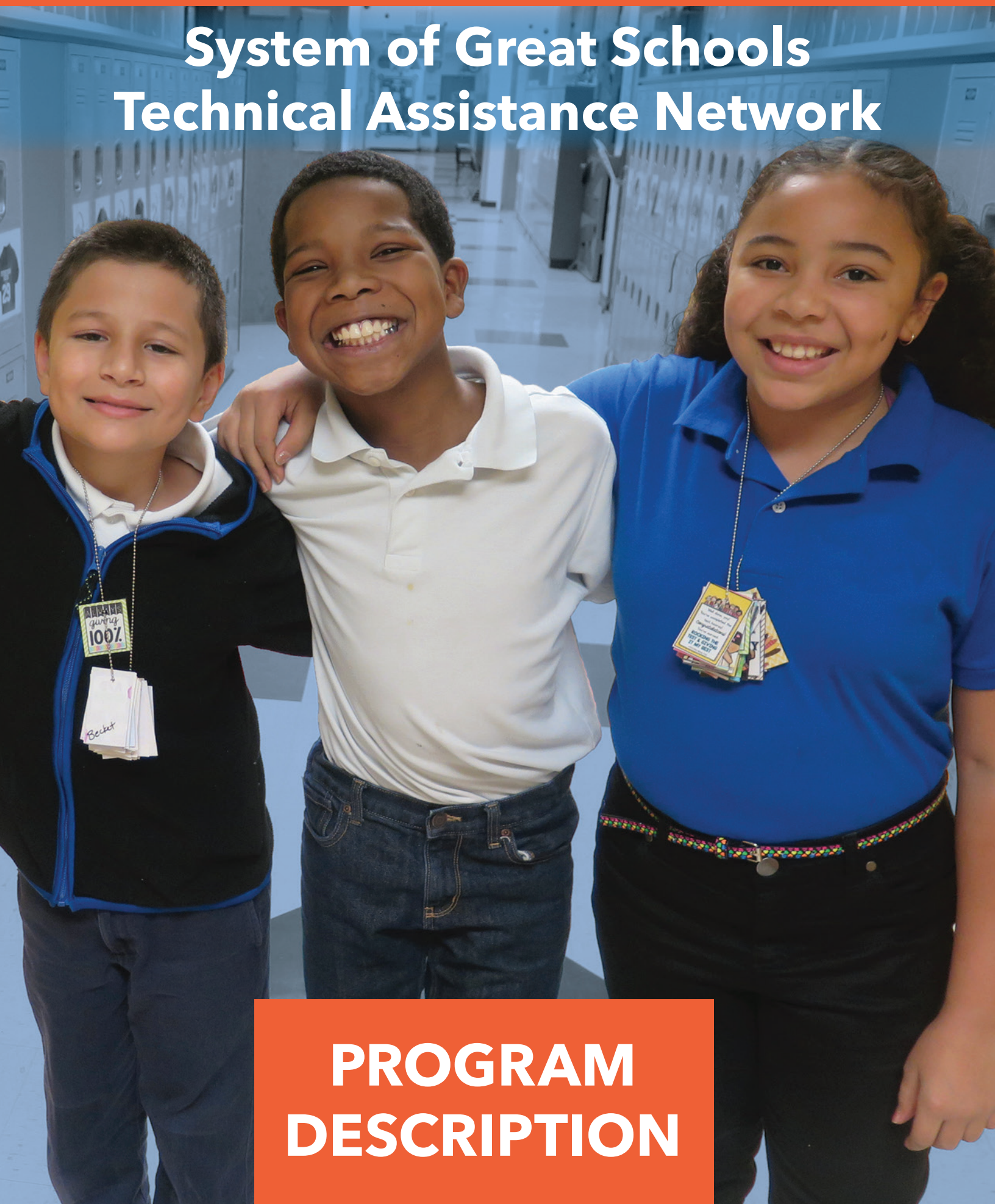
Texas Education Agency

System of Great Schools Technical Assistance Network



PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Texas Education Agency

Commissioner Mike Morath

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February 23, 2017

Dear Superintendent:

Throughout my first year, I've been witness to some incredible district efforts to provide the highest quality educational opportunities for our students. As part of TEA's strategic planning process, we have attempted to identify how we can modify our operations to more effectively support and empower districts and campuses across Texas.

As a result, TEA is launching two new initiatives that may be of interest to some districts:

A System of Great Schools

This spring, TEA will launch the System of Great Schools (SGS) Technical Assistance Network. This is an optional technical support program, that is designed with a cohort model allowing interested districts to apply and participate.

Districts that join the network will be provided with intensive system-level supports intended to:

	**1. Support** educators to design and lead high-quality schools;
	**2. Empower** families with high-quality options and informed choices; and
	**3. Focus** central office on high leverage oversight, innovation, and support.

Districts that pursue the SGS strategy will design and implement a continuous improvement process that annually evaluates school quality, parent demand, and neighborhood needs to take strategic actions to improve schools and provide parents with the programs they desire. A detailed description and application are attached to this memorandum.

Transforming Schools and Creating New Options

Additionally, TEA will develop and manage new grant programs. These competitive grants will support school districts to take actions to provide students in persistently low-performing schools with better options, whether through redesigning existing schools, replicating existing schools that serve students well, or supporting groups of schools with intensive supports. These efforts must provide the school leadership teams with the operational flexibility necessary to succeed.

The goal, as always, is to provide educational environments that maximize student outcomes. Expect more details in the future, as these grant opportunities become available.

It's important to note that while we want to establish interest and awareness, these programs may not be appropriate for every district at this time. Please review the attached information and, if you have any questions, contact the Division of System Support and Innovation at DSSI@tea.texas.gov.

Sincerely,

Mike Morath
Commissioner of Education

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System of Great Schools Technical Assistance Network
PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Texas Education Agency's Division of System Support and Innovation (DSSI) is launching a technical assistance network to support school districts across Texas that are interested in exploring and pursuing the System of Great Schools strategy for system-wide reform.

What is the System of Great Schools strategy?

The System of Great Schools (SGS) strategy is a locally designed system level innovation and problem solving approach that seeks to:

1. **Support** educators to design and lead high-quality schools;
2. **Empower** families with high-quality options and informed choices; and
3. **Focus** central office on high leverage oversight, innovation, and support activities.

Districts that pursue the SGS strategy will design and implement a continuous improvement process that annually evaluates school quality, parent demand, and neighborhood needs to take strategic action to both improve schools and provide parents with the schools and programs they desire. The goal of the SGS strategy is to ensure that every student has access to a high-quality learning environment.





What are the System of Great Schools levers of change?

Executing the SGS strategy requires districts to build new or strengthen existing capacities in the following six levers of change:

Establish and Administer

1 Establish and administer portfolio review and planning processes;

Develop and Expand

2 Develop and expand great schooling options;

Help

3 Help families understand and navigate their school and program choices;

Build

4 Build an ecosystem of effective school support and talent providers;

Reimagine

5 Reimagine central services to support school based decision making; and

Align and Engage

6 Align civic partners and engage the community.

It is not expected that network districts will pursue all SGS levers. We recognize that local context matters and expect that districts pursuing SGS related work will likely engage the levers in varying ways and at different times.

What potential activities exist within each SGS lever?

The list below describes the six System of Great Schools levers of change. These listed activities should be used as a guide to begin the discussion around implementing the System of Great Schools strategy. Not all activities will be pursued in a district and the table does not represent an exhaustive list of all potential activities.

1 Establish and administer portfolio review and planning processes

The district analyzes data to monitor school performance, neighborhood needs, and parent demand to determine strategic actions to be taken at each campus.

- Establish a local school performance framework
- Draft a local school performance framework action policy
- Enact annual/regular school portfolio review and planning processes
- Develop office/capacity dedicated to conducting portfolio review and planning processes

2 Develop and expand great schooling options

The district builds the capacity to create new schools and programs, and replicates and expands existing successful programs.

- Draft district authorizing policies
- Establish district authorizing practices (RFP, application decision-making, contracting, etc.)
- Codify and manage processes to create and grow schools and programs
- Provide strategic school design supports to empowered school leaders
- Develop office/capacity dedicated to creating and growing schools and programs

3 Help families understand and navigate their school and program choices

The district best informs parents of the school and program options available with a clear process to access them.

- Build and launch "school chooser" tools & supports (websites, navigators, expos, etc.)
- Design and implement a unified enrollment system
- Develop office/capacity to support enrollment, enrollment analytics, and choice activities

4 Build an ecosystem of effective school support and talent providers

The district analyzes school level talent and school improvement needs and actively cultivates partnerships to address those needs.

- Develop processes to understand school support needs
- Design and implement school support and improvement partnerships
- Develop processes to understand school level talent needs
- Design and implement talent pipeline partnerships

5 Reimagine central services to support school-based decision making

The district regularly evaluates the design of central office, ensuring that maximum resources are distributed to schools and that school leaders are supported to utilize those resources well.

- Execute a central office organization designed to serve a diverse set of schools
- Establish and define school autonomy provisions and timelines (people, time, money, program)
- Design and implement student based budgeting processes and supports
- Create central services pricing menus and build processes for schools to purchase services

6 Align civic partners and engage the community

The district communicates effectively with internal and external stakeholders and maintains an engagement strategy with civic, nonprofit, business, and philanthropic partners.

- Establish an internal and external communications strategy
- Design community engagement/input strategies
- Launch a citywide philanthropic organization dedicated to SGS and related activities (new school creation, talent pipelines, etc.)
- Develop office/capacity dedicated to partnering with external stakeholders

What is the System of Great Schools Technical Assistance Network?

The SGS Technical Assistance Network will provide superintendents and district leaders with customized consulting support and opportunities to learn from each other and from national experts on key components of the SGS strategy. Districts will receive 24 months of support, including, but not limited to, the following services:

Consultative Support

- Network members will receive an "Executive Advisor" with experience in SGS implementation to support the LEA in:
  - > Conducting a SGS district readiness assessment to analyze strengths and opportunities
  - > Drafting a SGS Implementation roadmap
  - > Providing on-going support and advice
- TEA will identify a pool of vetted technical assistance providers who can support implementation of specific SGS levers

Professional Learning Community

- Network members will build community and gain knowledge through:
  - > System of Great Schools Summits
  - > Working groups for LEAs on targeted topics of interest
  - > Trainings, webinars, and facilitated collaboration activities to learn from fellow SGS Network members, national experts, and leaders from other LEAs both inside and outside of Texas
  - > Access to resources, case studies, toolkits and implementation guides for each SGS lever

Participation in the network will be dependent upon an application process.



How will TEA support districts that join the SGS Network?

The SGS action process for member districts begins with building a strong understanding of the SGS strategy, followed by analyzing the local context, capacity, and structure within the district. Once there is a strong understanding of what is currently taking place, we will move districts towards developing an implementation roadmap and detailed project work plans. Districts will begin to implement plans and DSSI will work with districts to ensure that there is a sustainment plan in place before network membership ends.



1 Understand the SGS strategy and the school as primary unit of change with the central office as a support system for schools

2 Analyze the district's current system structure, capacity, and technical ability

3 Develop a SGS implementation roadmap with a focus on building local capacity to empower families, educators, and community stakeholders

4 Implement SGS plans or components of those plans

5 Sustain the changes or new systems coming out of the SGS plans

What is the role of the SGS executive advisor?

Each SGS member will be matched with a SGS executive advisor. These executive advisors will be experts who have attempted to implement SGS-related activites/ programs in their past work experience. The executive advisors will provide the superintendent and his/her leadership team with:

Diagnostic Support

Support the SGS district readiness process in collaboration with TEA and a third-party vendor: 2-3 days on the ground conducting interviews, focus groups, and data collection

Summit Facilitation

Support the facilitation of kick-off summit for districts that become members of the SGS network. Advisors will facilitate other meetings throughout the year

Implementation Roadmap

Collaborate closely with assigned LEA(s) to develop a local SGS implementation roadmap. This may include:

- facilitating work sessions;
- developing drafts;
- making revisions; and
- finalizing the roadmap.

Expert Advice

Maintain regular contact with assigned LEA(s) by advising superintendents and/or cabinet level officials in support of their SGS related priorities and activities.

PLC Support

Support the development of the SGS professional learning community (PLC) by facilitating interactions between network members



What is the System of Great Schools District Readiness Assessment?

The DSSI will use a SGS District Readiness Assessment to better understand the district's current strengths and opportunities against the SGS rubric. This will allow our team and the district to learn more about the local context and to shape supports and engagement in the most valuable way. At the end of the process, each district will receive a final report that identifies recommendations on leveraging current strengths and addressing opportunities in readiness. The assessment will also allow us to best match districts with partners and create more shared learning experiences. The process includes surveys, interviews, and focus groups of district leaders, central office staff, and school leaders.

What is the SGS implementation roadmap?

Following the completion of the SGS District Readiness Assessment, the executive advisor will work in close collaboration with the Superintendent and his/her leadership team to develop a SGS implementation roadmap. The roadmap will highlight local context and summarize the major SGS initiatives to be undertaken and in what order. A completed roadmap will likely include:

- initiative prioritization
- initiative owners
- initiative goals and objectives
- timelines
- important milestones and deliverables
- key interdependencies between initiatives
- risk mitigation strategies.

The roadmap will be a guiding document that the district leadership team will come back to as they build project work plans to implement the SGS initiatives.

What is the role of the SGS technical assistance advisor?

Whereas executive advisors will provide cabinet level strategic counsel and support for overall SGS planning, the technical assistance advisors will support the planning, design, and implementation of specific programs and activities outlined within the SGS implementation roadmap. The role requirements of the technical assistance advisor include, but are not limited to the following:

Planning and Implementation

Collaborate closely with assigned LEA(s) and their executive advisor to create detailed project work plans for specific programs and/or activities as outlined in their SGS implementation roadmap.

This may include:

- facilitating work sessions;
- creating drafts;
- making revisions; and
- finalizing the plans.

Support the district in implementing components, or all, of the project work plans

Staffing Support

Build capacity of LEA staff to successfully complete implementation (when necessary), manage the program/activity, and sustain changes

Expert Advice

Maintain regular contact with assigned LEA(s) and their matched EA to support the priorities related to their membership in the SGS network






What commitments does TEA make to member districts?

TEA ensures that members of SGS Cohort 1 will:

- Be supported throughout all phases of their work
- Receive pertinent information in a timely manner
- Be matched with an appropriate executive advisor
- Receive technical support from vetted advisors with experience in that specific work
- Have regular access to TEA staff and leadership
- Be active participants in a professional learning community of districts and national experts

What commitments are expected of Cohort 1 member districts?

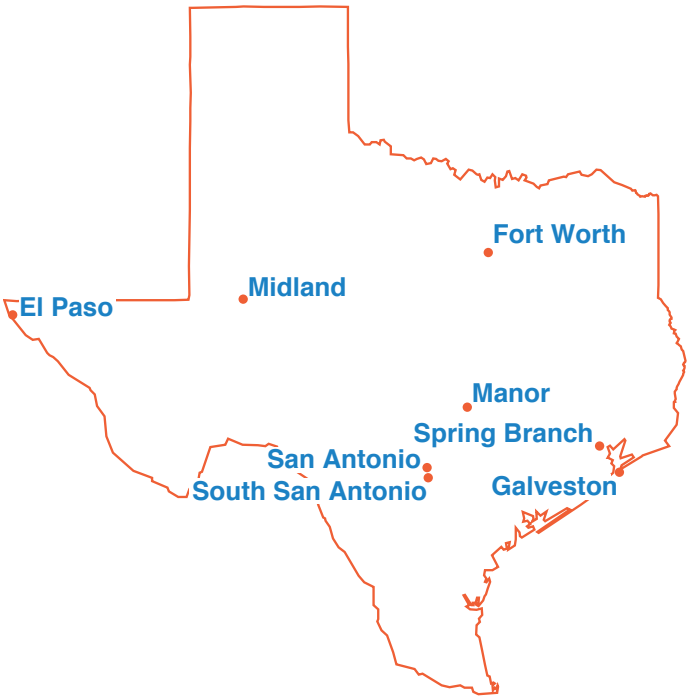
TEA expects that members of SGS Cohort 1 will:

- Demonstrate commitment and capacity to making the SGS strategy a top priority
- Participate in a comprehensive SGS district readiness assessment to better understand the district's strengths and opportunities related to the SGS levers
- Share knowledge, lessons learned, and tools created within the PLC
- Participate in all network sponsored summits and meetings
- Provide access to central office and school leaders
- Offer regular feedback to DSSI in support of continuously refining the SGS network programming

What districts are members of Cohort 1 of the SGS Network?







What was the SGS Cohort 1 application timeline?

2017 DATES	ACTION
February 23	System of Great Schools (SGS) Network application release
February 23 – March 17	Assistance for districts interested in submitting an application, email: DSSI@tea.texas.gov
March 24	Application due by 5:00pm CT to: DSSI@tea.texas.gov
By Early April	Invitation sent to districts to join the SGS Network and MOUs signed
By Mid-April	SGS District Readiness Assessment process begins (will vary between districts)
By Mid-June	Districts are sent their final readiness assessment report
June 28-29	System of Great Schools Network Kick Off Summit (in Austin)

Note: Dates are tentative and subject to change

What services and/or supports are available to districts that are not invited to join SGS Cohort 1?

DSSI is in the process of building a tier of services and supports that will be available to any district interested in learning about and/or engaging the SGS strategy. This includes access to:

- informational materials
- implementation guides/blueprints
- webinars
- a list of vetted consultants from across the country with a SGS-related expertise
- self-assessment materials

These materials will be available through the System Support and Innovation section of the TEA website as they are finalized over the first year of the program. DSSI is available to offer guidance and advice to all districts interested in the SGS strategy.

Should our district begin thinking about applying for SGS Cohort 2?

Districts that are interested in the SGS strategy, but not ready to apply for Cohort 1 can take early steps to prepare to submit a strong application for future cohorts of the network. We encourage districts to utilize the network application as an initial self-assessment tool until a formal self-assessment is developed. DSSI is available to offer support to districts interested in learning what they can do over the next year to prepare a strong Cohort 2 application.





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