

U.S. Department of Education RTT-D Annual Performance Report Executive Summary

Based on ED 524B OMB No. 1894-0003 Exp. 06/19/2014

Summarize the resources and strategies used in your RTT-D grant and the outputs and short term results. Provide highlights of accomplishments, lessons learned, challenges, the project's goals, and the extent to which the expected outcomes and performance measures were achieved. Describe the LEA's progress in implementing personalized learning environments (Absolute Priority 1 on the application) from the time of the application through June 30, 2014.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2012, the United States Department of Education awarded a 4-year grant of \$41 million to a combined set of 22 school districts representing 118 schools belonging to the Green River Regional Educational Cooperative (GRREC) and Ohio Valley Education Cooperative (OVEC). Six of the 118 schools that were represented closed or began the process of closing within Year One, decreasing the number of schools represented to 112. The cooperatives established a new educational arm, called kid·FRIENDLy (Kids Focused, Responsible, Imaginative, Engaged, and Determined to Learn) to implement the grant, hiring 61 staff to carry out the project goals (see Appendix A). At the end of Year One, there were some staff changes which changed the number of employees to 62 (see Appendix B). A team of researchers from Western Kentucky University, hired under the name “Rock Solid,” was commissioned to serve as external evaluators.

Grant implementation began in January 2013. The following report details the project’s goals, key components, and success measures, as well as kid·FRIENDLy and external evaluator activities carried out during the first project year, ending June 30, 2014. A summary of both benchmark and end-of-year data detailing progress toward goals is provided.

kid·FRIENDLy Goals

In alignment with the goals the U.S. Department of Education established for Race to the Top, kid·FRIENDLy is oriented toward improving student achievement, and, consequently, college-and-career readiness, primarily through an emphasis on personalized learning with a competency-based instruction approach. kid·FRIENDLy seeks to deliver high-quality professional development and supports for teachers and leaders around these concepts so that educator effectiveness – understood to be the key to improved student learning – can be enhanced.

Accordingly, the Green River Regional and Ohio Valley Educational Cooperatives articulated the following goals in their Race to the Top application:

Goal 1: Increase the number of students in participating schools who have access to *highly effective*¹ teachers and principals.

¹ Note: This and other terms associated with each goal were operationalized by the Rock Solid evaluation team, in coordination with the kid·FRIENDLy leadership team, to create measures that met USDE approval. See later sections of “Rock Solid Activities” for more information regarding this process.

Goal 2: Increase the number of students in participating schools who have access to *effective* teachers and principals.

Goal 3: Improve the academic and non-cognitive outcomes for students in participating schools.

Goal 4: Ensure all students in participating schools are on track to be college- and career-ready by graduation.

Goal 5: Ensure all students in participating schools are capable and prepared for post-secondary careers, college, and/or technical school.

A supplemental grant called Preschool Pals was also awarded to enhance kindergarten readiness through a network of supports for private pre-schools and child care providers.

kid·FRIENDLy Projects

To meet the goals outlined above, kid·FRIENDLy proposed four projects as vehicles for carrying out their efforts. A fifth project related to managing the grant and the previously mentioned supplemental preschool project were also developed. Below is a brief description of each:

Project 1: Students as Leaders. Associated with Goal 3 (improving academic and non-cognitive outcomes), this project emphasizes empowering students to take charge of their own learning by teaching social and emotional skills associated with high levels of personal achievement. The Leader in Me™ program, developed by Franklin Covey, is the centerpiece of this project, and seeks to engender student dispositions associated with Stephen Covey's *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. Districts and schools will capitalize on the strategies associated with The Leader in Me™ to promote student agency through curriculum, instruction, and assessment delivery models. Ultimately, the strategies will help students to act for themselves and take ownership for their learning by defining their learning goals, by relating their learning to authentic, real-life experiences, and by engaging them in student-centered metacognitive practices.

Project 2: Leaders Developing Leadership. Associated with Goals 1 and 2 (increasing the number of students with access to effective and highly-effective teachers and principals), this project emphasizes networking and mentoring for school leaders to lead innovative change, improve performance, and make key decisions based on data driven needs. Data analysis routines were established and facilitated by GRREC staff. Cognitive Coaches and Leadership Mentors facilitated on-going use of data analysis to inform innovative practices in districts and schools.

Project 3: Competency-Based Instruction. Associated with Goals 3, 4, and 5 (improving student academic and non-cognitive outcomes and improving students' college and career readiness), this project shifts the focus of learning away from traditional teaching and assessment toward mastery of specific content knowledge and skills. Through needs-based professional development, teachers will develop strategies for competency-based instruction and standards-based reporting of student progress toward proficiency. This project also involves the establishment of College and Career Centers in every participating high school toward the goal of establishing a clear and coherent system to prepare all students for college and career.

Project 4: Personalized Learning. Also associated with Goals 3, 4, and 5, this project supports school-wide efforts to make learning more flexible and individualized for all students. Personalized learning emphasizes a shift away from teacher-centered instruction and traditional modes of organizing the school day toward a learning environment unencumbered by the normal limits of the school day and

bell schedule. Each school developed a school-wide Personalized Learning Plan, supported by professional development, enhanced technology resources, and technical support.

Project 5: Management and Evaluation. This additional project, created in accordance with U.S. Department of Education (USDE) Scope of Work guidelines, governs the management and evaluation components of the grant itself. After the project director and program managers were hired, this leadership team collaborated with GRREC and OVEC staff to develop the Scope of Work to guide the work of this grant. The director then worked to hire the additional support staff and the external evaluation team, as well as to establish other support structures to carry out the grant. When the original project director chose to retire toward the end of the first year of the grant, another season staff member from GRREC stepped into the role.

Supplemental Project: Preschool Pals. Additionally, several of the projects above include elements of a Preschool Pals supplemental grant (which has a separate set of SOW activities, also reviewed in this report) to improve kindergarten readiness rates through enhanced supports for area daycares and preschools.

Subsequent sections of this report describe major activities associated with each project carried out in Year One relative to the proposed Scope of Work (SOW)² by both the kid·FRIENDLY leadership team and the Rock Solid external evaluation team. After only one year of implementation, a few measures of progress toward project goals are evident (student achievement data will not be available until early Fall 2014). However, where qualitative and quantitative measures of progress are available, the report attempts to describe them. Whereas evidence of progress of the overall project goals is preliminary and limited, the data suggest that the project has begun to have an impact on the 22 districts.

AN OVERVIEW OF YEAR ONE

The first year of kid·FRIENDLY implementation focused heavily on key management and evaluation activities, including the hiring and training of kid·FRIENDLY staff, refining the Scope of Work (SOW), and gathering benchmark data. Project 1 (Students as Leaders) occupied a major focus of school-level activities, though initial steps were made toward planning and implementation of all projects.

kid·FRIENDLY Activities

Sixty-one staff members were hired to carry out kid·FRIENDLY initiatives, including a project director, program managers, finance director, outreach director, leadership mentors, preschool pals, cognitive coaches, college and career readiness counselors, marketing/communication director, data specialist, finance administrative assistant, clerical assistant, and elementary liaisons (see Appendix C). The project director and program managers facilitated training for all new staff on project goals

² Note: The final SOW approved by USDE includes two primary sections: 1) The various activities proposed by the kid·FRIENDLY leadership team in order to carry out the RTT-D grant (the supplemental project also fits here); and 2) the student outcomes and performance measures used to evaluate the overall effect of the program on schools and students. The “kid·FRIENDLY Activities” portions of this report focus on SOW section 1; the “Rock Solid Activities” portions of this report primarily focus on SOW section 2.

and their individual roles and duties. Considerable time was spent refining the SOW in collaboration with representatives from the U.S. Department of Education.

School Personalized Learning Teams, made up of select teachers and administrators from kid·FRIENDLy schools participated in a number of professional development activities, including a Personalized Learning Symposium that outlined requirements for school-level Personalized Learning Plans. PLP teams in all schools developed plans and submitted to kid·FRIENDLy staff for feedback. To more evenly distribute the large number of planned professional development events and The Leader in Me™ sessions across the participating schools, schools were divided into two cohorts and assigned to alternating Year One and Year Two professional development. Cohort 1 schools (54 schools) participated in sessions on The Leader in Me™ facilitated by representatives of FranklinCovey, and The Leader in Me™ coaches visited Cohort 1 schools to evaluate their implementation progress and provide feedback. Cohort 2 school teams participated in data analysis workshops (data retreats). Additionally, schools participated in data analysis workshops, which also addressed student level data practices related to school-based PLCs. Besides a number of elementary and middle schools, Cohort 2 included all participating high schools. High schools specifically conducted culture assessments, school teams with support from internal and external consultants, of their current school environment and openness to change. Results were to inform high schools' personalized learning plans.

Rock Solid Evaluation Activities

The Rock Solid external evaluation team spent much of its first year assisting kid·FRIENDLy with understanding project goals and outcome measures and refinement of the SOW. Other key initiatives included gathering benchmark data required for yearly assessment of program achievement targets and developing theoretical frameworks to define the foundational concepts of the project such as personalized learning, competency-based instruction, and the social-emotional development and student agency constructs associated with The Leader in Me™.

The Rock Solid external evaluation team developed and revised memoranda of understanding with the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) and other agencies to obtain student-level achievement data needed for establishing benchmarks for project outcome measures, and worked with district representatives to gather school-level data not available through KDE or other sources. Once obtained, Rock Solid staff and graduate assistants entered, organized, analyzed, and reported benchmark data to the U.S. Department of Education. The team will eventually carry out quasi-experimental data analyses to compare student performance in kid·FRIENDLy schools with students in non-participating schools as a further evaluation of the program's impact.

Members of the team also carried out reviews of existing research on concepts central to the project, including personalized learning, competency-based instruction, and social-emotional competencies associated with The Leader in Me™. The team wrote literature reviews describing the theoretical underpinning of these concepts and developed logic models linking these concepts to desired learning outcomes. These efforts will assist the team in assessing the impact of the project by clarifying the ways kid·FRIENDLy activities and accomplishments comport with an empirically valid understanding of the project's stated goals.

An outgrowth of these efforts was the development of student and teacher perceptual scales that will serve as key measures of the impact that Project 1 (Students as Leaders) is making on students.

The team developed and deployed student and teacher surveys establishing baseline data for these constructs.

Summary Assessment of Progress

Key elements of each project have been successfully implemented as outlined in the Scope of Work (SOW). Of necessity, a major focus for kid·FRIENDLY has been hiring and training staff to carry out project activities. However, as described below, several aspects of each project are well under way or in full implementation.

In terms of implementation, Project 1 (Students as Leaders) has been a particularly strong focus of kid·FRIENDLY activities. Data from Leader in Me coaches, provided in detail later in this report, indicate that the majority of Cohort 1 schools are faithfully implementing the program as designed.

For Project 2 (Leaders Developing Leadership) Key elements of this project include regional and district networking and mentoring for school leaders to lead innovative change, improve performance and make key decisions based on data driven needs. Data analysis routines were established and facilitated by GRREC staff. Cognitive Coaches and Leadership Mentors facilitated on-going use of data analysis to inform innovative practices in districts and schools. Culture assessments in high schools have been conducted and leadership mentors have been trained and are actively working with superintendents and other district personnel. The Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) is the lead agency in developing a statewide superintendent effectiveness plan, and kid·FRIENDLY is partially dependent on KDE for progress on this particular component of the SOW. kid·FRIENDLY staff are collaborating with the Kentucky School Board Association to design tools to assist with feedback for effectiveness of boards of education.

Other than hiring staff and related preschool activities (described later in this report), few other SOW Year One activities specifically associated with Project 3 (Competency-Based Instruction) slated for Year One were achieved. No professional development on competency-based instruction was offered, for example. However, there were fewer activities for Project 3 in the Year One SOW than for any other component of the program, and most activities were related to hiring staff and carrying out the preschool initiative, both of which were successfully completed.

Key activities for Project 4 (Personalized Learning) centered on each school's development of a school-wide Personalized Learning Plan (PLP). Per the SOW, representatives from each school attended a Personalized Learning Symposium where they were introduced to key features of personalized learning by kid·FRIENDLY project leaders and given guidance about the content of their PLP's. FRYSC staff were included in the training for Personalized Learning as they are a key player in addressing barriers to kindergarten readiness and college and career readiness in each of the 112 schools. Each school submitted a PLP, but analysis of these plans by both the kid·FRIENDLY and Rock Solid teams indicated that schools generally chose "low-level," compliance oriented activities, suggesting that more training on the concept is needed. Of the four major "school-based" projects, the kid·FRIENDLY leadership team was most successful in carrying out the SOW activities associated with Project 4.

Two additional projects, Project 5 (Management and Evaluation), and a Supplemental Project (Preschool Pals), complete the SOW portion that guides kid·FRIENDLY staff activities. Project 5

provides guidance to the overall process of managing personnel, facilities, and expenditures related to a complex, multifaceted educational initiative. The Supplemental Project (Preschool Pals) provides training and ongoing support for childcare centers, preschools, and home-care through a cohort of itinerant Preschool Pals.

Overall, Year One focused heavily on establishing the implementation team, The Leader in Me™ sessions as a foundation for developing student sense of agency, and developing school based teams related to personalized learning (and for future work on competency-based instruction). Although the kid·FRIENDLY staff have accomplished much in Year One, school-level teams, and even the kid·FRIENDLY staff itself, may still be unclear on key features of competency-based instruction and personalized learning, or on how all of the various components of kid·FRIENDLY fit together in a clear, unified framework for enhancing student learning and educator effectiveness

More training on these essential concepts, and further work at clarifying the interconnectedness of various project initiatives, is warranted in Year Two (2014-2015).