

**Central Texas Education Stimulus Collaborative**  
**Investing in Innovation (i3) Federal Stimulus Grant Opportunity:**

***RAISE<sup>up</sup> Texas:***

**Research-validated Approach to Instruction for Secondary Excellence**

**Overview:**

i3 is a \$30M+ federal stimulus grant opportunity for our region that could be truly transformational. It must be innovative, yet requires a high bar of sound research behind it. We have submitted an i3 proposal on behalf of the Central Texas Education Stimulus Collaborative, a collaborative of Central Texas school districts supported with technical assistance from DoubleLine Partners and funded by 7 area foundations based on the collaborative infrastructure of the E3 Alliance.

*“Our work with the E3 Alliance and partner districts in this collaborative effort has been an extraordinarily unique experience. In the hundreds of projects that our center has engaged in during its existence, we have never dealt with a group of professionals who are so committed and passionate about making changes to existing practices to improve outcomes for learners.”*

– Dr. Don Deshler, Director - Center for Research on Learning, The University of Kansas

**Central Texas Education Stimulus Collaborative (CTESC):**

The CTESC was formed in May 2009. The goal of the CTESC is to *achieve systemic educational impact across the region using consistent goals and measures* by taking advantage of 3 concurrent opportunities:

1. Availability of ground-breaking federal stimulus dollars
2. Proven collaboration platform through The Blueprint for Educational Change, with E3 Alliance
3. Private funding leverage to extend stimulus for evidence-based programs

The CTESC includes 12 traditional public school and charter districts. It has been funded by: KDK-Harman, Michael & Susan Dell, RGK, THSP/CFT, TG, Texas Pioneer, and Bill & Melinda Gates foundations. The CTESC provided support and guidance to districts in navigating stimulus opportunities, ensuring State Fiscal Stabilization Fund (SFSF) compliance, and furthering state interaction. The CTESC has already secured a \$1M technology grant, the maximum award allowable, under the Target Tech in Texas Collaborative Grant Program (T3) for five participating districts and two charters. Significantly, none of the partners would have been able to win the grant on their own – only through effective collaboration of needs, ideas and practices could we bring this investment to our students and our region. All of these efforts are managed through the collaborative infrastructure of the E3 Alliance.

**i3 Overview:**

Investing in Innovation (i3) grants will be awarded at three levels: Development (up to \$5M), Validation (up to \$30M, requires regional or state scalability), and Scale-Up (up to \$50M, requires state or national scalability). The validation and scale-up levels require extremely rigorous quantitative research, and all require a high degree of collaboration with nonprofit or other partners. CTESC is planning to submit a Validation proposal of ~\$30M over a five year period.

The grant criteria include four absolute priorities; ***RAISE<sup>up</sup> Texas*** addresses all four:

- Support Effective Teachers and Leaders
- Improve the Use of Data
- Complement the Implementation of High Standards and High-Quality Assessments
- Turn Around Persistently Low-Performing Schools & Whole-School Reform

Applications were submitted May 11<sup>th</sup> and monetary awards will be made by September 30, 2010.

**The Problem:**

In Central Texas alone, over 7,000 9<sup>th</sup> graders from 4 years ago who should walk across the stage to receive a high school diploma this May will not. Every year's cohort of drop outs costs us over \$425 Million in lost earnings! And of those students who do graduate, only about half are academically ready for college without having to take remedial courses. College presidents tell us that students enrolling today – “even the

A-B students we thought were coasting along in high school” – often lack the critical thinking, independent problem-solving skills, and content knowledge required to be successful in higher education.

It's not an issue we can address in 12<sup>th</sup> grade- or even in high school. The foundation for deep critical thinking and engaged learning must be laid in middle school – and that's precisely where data tells us that students are most challenged. The structure of middle school calls for students to transition from the small, supportive world of elementary to the “factory model” of secondary education, with many disconnected teachers and courses, much more challenging content literacy requirements, and far less parent and community involvement. The data reflects their struggle: the percentage of students passing even basic math requirements drops by 20 points in the middle school years. Disciplinary rates *triple* between 5th and 6th grades! School attendance begins to fall, and truancy begins to rise. We can predict from scale scores in middle school who will be college and career ready and who won't.

And it's not getting any easier for schools. As the skills needed to succeed in 21<sup>st</sup> century jobs increase, standards for success in middle and high school are rising. At the same time, our student population is rapidly shifting to one that is much more challenging. Texas has the fastest growing student population in the nation. The Central Texas student population is growing at *three times* the Texas rate, and our most challenged students – those who are low income and English Language Learners – are growing at *twice to three times* the rates of other Central Texas students! Central Texas schools today are the harbinger for the student population across the country a generation from now.

### **Why the Challenge?**

CTESC teachers and administrators, together with academic leaders across the region – have spent the last year reviewing detailed student and school data, common needs, and possible solutions. The problem is not that our curricular materials are weak. Generally speaking, classes and schools are not too large. It's not a particular demographic- we have proven in specific instances that we can be successful with any group of students. So what's the challenge?

1. *Core instructional practices* in secondary classrooms are not strong enough to meet rigorous needs for 21<sup>st</sup> century society and workplace. Our students lack the depth of content literacy knowledge that is required and are infrequently developing deep critical thinking skills. Our teachers require better tools, methods and practices to develop these skills in all students.
2. We lack *integrated, effective tiered instruction* (“response to intervention”) at a secondary level to tailor and fit classroom instruction to each student's needs no matter their challenges or gifts.
3. *Central Texas students are very mobile*—they frequently move across school and district lines. Integrating into new schools is very difficult without common practices and methods.

### **Planned i3 Solution:**

The CTESC has been working on potential approaches to utilize the i3 grant opportunity to address these challenges since August 2009. The CTESC team based decisions on four overarching criteria:

1. What approach will have the *greatest impact on students*, especially those most in need?
2. Can we meet regional district needs *holistically and with flexibility* to address diverse student and district needs and build on what is already working? (We don't want “just another program”... we already have too many competing programs!)
3. Can we provide the required *quantity and quality of research* demonstrating success?
4. Do we have the capacity to *execute, sustain and scale* this approach beyond the grant period?

Using these criteria, CTESC decided to focus on *transforming and personalizing the student experience in middle years* by enhancing core teaching and learning across all content areas and providing integrated tiered intervention for students who require additional assistance. The need to do both well led the CTESC to recommend the Strategic Instruction Model (SIM) out of the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning (KU). This innovative approach—a regional effort based on improving classroom instruction through research-validated protocols and teacher strategies—has been shown to yield dramatic increases in student achievement.

SIM is not a curriculum or a program. SIM encompasses an integrated set of teaching and learning strategies that can be applied in *all* content areas – not just core areas of literacy, social studies, math and science, but fine arts, electives, ...even physical education. These strategies allow teachers to:

- Provide well-defined instructional plans that make goals for learning transparent, helping students understand context better and allowing clear communication among students, teachers, and parents as to what learning goals are
- Provide interactive exercises and context frameworks that help develop students' critical thinking skills and their understanding of concept depth and complexity -- rather than rote memorization
- Provide tiered interventions for those who are struggling to address their specific learning needs and bring them on track quickly rather than referring to "Special Ed" or allowing them to languish in the classroom
- Improve use of data from student-centered assessments and monitor student progress continually in order to meet the needs of academically diverse classrooms.

Nancy Guerrero, the principal of C.D. Fulkes, a piloting school, had this to say:

*"When our students use SIM, they begin to see not just the connections between topics, but the deeper skills of analysis, synthesis, and critical thinking that support these connections. These are precisely the skills students need to be college- and career- ready."*

The title of this project is: **RAISE<sup>UP</sup> Texas: Research-validated Approach to Instruction for Secondary Excellence.**

#### **RAISE<sup>UP</sup> Texas Grant Goals:**

- Improve student performance and eliminate achievement gaps: ELL, income, ethnic
- Implement an effective protocol for response to intervention (RtI) at the secondary level:
  - Enable true differentiated instruction for the individual needs of challenged learners
  - Reduce need for intervention by enhancing Tier I teaching and learning in all content areas
- Lessen referrals to advanced interventions and Special Education
- Ensure academic success on end-of-course (EOC) assessments starting fall 2011
- Better prepare students to meet college and career-readiness standards
- Strengthen professional learning among teachers and administrators
- Foster and leverage collaboration within and among schools and districts
- Provide a platform for sustainability and scale to Central Texas district needs beyond the grant period

#### **What the Research Says:**

There is significant national research on the efficacy of SIM – in diverse classroom settings, with controlled experimental studies performed by objective outside evaluators. In short, we have the research base that says: Implemented with fidelity, SIM works for *all* student populations – learning disabled, struggling, average, and gifted students.

In addition to the national research, we have results to look to in our own region to learn from:

#### **Rouse High School (Leander ISD) Year 1 (08-09) results:**

- 100% of freshmen on target to meeting 4x4 graduation requirements; ZERO were under-credited to be a sophomore
- TAKS performance gap between low income and more affluent students less than 2%
- TAKS math failure rates 30-40% less than rest of LISD
- 85% of teachers said staff development impacted their learning

#### **Lago Vista Middle School through SIM:**

- In 2 years went from Acceptable to Exemplary
- In 2008 and 2009 100% of ALL student groups met writing standard
- From '06 to '09, low income and Hispanic passing rates increased 15% on average across all tests and commended rates increased 21%

**Round Rock ISD** in 3rd year of implementing SIM;

- Have expanded to 6 middle schools based on early signs of success at one school
- Schools who started just this year have already shown 20%+ improvement in science benchmarks
- Teachers indicate in their appraisals that SIM is helping drive gains

Clearly, this is a solution that can work. But it requires job-embedded, whole-school coaching and professional development with committed leadership. It is not cheap or easy. Only with a comprehensive plan, backed by grant resources, can we achieve impact at scale.

### **Grant Partners:**

The **RAISE<sup>up</sup> Texas** proposal includes Round Rock, San Marcos, Leander, Eanes, Pflugerville, Hays, and Austin school districts, reaching over 65,000 students and 2500 teachers and coaches during the five year grant period and extending to many more beyond that.

It will require multiple collaborating partners to make **RAISE<sup>up</sup> Texas** a success. The University of Kansas will provide program management consulting, district readiness and planning assessment, and technical assistance and coaching as local teams are developed. Region XIII Education Service Center, who already has some SIM specialists on staff, will be integral in helping us to scale and providing local technical assistance to districts, and will act as fiscal agent/applicant for the grant. Texas State University and Concordia University will partner on research associates and teacher candidate interns to initiate long-term sustainability within the teacher force of the future.

Strong evaluation will be a key component of **RAISE<sup>up</sup> Texas**. The Meadows Center out of The University of Texas at Austin, who specialize in RtI strategies, will work with The University of Houston TIMES Center to provide both formative review and summative evaluation research. The E3 Alliance will continue to be involved to provide the collaborative infrastructure and support for related work by building common data systems capacity and leveraging ongoing collaborative efforts such as the ELL Collaborative. These partners, participating districts, and key private matching funders will together form a steering committee to oversee the grant.

### **Can We Really Win an i3 Grant?**

This grant process will be incredibly competitive. Perhaps only ~15 grants will be awarded in our category, out of hundreds of expected applications. Why do we think we can win it?

- ✓ The breadth and depth of **collaboration across districts is unique**. This will provide us the ability to show success more quickly by sharing lessons learned, and to scale much further and faster than any one school or district could ever do.
- ✓ The infrastructure of E3 Alliance promotes **sustainable collaboration and scale**. The E3 partners have a 4 year track record of working together to build positive results.
- ✓ The solution is **cost-effective** – reaching about 50,000 students in the 1<sup>st</sup> 4 years. We believe we can transform the middle school teaching and learning experience for about \$600 per student.
- ✓ The SIM/CLC solution is **backed by 25 years of research and experience**; and the program designers (KU) are an integral partner working with no one else in the country on an i3 grant.
- ✓ We have a **local experience base** to leverage: three collaborative districts have started using SIM, and Region XIII has a core team of trainers already certified. Region XIII can provide a cost-effective base to expand beyond our grant-funded schools.
- ✓ The proposed design fits regional needs **based on objective data**:
  - Whole-school reform model ideally suited to address challenges at middle grades
  - Works across all content areas
  - Adaptable to different district and school capacities/needs
- ✓ We have strong, **well-respected evaluation partners**: The UT Meadows Center and TIMES

### **Private Funding:**

**RAISE<sup>up</sup> Texas** will require 20% leverage, so a \$30M grant requires at least a \$6M private match. We have formal and verbal commitments for about \$2.4M thus far, with many follow-up meetings scheduled

this summer. While matching funds can be paid out over a 5 year period, all commitments are required by late summer. Politicians at all levels including every mayor in the application area, the teachers union, corporations, and educators are all strongly committed to this effort.

***We need strong private support now to make RAISE<sup>up</sup> Texas a reality.***