# 2015–16 Reward Schools Case Study Report
# KIPP SHINE Preparatory School

## KIPP Houston Public Schools, Region 4

November 2016

# Acknowledgments

# Overview of the Reward Schools Case Studies Project

The state of Texas is home to more than 5 million primary and secondary public school students. From districts in major urban centers such as Houston and Dallas to those in rural areas far from cities, Texas Education Agency (TEA) serves schools and students of all backgrounds. Similar to schools across the country, many Texas schools face difficult circumstances, including poverty and high rates of student mobility. Schools that receive Title I funding are especially likely to face these and other challenges. The objective of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) is for the U.S. Department of Education to help address the greater educational challenges facing high-poverty communities by targeting additional resources to school districts and schools with high concentrations of poverty (ESEA of 1965). Decades of research have shown that poverty has a strong and negative impact on student academic performance (Arnold & Doctoroff, 2003; Herbers et al., 2012).

Despite significant obstacles, 6 percent of Title I public schools in Texas have gone beyond meeting state standards to earning the distinction of Reward School status. Reward Schools share many similarities with low-performing schools in terms of student socioeconomic status and other demographic characteristics. However, Reward Schools have implemented practices that have allowed the schools to overcome these challenges and become high-performing learning institutions. TEA and the Texas Comprehensive Center (TXCC) developed an initiative in 2014–15 to implement a best practices case study project with the goal of recognizing the extraordinary accomplishments of Reward Schools and providing an opportunity for them to share their success stories with the state and other local educational agencies.

When the project began in 2014–15, eleven schools participated as case study sites (TEA, 2015). In 2015–16, seven new schools were selected to participate in the project. The purpose of this report is to present the findings from one of the seven newly participating schools. In addition to staff from TEA and TXCC, staff from the Texas Center for District and School Support (TCDSS) at Region 13 Education Service Center (ESC) joined the project and assisted with the fieldwork at the case study schools. TCDSS representatives also interviewed or videotaped school staff and students from three of the participating Reward School case study sites.[1]

This report presents the findings from KIPP SHINE Preparatory in Region 4. The report details the systems and structures KIPP SHINE employs to use quality data to improve instruction, engage families and the larger school community, and foster a positive school climate. The final section of this report also details the ways KIPP Houston Public Schools supports the school in its efforts. For more details about the 2015–16 Reward Schools Case Studies Project, including the methodology the team used to conduct the case studies, aggregate findings from the analysis of data from the seven participating schools, with all seven Texas Accountability Intervention System critical success factors (CSFs) represented, please refer to the *2015–16 Reward Schools Statewide Report.*[2] The Statewide Report also includes the findings from the analysis of the aggregated student interview and school climate walkthrough data, which are not presented here because of the small sample size and potential breach of student confidentiality.

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[1] Clips from the videos are available at http://www.taisresources.net. They are under the heading "Critical Success Factors" and are titled "Teacher Quality," "Academic Performance," "School Climate," and "Quality Data to Drive Instruction."

[2] The *2015–16 Reward Schools Statewide Report* is available at [insert URL here]

## Overview of KIPP SHINE Preparatory School

KIPP SHINE Preparatory is located in the Alief neighborhood, a southwestern subdivision of Houston, Texas. The preparatory school is a charter school governed by KIPP Houston Public Schools, located within the jurisdiction of Region 4 ESC. For the past several years, KIPP SHINE has met state accountability standards (i.e., Met Standard) and earned distinction designations in core subjects and other school improvement areas. For example, in 2014–15, the school met five out of seven possible distinctions, including academic achievement in both reading and math, postsecondary readiness, as well as recognition for being in the top 25 percent of Texas schools for both student progress and closing performance gaps. The school's 2014–15 distinctions, along with detailed demographic data, are included in the snapshot on this page.

The team visited KIPP SHINE in early March of 2016 and spent two days at the school conducting one-on-one interviews with the school principal, KIPP Huston Public Schools support staff, and nine students. In addition, the team conducted three one-hour focus groups, including one focus group with school leadership and two with teaching staff from grades PreK through 4 who shared stories and best practices from their school. The team also collected observational data about the learning environment at KIPP SHINE during a walkthrough of the premises.

This report presents the results from the qualitative analyses of the principal and KIPP Huston Public Schools staff interviews as well as the teacher focus groups. The data analysis was guided by the three CSFs highlighted in this case study (Use of Quality Data to Drive Instruction, Family and Community Engagement, and School Climate). To maintain the participants' privacy and confidentiality, participants are not named.

## Critical Success Factor 2: Use of Quality Data to Drive Instruction

KIPP SHINE staff who participated in focus groups and interviews provided an in-depth account of the school's procedures and processes involving the use of quality data to drive daily instruction. Research has shown that frequent examination of student data facilitates both educator accountability and improvements in student learning (Halverson, Grigg, Prichett, & Thomas, 2007). Existing literature on data use for instructional improvement holds that providing teachers with easily accessible, timely student data and promoting its use through supported analysis helps schools leverage their data to improve student achievement (Kerr, Marsh, Ikemoto, Darilek, & Barney, 2006). Focus group data detailed a variety of ways

that KIPP SHINE staff use student data to improve student learning. In particular, this section examines the school's strategies around:

- Leveraging student data for classroom instruction, and
- Analyzing grade-level data to make decisions across multiple classrooms.

This section includes data from the interviews and focus groups shared with the research team while on-site that illustrate ways quality data is used to drive instruction at KIPP SHINE.

## Classroom Data Use

Focus group participants offered many examples of the way classroom data is used to drive instruction. For example, teachers of grades 2 through 4 use the computer adaptive Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment data to appropriately level and group students. One member of the leadership team described how teachers used MAP data to determine how to meet the needs of KIPP SHINE students at every level: *"Instead of teaching in self-contained classrooms, [instructors] differentiated their math and reading classes in order to best reach those quartiles…We try to strategically have smaller classes for our struggling students, or our lower quartiles in MAP, and the other classes are slightly bigger and they're moving faster working more with like enrichment questions and enrichment problem sets."* According to focus group participants, data is used every day to make decisions about how students will be grouped or which students need more intervention, extra tutorials, or more instruction. One teacher said *"having the daily accessibility to something like Istation[3] really helps."* Teachers also use individual-level data to help students set goals and objectives for their own learning. One teacher said that after their classroom took a benchmark exam mid-year, the instructor met with the students in small groups to discuss their data: *"We have this program called IXL. It has every objective that we do in [their] grade. They highlighted all the types of questions that they got wrong on their benchmark so they'll be working on those."* Interviewed staff at both the administrative and instructional levels agreed that data is the driving force behind all instructional decisions at KIPP SHINE and the school relies on frequent review of numerous data sources to ensure their students receive the best possible instruction.

## Grade-Level Data Use

Beyond instruction in individual classrooms, KIPP SHINE staff use data to make decisions about objectives, assessments, and instructional expectations at the grade level. Each grade-level team

> **Best Practice: Data Use**
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> *"Any and every instructional decision [staff] make whether it's a micro kind of changing a lesson in the moment in the day, or a much more macro [decision], like adjustment to a unit plan, or what are my intervention groups going to look like for the next 10 weeks? All of that is backed up by data."*
>
> –Leadership Team Member

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[3] Istation is an e-learning program that includes curricula (Reading and Writing, Math, and Spanish), computer-adaptive assessments, and teacher data analysis tools.

self-selects their performance goals and monitors them throughout the year: *"[One] grade self-selected a goal around the MAP data…The MAP had administrations in fall, winter, and spring. They look at their students' data from the fall, and they set goals for specific quartiles of students that were then reached by the end of the year."* In another instance, focus group participants described how teachers at the PreK and Kindergarten level analyzed data collaboratively to determine what measures would be used to accurately assess what their students know and can do. Through this collaboration, teachers were *"were able to reconstruct [an] assessment to be more true"* to grade level objectives.

Staff repeatedly communicated to the research team that intentional data use *"is part of the DNA"* at KIPP SHINE, and site visit data provided abundant evidence to support that claim. Instructors and administrators consistently leverage data collected on a daily basis to make student, classroom, grade-level, and schoolwide instructional decisions to improve student understanding and performance. Furthermore, data use is so ingrained in KIPP SHINE's culture that teachers are engaging students to examine their own data, encouraging them to set learning objectives and track their progress.

# Critical Success Factor 5: Family and Community Engagement

As shown in the literature, family involvement in children's education both at home and in school is a significant indicator of student performance (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Recent research on the impact of community engagement with local schools has shown a positive relationship between engaging community members and student achievement (Kirby & DiPaola, 2011). Furthermore, research concludes that more parent involvement at elementary schools is associated with higher academic achievement (Lee & Bowen, 2006). The teachers and leadership team at KIPP SHINE have several strategies in place that have proven effective in encouraging familial involvement. These strategies are:

- Hosting social and academic engagement activities, and
- Communicating frequently with students' families.

This section includes data from the interviews and focus groups shared with the research team while on-site that illustrate ways KIPP SHINE staff engage students' families and the school community.

## Engagement Activities

As a charter school, KIPP SHINE has a specific student in-take process that involves home visits to ensure their students' families understand the expectations school leadership has for their students and for them. To support parent engagement and understanding of the school's academic goals, KIPP SHINE staff host academic events and presentations. For example, a member of the leadership team told the research team that they want parents to be able to understand test scores so that students, instructors, and families can speak the same language. With a common language, parents can have *"meaningful conversations with [students] when they come home with their report card, or they come home with their MAP data…we want them to be well-versed in it, or well-versed on the grades on their report card, or their STAAR test scores."* To this end, KIPP SHINE delivered a data and college readiness presentation to parents, helping them draw parallels between their student's achievement and trajectory. These data events start with the parents of kindergartners and continue through the fourth grade: *"We actually gave [parents] the report that we get with their child's [MAP] score, and we had them look at the difference between the RIT[4] score and the percentile and 50th percentile is on grade level, 75th percentile is college*

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[4] Individual MAP results are reported in "RIT" or Rasch Unit, scores. The RIT score estimates the student's progress or growth over time

*ready. What does college ready mean? Let's talk about college."* Providing parents with opportunities to understand student data at an early stage has helped KIPP SHINE create a common language around student achievement at their school.

To ensure the school is consistently making efforts to engage families, the leadership team established a Parent Involvement Committee with smaller sub-committees in charge of academic events and social events for families. These committees are composed of both teachers and parents. One teacher described a hybrid social-academic event that had taken place just before the site visit: *"We had a reading night where [families] came and did reading activities and people read to the kids and parents could sit and just read with their kids."* The committee set a goal to host three social activities throughout the year *"two off-campus, one on-campus"* to build relationships with the families and provide time for students and families to spend with one another. KIPP SHINE regularly host open houses, data events, and social activities to engage their students' families, and focus group participants expressed deep appreciation for the willingness of families to involve themselves with and at the school.

## Communication With Families

The KIPP SHINE stakeholders we interviewed in March described a *"unique level of parent-teacher collaboration at our school."* Much of teachers' and parents' communication is facilitated by their iPhones that the school gives to all instructors for the explicit purpose of communicating with families. One teacher said having a school assigned cell phone and number made communication with students' families easier: *"we're texting [parents] back and forth, calling them, calling, texting brothers, sisters, coaches."* Teachers provide parents with frequent updates about their students, with one saying that throughout the course of the day, they will share a variety of information: *"It could be anything. Something happened behavior wise or academics. It could be positive or negative."* Teachers felt that this level of communication not only builds relationships between themselves and parents, it also helps *"kids see that it's not that school is this island over here and the rest of your life is over here. It's all one place that what you do over here does affect what you do over here and vice versa."* Beyond texting and phone calls, KIPP SHINE sends weekly notes and written communication home with their students, sharing school news and information about events. Additionally, because many of KIPP SHINE's students come from homes in which Spanish is the primary language spoken, each team has a Spanish-speaker that can *"translate pretty much everything, all presentations, [and parent-teacher] conferences."* Having Spanish-speaking team members ensures all parents are able to engage with their child's education.

**Best Practice: Engagement Activities**

*"For all of our new 3-year-olds coming in, we do a home visit. We sit down. We talk with our families about our mission and what we're committed to, but part of that conversation is…'the 3-pronged stool'. There's the school component of it. There's the student component. Then there's the family component."*

–Leadership Team Member

The data collected during the site visit revealed several methods employed by the administrative and instructional staff at KIPP SHINE to engage students' families. These efforts ranged from frequent academic and social events planned by a parent-teacher led Parent Involvement Committee, to daily communication between parents and teachers facilitated by school-issued teacher cell phones. Interviewed staff believe family engagement is essential to a successful school and staff's efforts contribute to the overall high student achievement at KIPP SHINE.

# Critical Success Factor 6: School Climate

Student achievement is higher in schools with healthy and positive learning environments (MacNeil, Prater, & Busch, 2009). Research on the impact of schoolwide positive behavioral supports in urban settings has shown that such systems have a positive impact on student performance and achievement and reduce discipline incidents (Lassen, Steele, & Sailor, 2006). Strong relationships between students and adults in the school setting have a positive effect on both student engagement and achievement (Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, & Oort, 2011). Research has shown that establishing and cultivating trusting relationships among school staff is essential to successful school improvement (Bryk & Schneider 2003). Focus group participants at KIPP SHINE described a healthy and supportive school climate bolstered by several schoolwide practices, which include:

- Implementing a schoolwide behavior plan, and
- Cultivating positive adult-student relationships.

This section includes data from the interviews and focus groups shared with the research team while on-site that illustrate ways KIPP SHINE staff has developed and maintains a positive school climate.

## Schoolwide Behavior Plan

Data collected at KIPP SHINE depicted a staff consistently using the LiveSchool platform to monitor student behaviors in the second, third, and fourth grades. School leadership spoke highly of the platform, which allows for flexible customization, stating that KIPP SHINE's LiveSchool program is *"all linked to our value system here. It's totally custom created by us."* Students earn rewards dollars, which are given to them every Friday in the form a "paycheck" which can be saved or spent at the school's onsite student store, the LiveSchool Bodega. Real-time student behavior data is entered and accessible via the LiveSchool application. The app is available on multiple platforms and most frequently used by teachers on their school-provided iPhones. Teachers have found the rewards system effective. One focus group participant reported that teachers have *"seen a lot of kids turn [their behavior] around… because of that Live School Bodega."* The Bodega contains a variety of items for 'purchase,' ranging from snacks to school supplies to small toys.

The LiveSchool platform is customized to reflect the KIPP organizational core values and 'character traits': zest, grit, self-control, optimism, gratitude, social intelligence, and curiosity. In addition to the LiveSchool tracking, these character traits are reinforced with lessons and assemblies, designed by the school's Values Team. Values Team members are responsible for designing and delivering lessons *"grounded in the KIPP character traits"* and customized based on the needs of students at each grade level, from pre-K to fourth grade. The lessons, assemblies, and LiveSchool tracking are all designed to support the social emotional development of students at KIPP SHINE.

## Adult-Student Relationships

The KIPP SHINE leadership team believes positive relationships between teachers and students is imperative, with one member saying *"our goal has been to create an environment where kids get out of the car in the morning, get off the bus, and they are incredibly excited to walk in the building because they know that great things are going to happen, and that they're surrounded by people that love them and care about them."* Teachers in the focus groups, who expressed deep investment in their students and a desire to cultivate meaningful relationships with them, echoed this sentiment.

To promote positive adult-student relationships, all students are assigned an 'Excellence Mentor'—typically a music, art, learning lab, or physical education teacher—with whom they meet twice a week. According to school leadership, the purpose of the Excellence Mentorship initiative is to provide students with an opportunity to connect with an adult who is not a parent or teacher. This mentor acts as *"a neutral party"* with whom students can discuss school related concerns or, as one leadership team member mentioned, if *"something's going on at home that's stressing them out, they have the opportunity to talk with someone that they're comfortable with."* This initiative came about when staff saw a discrepancy in student achievement and discipline data: some of the highest performing students were struggling with behavior. Now, students meet with their Excellence Mentor in both a group setting and one-on-one to promote behavioral accountability and social emotional development. One interviewed teacher said that children are grouped strategically in order to *"teach the students that they need to help their friends to change their behavior."* The Excellence Mentorship initiative is another example of this staff's dedication to creating a supportive environment where students can develop strong relationship with adults and, subsequently, their peers.

The data collected during the site visit indicated a schoolwide commitment to cultivating a healthy and supportive school climate through the consistent implementation of a schoolwide positive behavior plan that reflects the KIPP organizational values and character traits. In addition, staff at KIPP SHINE are dedicated to fostering positive adult-student relationships built on trust and accountability, making School Climate one of the most potent CSFs contributing to the school's success.

> **Best Practice: Adult-Student Relationships**
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> *"Regardless of what goes on beyond the four walls of this school, when [students are] here, they're fed, they're well taken care of, they're surrounded by people who believe they can achieve tremendous success"*
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> –Leadership team member

# Support from KIPP Houston Public Schools

In addition to the interviews and focus groups conducted with building staff and students, the research team interviewed a KIPP Houston Public Schools staff member to learn about the relationship between KIPP SHINE and its regional governing body. KIPP Houston Public Schools is composed of ten primary schools, twelve middle schools, and four high schools. KIPP Houston Public Schools has consistently met state accountability standards for the last four years.

Data from the March site visit indicated that KIPP Houston Public Schools provides a variety of supports directly to KIPP SHINE. While the offered supports are many and varied, interview data suggested the district was particularly helpful in supporting the school's success in the following areas:

- Leadership effectiveness, and
- Teacher quality.

This section includes qualitative data from the interviews and focus groups shared with the research team. The data illustrates the ways in which KIPP Houston Public Schools supports KIPP SHINE's efforts to effectively lead a high performing, high needs school, as well as support the professional development of quality teachers.

## Support for Leadership Effectiveness

One of the most significant contributions KIPP Houston Public Schools provides KIPP SHINE and other schools under its jurisdiction is direct support to school leadership. A representative from the regional office meets with the principal on a regular basis, noting that because KIPP SHINE *"really has all systems on track, it is more of checking in with [the principal] weekly and what's going well and what's not, where they need support and help with and what can we do to support."* Interviewees emphasized that the school's governing body allows the administrative team at KIPP SHINE to exercise their autonomy and make schoolwide decisions without extensive oversight. One teacher noted that the school is permitted to use the instructional methods that work best for their students, noting that *"if something is not working, even if it is something that is being pushed by the region, the fact that if it doesn't work for us, we're able to actually make the change."* The KIPP Houston Public Schools staff member agreed that the charter's philosophy encourages the regional office to place high trust in their effective leaders.

**Best Practice: School Autonomy**

*"Autonomy lies with those [schools] that are achieving results. The ones that are not achieving results have more guardrails and more scrutiny from their [assigned] manager."*

–KIPP Houston Public Schools staff member

In addition to one-on-one meetings with the principal, the regional office also facilitates self-reflection, where school leaders consider their *"goals and the vision"* for their school. Using this vision as a framework, principals are expected to report their progress and participate in a school review. To further support the principal, KIPP Houston Public Schools encourages other school leaders to collaborate during the school review process: *"We try to bring in young leaders as well and grade-level chairs. Not just school leaders and principals but assistant principals and deans, grade-level chairs, so that we get a whole different perspective."* This collaboration supports effective leadership at KIPP SHINE through shared responsibilities and fostering the leadership development of other staff members.

### Support for Teacher Quality

Study participants frequently described the various supports KIPP Houston Public Schools offer teachers to improve instruction and pursue professional development opportunities. KIPP SHINE staff have access to numerous professional development opportunities offered through the regional office, as well content specialists who assist with implementing math and reading curricula. Beyond content support, the regional office provides funding for *"any kind of programs"* the instructional staff are interested in implementing. Regional professional development sessions are designed to be collaborative, where staff from KIPP SHINE interact with, teach, and learn from instructional staff from other KIPP Houston Public Schools. Regional, collaborative professional development opportunities, access to content specialists, and funding for instructional resources, are used to support quality instruction at KIPP SHINE and throughout KIPP Houston Public Schools.

## Summary

According to interview and focus group participants, KIPP Houston Public Schools provides the resources and supports KIPP SHINE needs to be successful. In addition to providing access to resources and opportunities that encourage instructional improvement, KIPP Houston Public Schools trusts school leadership to exercise the autonomy necessary to run a consistently high-achieving school. This support from the regional office, along with a schoolwide commitment to using quality data to inform instruction, strong family engagement practices, and the consistent implementation of a positive behavior plan all contribute to the extraordinary accomplishments of KIPP SHINE Preparatory School. The dedicated leadership team and instructional staff have cultivated an ethos of achievement and innovation, earning KIPP SHINE the recognition befitting a Reward School.

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