

# Harmony Supporting Top Educators Program (H-STEP)

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>I. SIGNIFICANCE &amp; RESPONSE TO ABSOLUTE PRIORITY</b> .....	1-10
• Harmony Public Schools’ HCMS is aligned with its vision of instructional improvement.....	1
• Information generated by Harmony’s Evaluation & Support System informs a variety of human capital decisions.....	4
• Harmony focuses on human capital strategies that ensure high-need schools are able to attract and retain effective educators.....	8
<b>II. QUALITY OF THE PROJECT DESIGN</b> .....	10-29
• Project is part of a comprehensive effort to improve teaching and learning and support rigorous academic standards.....	10
• Requirement 2: Documentation of High-Need Schools.....	24
<b>III. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SYSTEMS TO SUPPORT THE NEEDS OF TEACHERS &amp; PRINCIPALS IDENTIFIED THROUGH THE EVAL. PROCESS</b> .....	25-29
• Harmony uses disaggregated evaluation information to identify development needs.....	27
• Harmony’s proposed TIF project directly works to address remaining needs.....	28
<b>IV. MANAGEMENT PLAN</b> .....	29-36
• An ambitious yet achievable timeline with clear project milestones and objectives.....	33
<b>V. ADEQUACY OF RESOURCES</b> .....	36-38
• PBCS developed with input of educators in schools to be served by the grant.....	36
• Harmony has a strong plan to sustain financially the activities conducted and systems developed under the grant once grant period has expired.....	37
<b>COMPETITIVE PRIORITY 2: IMPROVING TEACHER EFFECTIVENESS AND PROMOTING EQUITABLE ACCESS TO EFFECTIVE EDUCATORS</b> .....	39-40

## **2016 TIF Project Narrative: Harmony Supporting Top Educators Program**

### **I. SIGNIFICANCE & RESPONSE TO ABSOLUTE PRIORITY**

#### **An LEA-wide Human Capital Management System (HCMS) with Educator Evaluation and Support Systems at the Center**

##### ***Harmony Public Schools' HCMS is aligned with its vision of instructional improvement***

Founded in 2000, Harmony Public Schools (Harmony) is a high-performing, nonprofit Charter Management Organization (CMO) with a network of 46 K-12 schools and ~2100 teachers, serving a diverse student population of nearly 30,000 across seven Local Education Agencies (LEAs) in Texas. 50% of students are Hispanic/Latino, 20% are African American, and 62% receive free or reduced-price meals. Harmony also serves a large English Language Learner (ELL) population of 22%, higher than the overall Texas population by 4%, and a Special Education population of 6%. Harmony believes that all students, regardless of race or income level, can achieve outstanding academic results, and strives to prepare each student for higher education by providing a safe, caring, and collaborative atmosphere featuring a student-centered educational program with emphasis on science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM).

Harmony schools have transformed the way Texas students, especially traditionally underserved populations, engage in learning. Harmony has developed a student-centered educational model that recognizes each child as an individual with unique interests, needs, and abilities, while building a shared foundation that emphasizes and values instructional rigor, real-world relevance, and relationships between teachers and students, campus personnel and parents, and the school and its local community. This combination of personalized and project-based learning and structured curriculum grounded in core academics and 21<sup>st</sup> century skills (e.g., critical thinking, collaboration, creativity) has resulted in a long track record of success. Harmony schools have consistently earned national recognition for their performance, with

## 2016 TIF Project Narrative: Harmony Supporting Top Educators Program

multiple schools appearing on lists such as U.S. News & World Report’s “Best High Schools in the Nation” and The Washington Post’s Challenge Index. Furthermore, compared to state and local district averages, a higher percentage of Harmony students pass state accountability exams across nearly all grade levels and subjects, as well as by sub-group. As a result, demand for a Harmony education is very strong, with a statewide waiting list of more than 21,000 students.

To ensure quality instruction across the system, Harmony has invested in developing, and continuing to refine, a robust Human Capital Management System (HCMS) to attract, retain, and grow strong educators. Research is clear – and Harmony agrees – that the single most important school-related factor affecting student outcomes is teacher quality, with the quality of the school leader the second most important determinant.<sup>1</sup> Harmony’s HCMS is designed to enable educators to understand and grow in the “Harmony way” of instruction and to be differentially supported and rewarded according to their needs and outcomes, with positive impact on retention. Harmony therefore thinks carefully about its approach to compensation, professional development, and career pathways. All educators are eligible for a comprehensive, equitable compensation package including base salary, benefits, bonuses, and stipends. Bonuses recognize and reward exceptional student results, and stipends recognize and reward additional commitments and contributions that enable broader system impact along with enabling career growth, such as supporting curriculum development or mentorship of colleagues.

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<sup>1</sup> Numerous organizations and research institutions have highlighted the importance of quality educators on academic achievement: of teachers, including [Editorial Projects in Education Research Center](#), [Carnegie Corporation](#), and [Public Impact](#); and of school leaders, including the [Wallace Foundation](#) and [American Institutes for Research](#).

## 2016 TIF Project Narrative: Harmony Supporting Top Educators Program

A core component of the HCMS is performance development, with educator evaluation informing differentiated professional development and supports. Harmony communicates and implements its instructional approach in a cohesive and unified way, with guidelines for how lesson planning and grading, professional development, evaluation systems, and coaching practices are put in place in each school. At the same time, it believes in providing educators with sufficient autonomy within these guidelines to personalize instruction for their students and works with its educators in deepening their skills. In determining where individual educators are in their practice, and what supports and autonomies they would most benefit from, Harmony values a transparent, clearly communicated evaluation system, so that all educators understand what factors determine individual rewards and development opportunities. Its structured evaluation process ties closely to unique career pathways, growth goals, and leadership roles that encourage staff to stretch themselves or to take advantage of additional scaffolding when needed.

The key challenge for Harmony (and objective for this project) is effectively supporting its large number of educators to become *more* effective and remain at Harmony, recognizing varying levels of experience and skills and ~700 new teachers entering the system each year (due to growth, attrition *and* significant educator mobility through the Harmony system). The challenge compounds given Harmony's unique instructional requirements: Harmony's model is grounded in many advanced or "second order" teaching skills that require support and training for even experienced educators. For example, two centerpieces of Harmony's 2012 successful Race to the Top-District (RTT-D) initiative – interdisciplinary, project-based learning that ties together student work across subjects, and "custom day" student scheduling that flexibly groups students based on their mastery of content – go beyond basic classroom management and data-driven instruction. Harmony's HCMS has been designed with this in mind: to enable a diverse

## **2016 TIF Project Narrative: Harmony Supporting Top Educators Program**

group of teachers to effectively deliver 21<sup>st</sup> century instruction to students, they themselves need to experience 21<sup>st</sup> century learning. Adult learning platforms and mechanisms aspire to be just as personalized, flexible, and learner-centered as those for students, with training and coaching provided on both foundational and “second order” skills.

Harmony also believes that its teachers cannot be “in it” alone, and appreciates the critical role that principals, assistant principals, and other instructional support staff play in the work. Harmony asks a great deal of this group, to directly support the instructional model, provide feedback and formal professional development to teachers and other educators in the system, create and cultivate a learning culture that enables teachers to be successful, and engage parents and the community in student learning. School leaders are responsible for retaining and growing Harmony teachers, and need to be able to receive and provide differentiated support in the same way teachers are asked to provide differentiated support to their students.

In sum, Harmony’s HCMS is designed to equitably support, grow, and reward educators across the system, as a critical enabler of excellent teaching and, ultimately, excellent outcomes: preparing each student to be productive and successful in college and career.

### ***Information generated by Harmony’s Evaluation and Support System informs a variety of human capital decisions***

In its winning Race to the Top-District (RTT-D) bid, Harmony articulated a plan to redesign its evaluation and support systems to better align with personalized learning approaches, include frequent feedback intervals, and incorporate multiple measures of student achievement. Harmony’s objective was to make a meaningful shift toward defining what great instruction looks like and prioritizing educator growth and continuous improvement, and away from the compliance culture that had helped ensure consistency in teaching in Harmony’s early days of high-paced growth. The plan called for system-wide roll-out in the 2014-15 school year

## **2016 TIF Project Narrative: Harmony Supporting Top Educators Program**

following a pilot year in 2013-14. Harmony has successfully implemented the plan, with robust evaluation systems for both teachers and principals in place for the last two full school years.

The Harmony Teacher Evaluation and Support System (H-TESS) evaluates teachers based on three domains of performance: (1) Instructional Quality, (2) Student Growth and Achievement, and (3) Professional Roles and Responsibilities.

To assess the first domain, (1) Instructional Quality, Harmony collaborated with The Danielson Group, a group of education consultants, to focus on five of the components found in Charlotte Danielson's research-supported Framework for Teaching, which has been adopted as the single model, or one of several approved models, in over 20 states.<sup>2</sup> Harmony's standards prioritize instructional quality through identifying good practices, pinpointing areas of need, and providing tools to address those areas (see Appendix F). Feedback and observations are an essential component. All teachers receive at least two full observations per year from an administrator and coach, as well as at least eight walkthroughs per year; new and emerging teachers receive at least three full observations. Through observations enabled by a simple yet robust rubric, teachers are given specific areas to focus on, support from the observer, and performance level descriptors from the framework. Principals are trained and certified using Teachscape Focus, a platform that provides training and calibration on the Danielson rubric, so that they can accurately evaluate teaching practice and provide meaningful feedback. Teachscape Reflect provides administrators a reporting platform to reflect on teacher needs and make decisions on teacher placement (or promotion) and professional development.

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<sup>2</sup> Numerous studies including MET and Chicago's Excellence in Teaching Pilot have independently validated Danielson's Framework for Teaching.

## **2016 TIF Project Narrative: Harmony Supporting Top Educators Program**

Today, assessment of (2) Student Growth and Achievement consists of objective assessment measures tied to the Texas accountability system (see Appendix F, Student Growth and Achievement). For teachers in tested subjects, goals are set on both overall student proficiency and closing the achievement gap between sub-groups on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR), on student growth as measured by percent of students meeting or exceeding individual growth targets on the Northwest Evaluation Association Measures of Academic Progress (NWEA MAP), and participation and achievement on Advanced Placement (AP) exams. Teachers with strong performance in this domain are eligible for performance bonuses of up to \$1,750 in Harmony's Performance-Based Compensation System (PBCS) (see p.24). Harmony feels most confident in providing financial incentives for objective goals, and therefore those teaching non-tested subjects or special populations are only individually evaluated on the Instructional Quality and Professional Roles and Responsibilities domains today and are limited to smaller bonuses of \$250 focused on school-wide performance on Texas state measures. Through this TIF project, Harmony plans to innovate to further assess and reward effectiveness of more of its teachers through piloting measures to better track student achievement outside tested subjects.

The (3) Professional Roles and Responsibilities domain is assessed by principals based on a simple, Harmony-developed rubric (see Appendix F) that includes aspects of adherence to Harmony's instructional model (e.g., following scope and sequence), as well as maintaining practice and credentials to teach effectively (e.g., participating in professional development activities, keeping up with requirements for certification) and supporting the broader school and team (e.g., collaborating with colleagues). Taken together with the above two domains, school

## 2016 TIF Project Narrative: Harmony Supporting Top Educators Program

leaders have a holistic assessment of teacher effectiveness that combines their observations of instructional and professional contributions with objective measures of student performance.

Harmony took a similar approach to principal evaluation, identifying a well-researched evaluation framework that was set up to flexibly support different school models. The rubric addresses proven inadequacies of previous evaluation systems and practices,<sup>3</sup> and stresses principal competencies recognized by national leadership standards and shown to have a statistically significant link between principal leadership and student achievement<sup>4</sup>.

During the 2014-15 school year, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) planned the development and pilot of the Texas Principal Evaluation and Support System (T-PESS) based on new principal standards set by the state. According to TEA, these standards “will also inform and support state-wide educator preparation, mentorship, professional development, and career pathway programs and systems that strengthen the educational leadership workforce in the state of Texas.”<sup>5</sup> Harmony is collaborating alongside other Texas school systems in piloting this system, to great reception from Harmony’s regional (“district”) superintendents and principals.

The resulting system has three measures of principal effectiveness: (1) a rubric capturing effective practices, (2) progress in achieving goals, and (3) student growth. The rubric is composed of five standards: (1) Instructional Leadership, (2) Human Capital, (3) Executive Leadership, (4) School Culture, and (5) Strategic Operations. Along with the rubric, Harmony has an artifact list and guidelines (see Appendix F) to collect evidence aligned to each standard

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<sup>3</sup> Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern, & Keeling, 2009; and Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> ISLLC, 2008; Waters & Cameron, 2007; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003.

<sup>5</sup> TEA: Texas Principal Evaluation and Support System FAQ, October 17, 2014.

## **2016 TIF Project Narrative: Harmony Supporting Top Educators Program**

to connect the evaluation system closely to Harmony’s instructional approach and HCMS overall. At the beginning of the year, principals complete a self-evaluation, and then meet with their area superintendent to review and discuss strengths and areas of improvement. The principal designs an individual professional growth plan and is evaluated twice each year on progress toward and attainment of goals. Evaluation on T-PESS today impacts retention and dismissal of principals, potential promotion of principals into further leadership roles in Harmony’s growing system, and suggested supports or professional development opportunities (see p. 27-29 for examples). Harmony expects that a principal who performs well on all five evaluation standards will see strong student outcomes at his or her school. Therefore, Harmony’s PBCS is focused on school-wide outcomes for its administrators, with a bonus for every Texas state distinction awarded.

Taken together, H-TESS and T-PESS drive decisions around many aspects of Harmony’s HCMS, including offers to return, placement and mobility decisions that encourage high-quality educators to move to high-need schools, professional development offerings aligned to co-developed goals, performance bonuses, and invitations to Harmony’s Aspiring Leaders Academy (see p.14) and other supports to pursue different pathways in school and system leadership, instructional leadership, or classroom mastery.

***Harmony focuses on human capital strategies that ensure high-need schools are able to attract and retain effective educators***

Harmony has developed a range of human capital strategies to ensure that high-need schools are able to attract and retain effective educators, with the belief that a mix of additional supports, professional development, and incentives will positively impact educators and help them, and their students, accelerate their growth. These include (1) a “Priority Schools program”

**2016 TIF Project Narrative: Harmony Supporting Top Educators Program**

for the highest-risk, highest-need schools and (2) stipends for teaching hard-to-staff subjects and transferring to new and hard-to-staff schools.

Harmony’s (1) “Priority Schools program” identifies the 8-9 highest-risk schools (generally based on STAAR achievement over a period of time) and provides more intensive supports and services, such as additional visits from coaches and additional interventionists to support teachers in

**Figure 1: Priority Schools 2015-16**

differentiating instruction, as well as incentives through a bonus program. Each priority campus

School	% Free and reduced-price lunch	2014-15 Texas State Accountability Results	Enrollment
<b>Harmony Science Academy – Austin</b>	86.7%	Met Standard	564
<b>Harmony Science Academy – Houston</b>	85.1%	Met Standard	347
<b>Harmony School of Excellence – Endeavor</b>	82.6%	Met Standard	523
<b>Harmony School of Innovation – San Antonio</b>	77.7%	Met Standard	587
<b>Harmony School of Innovation – Austin</b>	76.9%	Needs Improvement	463
<b>Harmony School of Innovation – Laredo</b>	76.2%	Met Standard	534
<b>Harmony Science Academy – Lubbock</b>	71.7%	Met Standard	290
<b>Harmony Science Academy – Odessa</b>	60.9%	Met Standard	432

receives a \$50,000 allocation for distribution (see Appendix F, Figure 2. Distribution Table for Priority Schools Bonus) across the entire *retained* school team and the District Administrators (see operating structure on p.32) supporting that school if the school meets Texas state standards. This program has been highly successful, with only one of the current eight priority schools (see Figure 1 above)—and only one of the 46 schools in the system—not meeting Texas state standards in the most recent school year. Supporting and expanding this Priority Schools program is one way Harmony hopes to attract and retain effective educators at its highest-need schools (see p. 19).

Harmony uses (2) stipends to help attract teachers to the hardest-to-staff subject areas and locations. STEM instructors (e.g., Math, Science, Computer and Technology Applications) and educators supporting special populations (e.g., bilingual, gifted and talented, ESL, and Special Education Teachers) receive an additional \$2,000 annually, while experienced Harmony

## **2016 TIF Project Narrative: Harmony Supporting Top Educators Program**

educators moving at least 50 miles to fill hard-to-staff openings receive a one-time moving stipend. If the move is requested by the District Superintendent to fill a need at a Priority School, Harmony provides an additional \$2,000 alongside the moving stipend.

### **II. QUALITY OF PROJECT DESIGN**

#### ***(1) Project is part of a comprehensive effort to improve teaching and learning and support rigorous academic standards***

Harmony is an organization devoted to continuous improvement. One of its priorities has been to increase the effectiveness of its educator team to support the multi-faceted and rigorous standards to which it holds its students. Two years ago, Harmony initiated a comprehensive planning process assessing all aspects of the organization, including student outcomes and human capital systems, culminating in the development of a 2020 Strategic Plan that has since been guiding the system's growth. Two of the five major priorities in the strategic plan are (1) Goal 1: Maximize academic achievement of every child and (2) Goal 2: Recruit, develop, and retain a talented workforce, each achieved through four strategies and nine sub-initiatives. These goals, and the strategies and initiatives to achieve them, were developed with a deep level of stakeholder input on Harmony's direction and needs (see p. 36 for details).

Harmony has been successfully implementing the strategies related to Goals 1 and 2 (see Appendix F: Figures 2 and 3) over the last two years. These two goals are highly interdependent. All four strategies in Goal 2 enable Harmony's efforts to maximize academic achievement, and Goal 1 includes the strategy to develop and implement a comprehensive teacher evaluation and professional development program (see p.27-28). Goal 2 strategies include:

- Strategy 1: Reorient the human capital department to focus on strategic human capital needs.

In 2014, Harmony brought on a Chief Talent Officer, who has led the shift from compliance

## **2016 TIF Project Narrative: Harmony Supporting Top Educators Program**

toward a more strategic, talent-centered, performance orientation. In partnership with the Academic team, the department has led several detailed needs assessments to enable strategic revisions to professional development, compensation, and staffing practices, and will lead much of the work described in this application.

- Strategy 2: Build a pipeline of high-quality teachers and administrators that reflect and support the “Harmony way.” Harmony expanded its team and adopted software to design and implement a system-wide recruitment approach, with greater structure around branding and marketing, partnerships with universities, a teacher referral program, and training to improve consistency. Harmony has also built a system-wide teacher and principal selection model and is currently building out the professional development for administrators and hiring managers to improve consistency.
- Strategy 3: Increase staff satisfaction and retention by recognizing and rewarding highly effective teachers and administrators. Harmony conducted a compensation study in the 2015-16 school year to clarify and refine its compensation design, starting with a re-articulation of its compensation philosophy. The core values grounding the philosophy—equity, transparency, excellence, and commitment—are the foundation for all Harmony compensation structures and practices. Harmony refined its salary scales and processes, increasing compensation for 25% of teachers and 14% of principals to better align to external market benchmarks, and honed its performance-based bonus system as a means to reward highly effective teachers and administrators. In addition, Harmony broadened its leadership role offerings for high-performing teachers to enable career progression through unique career pathways and growth and development opportunities, and looks to further clarify and integrate those with the rest of its HCMS. Harmony is still early in the

## **2016 TIF Project Narrative: Harmony Supporting Top Educators Program**

process, but is building out three pathways for teachers: (1) school and system administration, (2) curricular leadership (e.g., curriculum coaches and directors), and (3) instructional coaching and development (e.g., department chair or mentor teacher).

- Strategy 4: Strengthen organizational management practices by investing in administrator development and evaluation. Harmony refined its administrator onboarding, adopted the Texas principal evaluation system, and is now in the process of adapting the principal evaluation for its assistant principals and other administrators.

Harmony's work to strengthen its human capital foundation has resulted in positive feedback from educators, in part due to its engagement efforts throughout each initiative planning and implementation cycle. In a recent teacher survey conducted by Harmony's board, 42% of teachers said that the recent compensation work would "make a big difference in a positive way" regarding retention, with another 37% commending the changes.

Harmony has invested in significant human capital initiatives over the past several years, and is committed to continuing to build on that foundation. However, Harmony sees the need to invest further to (1) improve instruction of *all* educators, building both foundational skills and second-order instructional skills through differentiated supports; and (2) support career progression, meaningfully increasing educator engagement and retention as well as enhancing system flexibility to align career progression goals with school system needs (see Current Situation/Need in logic model on page 15). By addressing both needs simultaneously, our aspiration is to retain educators in the system as we invest to make them more effective.

**Harmony's application for the TIF Program builds on recent efforts to strengthen the entire Harmony system, including Harmony's RTT-D grant, its Strategic Plan 2020, and**

## 2016 TIF Project Narrative: Harmony Supporting Top Educators Program

**significant investments in educator professional development, and is rooted in a desire to accelerate and deepen that progress.**

*(2) Services provided by the proposed project involve collaboration of appropriate partners for maximizing effectiveness*

Harmony has an excellent track record of engaging with appropriate partners to maximize the effectiveness of its HCMS. Harmony partnered with Gallup and the Haberman Educational Foundation to establish a system-wide approach to talent acquisition and recruitment. Haberman trains principals on teacher selection through a program called “Star Teacher Interview” and Gallup’s TeacherInsight Assessment provides a consistent source of information across Harmony districts and schools. Harmony partnered with several organizations to develop a research-based evaluation approach and support systems for educators and to establish a common platform to improve instructional practices. Since Harmony adopted the Framework for Teaching by Charlotte Danielson, The Danielson Group has trained Harmony administrators, instructional coaches, and teachers on topics ranging from observation skills to eliminating bias during evaluations to learning-focused conversations. Danielson training is also a major component of new teacher onboarding. Harmony partnered with Teachscape, which has developed several systems to support professional development, to develop an online management platform that has further enabled Harmony to implement and manage all aspects of H-TESS, from observer certification and calibration to personalized professional development plans. Finally, Harmony has leveraged partnerships to enable a more differentiated approach to teacher professional development, including a partnership with National Math and Science Initiative (NMSI) and Lead4ward to provide intense professional development training for emerging teacher-leaders. 180 teachers across disciplines have completed the 14-day program.

## **2016 TIF Project Narrative: Harmony Supporting Top Educators Program**

In addition to the partners named above, Harmony has identified several high-quality organizations who could support its work through the proposed TIF project, subject to further conversations. To deepen and differentiate professional development for teachers (see Lever 1 in the logic model, below), Harmony is exploring partnerships with Getting Smart, a nationally recognized education design firm; with The Buck Institute for Education, which developed a gold-standard project-based learning framework that inspired aspects of Harmony's instructional model, to train its teachers on project design and implementation via Project-Based Learning World and Leadership Academies; and with Rice University STEM Center to bring professional development modules to STEM teachers tailored to their individual needs and interests.

To deepen and differentiate professional development for administrators (see Lever 2), Harmony proposes to expand several existing relationships: with The Texas Education Agency's (TEA) Education Service Centers, which have helped to provide principal evaluation training as well as direct coaching to principals connected to adoption of T-PESS and which plan to expand related professional development; with the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), which currently supports Harmony leadership development programs including the Aspiring Leaders Academy and summer professional development for school leaders, to provide additional training throughout the school year; and with local universities such as University of Houston-Clear Lake and Lamar University to provide coaching supports to more Harmony educators in high-need schools.

To enhance consistency in career pathways (see Lever 3), Harmony is exploring partnerships with BloomBoard, the leading professional development platform for empowering educator growth, and Digital Promise, a nonprofit organization dedicated to accelerating innovation in education. BloomBoard and Digital Promise have teamed to provide a catalogue of

## 2016 TIF Project Narrative: Harmony Supporting Top Educators Program

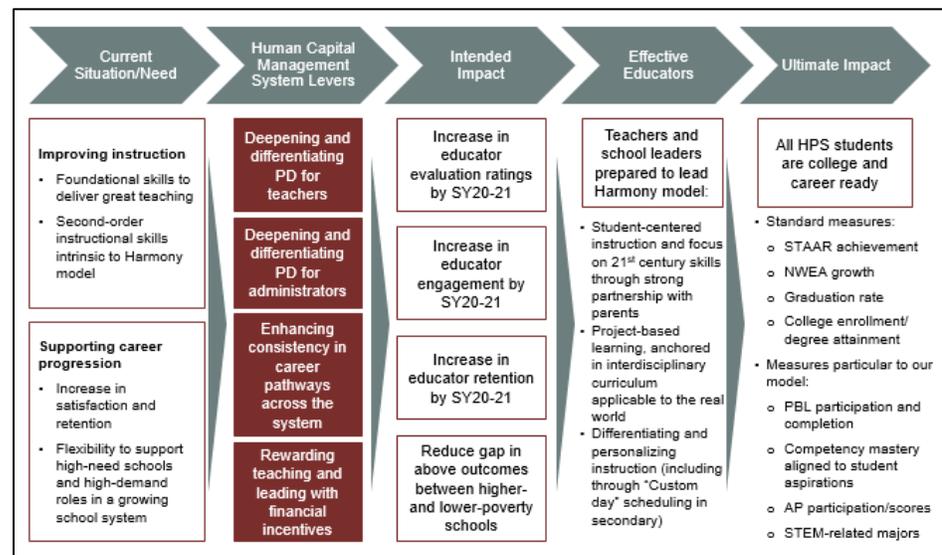
professional development micro-credentials for K-12 educators, which Harmony seeks to leverage to recognize and reward educators for their accomplishments and enable them to steer their own professional and career development.

### (3) Extent to which the proposed project is supported by a strong theory

Harmony sees educator effectiveness as the most important school-related factor affecting student outcomes, and has identified two foundational human capital needs to raising outcomes across the

system: (1) improving instructional quality of both new and veteran educators, and (2) supporting career progression of its effective

**Figure 2: Harmony's TIF Project Logic Model**



educators (see p. 14 and model below). Harmony has thereby identified four key levers to drive system-wide change, all informed by stakeholder feedback and comprehensive efforts to date:

(1) Deepening and differentiating professional development for teachers, (2) Deepening and differentiating professional development for administrators, (3) Enhancing consistency in career pathways across the system, and (4) Rewarding teaching and leading with financial incentives.

Harmony looks to these levers to increase educator evaluation ratings, educator engagement, and retention, and the approach taken is intended to particularly impact higher-need schools, reducing gaps between lower- and higher-poverty schools for each of these outcomes.

## 2016 TIF Project Narrative: Harmony Supporting Top Educators Program

### *HCMS Lever 1: Deepening and differentiating professional development for teachers*

Per Harmony's Educator Support Framework (see p.28), Harmony has identified a significant opportunity to improve both content and delivery of its professional development curriculum and coaching supports to better address foundational and "second-order" instructional skill-building differentiated to teacher skills and context. The three aspects of its instructional approach that would most benefit from differentiation, reflecting the varying experience and skill levels across the educator group, are:

- Student-centered instruction and focus on 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, both academic and social-emotional, through strong partnership with parents
- "Custom day" scheduling, anchored in differentiating and personalizing instruction (e.g., flipped classrooms, assessing and intervening real-time with dynamic response)
- Project-based learning, anchored in interdisciplinary curriculum applicable to the real world, and requiring tight integration across English Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies programming

This TIF project work involves (1) deepening and differentiating content and (2) enabling broader access to the content. For (1), Harmony plans to mobilize its teacher leaders and external partners to develop a series of content modules that build on each other through a competency-based progression, differentiated by elementary and secondary school needs. For example, project-based learning for secondary grades "101" focuses on building foundational skills and implementing short-term projects within a discipline; "201" focuses on designing and implementing longer-term, interdisciplinary projects; "301" focuses on designing and facilitating student-led, semester-long, multi-faceted projects that span in-school and out-of school time.

## **2016 TIF Project Narrative: Harmony Supporting Top Educators Program**

These modules will be integrated into existing development options and made available to educators (see Lever 3 below for detail on integration with evaluation and career pathways).

To enable system-wide access (2) to differentiated content, and especially to connect teachers at different stages to each other across schools (e.g., there may only be one educator on a given campus exploring “301-level” differentiation techniques), Harmony plans to develop a 24/7, easily accessible resource hub with video examples and project artifacts, as well as online professional development modules and collaboration platforms. Harmony has already begun to develop an online hub for its special education content, and aims to use TIF resources to dramatically escalate the speed at which schools will be able to access a greater depth and breadth of resources, allowing for access to new content by the 2017-18 school year.

Educator support for this investment is strong. TIF project input from teachers highlighted particular interest in (1) increased differentiation based on teacher skill and context (e.g., different, yet aligned, video articles and artifacts for project-based learning for elementary and secondary grades) and (2) real-time access to real examples and artifacts. In the words of one teacher, “Video examples, project artifacts, and a professional development resource hub would create practical and useful curricular supports for teachers”; and of another, “Sometimes ideas seem abstract, so if we can see these in action in real classrooms across Harmony, I believe that would serve as a beneficial tool to better serving our students.”

*HCMS Lever 2: Deepening and differentiating professional development for administrators*

“The success of the students depends greatly on the impact of the teacher. The success of the teacher can greatly depend on the impact of the principal. I believe that, ultimately, the principal is the most important factor in the success of the students. IF the principal is able to bring a

## **2016 TIF Project Narrative: Harmony Supporting Top Educators Program**

positive culture to the teachers and help foster an environment of growth and passion in his or her teachers, then that will directly trickle down to the students.” – Harmony teacher

Harmony’s model asks a great deal from administrators, to be strong instructional leaders and models as well as executives, culture-builders, operators, and people leaders (see T-PESS on p.6-8). As with teachers, Harmony’s growth as a school system has led to a large number of administrators new to their role alongside more experienced ones, necessitating deeper and differentiated development for this group as well. To note, investment in administrator professional development received the strongest support from both teachers *and* administrators of all proposed TIF investments.

Harmony’s proposed TIF project therefore includes two primary components: (1) a coaching program for new administrators as well as those identified as needing greater support and (2) an expansion of professional development offerings on three of the five T-PESS domains: Instructional Leadership (e.g., providing feedback, sharing advanced techniques), School Culture (e.g., extending learning environment beyond the classroom), and Human Capital (e.g., creating a culture where teachers are motivated, retained, and can focus on instruction). Harmony plans to have its Director of Leadership Development work closely with outside partners (see p.13-15) for initial content development, delivery, and coaching, leveraging school leadership expertise from the field.

### *HCMS Lever 3: Enhancing consistency in career pathways across the system*

Harmony deeply believes that investments made in improving educator effectiveness compound if those educators extend their careers in Harmony schools. This area of work, therefore, is focused on enabling the adults in the Harmony system to take ownership of their development and careers. Today, teachers and principals have a set of standards to assess

## 2016 TIF Project Narrative: Harmony Supporting Top Educators Program

performance within their roles, and a growing set of professional development opportunities aligned to those standards. However, teachers' and administrators' systems and opportunities do not yet link together, and career pathways are difficult to track. Per Harmony's Educator Support Framework (see p.28), Harmony sees the need to develop a system for "assigning" development opportunities connected to both evaluation and career pathways and integrating it into the HCMS. As teachers noted, "There should be a tracking system to determine the needs and completions of professional development," and "It is important for those with aspirations to know 'how' to move upward."

Developing this system as part of the TIF project will require: (1) aligning competency systems across all educators to enable greater transparency in career pathway connections between evaluation systems, and (2) building out Harmony's technical platforms to better support learner-centered assignment and tracking of educator development. Harmony will first need to finalize evaluation approaches for its assistant principals and counselors, and then identify links across the evaluation systems and flesh out connections to specific career pathways based on best practices. Harmony plans to draw on both an internal educator design team and an external partner with deep experience in competency design and career pathways to build out requirements for an integrated learning management platform (that may incorporate a micro-badging approach), ultimately driving platform selection and implementation.

### *HCMS Lever 4: Rewarding teaching and leading with financial incentives*

While Levers 1-3 *enable* educators to continuously improve teaching and leading, Lever 4 focuses on *recognizing and rewarding* efforts to do so. Harmony has a PBCS and Priority Schools program already in place, along with a stipend fund reflecting the extra contributions and commitments that educators make—all valued and appreciated by educators. As described in

## 2016 TIF Project Narrative: Harmony Supporting Top Educators Program

more detail on page 27, Harmony's proposed TIF project aims to improve its approach in three ways, all strongly supported by educators: (1) Piloting opportunities to expand definitions of student achievement and growth to better recognize and reward teachers outside of traditionally tested classrooms, (2) Assessing its goal-setting approach for standardized tests to balance aspiration and feasibility, and (3) Developing a sustainable long-term funding strategy that provides for an expanded rewards system.

Per Harmony's logic model, Levers 1-4 will expand, strengthen, and sustain Harmony's approach to human capital development, resulting in a more effective educator base and higher educator engagement and retention levels *across all eligible schools*. More energized educators, better equipped to teach the "Harmony way" and to support themselves and their peers in striving toward instructional excellence, will lead to improved student outcomes across the system. Career pathways that provide increased flexibility to match educator development with system needs, and reward systems that encourage and recognize effectiveness particularly in high-need schools, will lead to a narrowing gap between higher- and lower-poverty schools.

### ***(4) Proposed project will build on efforts to improve outcomes, using existing funding streams***

This TIF project builds on and benefits from Harmony's \$30 million RTT-D grant, awarded by the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) in 2013. RTT-D funding enabled Harmony to expand project-based learning and differentiated learning pathways at all middle and high schools across the system (which now also serves as a model for elementary schools); build a world-class, technology-enabled database that powers information-sharing for students, teachers, administrators, and parents; and develop customized data dashboards that draw instructional and non-cognitive student outcomes from multiple sources. As part of RTT-D, Harmony redesigned its teacher and principal evaluation systems to better align with personalized learning

## **2016 TIF Project Narrative: Harmony Supporting Top Educators Program**

approaches, include frequent feedback intervals, and incorporate multiple measures of student achievement. Harmony followed this work with a deep assessment of professional development needs in 2014-15, leading to significant investments in its professional development system (see p.27) and a compensation study in 2015-16 (see p.11).

These investments in instructional approach, as well as in educator evaluation, development, and compensation, serve as the bedrock for Harmony's entire TIF program. The shifts in instruction that RTT-D enabled, along with the 2014-15 needs assessment, highlighted areas for additional support and development for teachers (Lever 1) *and* the need to differentiate adult learning through a data-driven, competency-based, personalized learning platform for educators (Levers 1-3). Implementation of the principal evaluation system identified areas for further investment in administrator development (Lever 2). And lessons learned from the development of the PBCS and recent research into and adjustments to compensation design have informed the latest thinking to expand and sustain Harmony's compensation approach (Lever 4).

In sum, the 2013 RTT-D grant and complementary investments made across the Harmony system have laid much of the groundwork for this proposed TIF project, and have helped inform the vision for taking data-driven, differentiated learning to the next level for students and educators.

### **Requirement 1: Implementation of Performance-based Compensation System (PBCS)**

Harmony's current PBCS was developed with deep engagement from its educators, and continues to solicit input for any significant redesign. TIF is no exception: Harmony engaged all teachers and principals in developing this proposal (see p.36 for more detail).

## 2016 TIF Project Narrative: Harmony Supporting Top Educators Program

Harmony explicitly recognizes and rewards exceptional performance and contributions that enable excellent student outcomes through the Performance Bonus program, in which every

campus and district educator has access to a bonus between \$250 and \$1,750, depending on role and achievement of specific goals. Goals are focused on objective student achievement and growth measures aligned with Texas state goals, such as STAAR

**Figure 3: Performance Bonus System**

Assignment	Category	Description and Bonus Goal	Bonus amount
K-2	NWEA MAP	65% of students who met NWEA MAP Reading & Math growth goal (\$500 per subject)	\$1000 (per person)
3 through 11	STAAR	Teacher goal met - 25% of those who did not pass STAAR last year will pass this year.	\$1000 (per person)
3 through 10	NWEA MAP	65% of students who met NWEA MAP growth goal (Reading and Math Average)	\$500 (per person)
3 through 11	Distinction Designation	When campus earns a distinction designation in a subject area, all teachers in that department will get bonus	\$250 (per person)
Counselor	Distinction Designation	When campus earns a distinction designation in Postsecondary Readiness, all counselors will get bonus	\$500 (per person)
AP Teachers	AP Exams	AP Goal Met per subject (55% passing rate)	\$250 (per person)
AP Teachers	AP Exams	# of students with a score of 3 or higher taught by that teacher in that subject area	\$20 (per student)
Campus Admin	Distinction Designation	Principals and All AP's will get bonus for each Distinction Designation campus earns	\$250 (per distinction)
District Coach	STAAR	District Goal met - 25% of those who did not pass STAAR last year will pass this year	\$1000 (per person)
District Data Analyst / Director of Academics	STAAR	35% of bonus amount when District goal in Reading is met, 35% of bonus amount when District goal in Math is met, 15% of bonus amount when District goal in Science is met, and 15% of bonus amount when District goal in Social Studies is met.	\$1000 (per person)
Non-tested teachers and staff	Designation	When campus earns at least one distinction designation, those who did not get any other bonus will qualify for bonus	\$250 (per person)
Special Ed & ESL	District PBM stage	When district stage for Special Education and ESL is one or zero, all staff in those departments will qualify for bonus.	\$500 (Stage 1) \$1500 (No Stage)

achievement, student growth on NWEA MAP, AP exam scores, and distinctions awarded by the state (see Appendix F: Figure 7). For example, a 4<sup>th</sup> grade math teacher could earn \$1,000 for working to close the gap in STAAR achievement, plus \$500 for meeting student growth goals on NWEA MAP and \$250 for school distinction designation in her subject area, with a maximum of \$1,750 possible. Similarly, an assistant principal earns \$250 for every campus distinction designation, so with seven possible designations, could earn \$1,750. Four of the TIF-eligible campuses earned all seven designations in 2015, out of 153 total campuses in the entire state achieving this same level of quality. By tying its bonus system to rigorous, objective, holistic, and state-aligned metrics, Harmony rewards its educators for working together to improve their instructional and professional practices and achieve school and system goals for students. And

## 2016 TIF Project Narrative: Harmony Supporting Top Educators Program

the investment is paying off: the bonus system is widely cited by high-performing educators as a key incentive to stay at Harmony (whereas compensation, historically, has been a significant driver of undesired attrition, especially for teachers).

Harmony would like to improve its PBCS in three ways:

- **Pilot opportunities to expand definition of student achievement and growth to better accommodate teachers outside of traditional tested classrooms:** Today, Harmony only measures student achievement and growth of individual teachers in tested subjects, which accounts for only half of its teachers. The maximum other teachers can earn is \$250 for a campus-level performance goal of achieving at least one distinction. Harmony plans to offer three different pilots that high-need schools can opt into to assess feasibility and meaningfulness of a variety of measurement approaches for student achievement and growth: (1) Harmony-created pre-and post-assessments in designated subject area, (2) portfolio assessment against a Harmony-created rubric, and (3) assessment of quantity and quality of project-based learning opportunities. Over the next three years, Harmony will design, pilot, and refine these approaches, and then determine which are viable to scale across the system. Harmony also plans to share its learnings with peer districts across the country, given the dearth of proven practices in this domain today.
- **Assess goal-setting approach for standardized tests to balance aspiration and feasibility:** Teacher feedback suggests that specific goals tied to the STAAR assessment, which is a relatively new standardized test (fully implemented only this past year), can be mis-calibrated (i.e., either impossible to achieve or not as aspirational as they should be) and therefore do not always provide the incentives desired. As part of this project, Harmony proposes conducting a study of its current goal-setting approach on key test-

## **2016 TIF Project Narrative: Harmony Supporting Top Educators Program**

based measures to identify improvements that could be made in maximizing meaning and usefulness of performance-based bonuses, drawing on deep analysis of Harmony-wide performance on STAAR and NWEA-MAP and best practices implemented by comparable school systems.

- **Develop a sustainable long-term funding strategy for an expanded PBCS:** In exit surveys, highly effective educators leaving Harmony indicate that compensation is a primary factor in their departure, despite recent system-wide upgrades to compensation. Budget constraints are a factor: Harmony's Priority Schools program has been artificially limited to 8-9 schools, and the Performance Bonus program has capped maximum bonuses at \$1,750, despite data that suggests that \$3,000 would have more impact with top performers. Harmony would like to be able to better reward and retain its effective educators, but recognizes the risk inherent in setting aside any bonus pool and the need to develop a sustainable long-term approach that can better handle shifts in state funding streams. With this in mind, Harmony is exploring an engagement with Dini Spheris, a fundraising consultancy, to create a strategy to bring local communities into supporting its performance-based bonus system, focused on the dual priorities of supporting and rewarding excellent educators in *all* eligible schools and attracting, supporting, and retaining strong educators in highest-need schools through the Priority Schools system.

### **Requirement 2: Documentation of High-Need Schools**

Harmony aims to meet the needs of *all* students across the system, and makes extra effort to meet the needs of historically underserved populations. 36 of Harmony's 46 schools have at least 50% of their student populations receiving free and reduced-price lunch, and 19 schools have at least 70% of students receiving free and reduced-price lunch. While the HCMS

## **2016 TIF Project Narrative: Harmony Supporting Top Educators Program**

improvements to professional development and career pathways supports will likely benefit all of Harmony's teachers and students, the Performance-based Compensation System enhancements described in Requirement 1 will focus on schools with at least 50% receiving free and reduced-price lunch, and funds supporting the Priority Schools program will focus on the subset of high-need schools at risk of not meeting Texas standards (see Appendix B).

### **III. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SYSTEMS TO SUPPORT THE NEEDS OF TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS IDENTIFIED THROUGH THE EVAL. PROCESS**

Harmony has developed a comprehensive, research-based professional development framework and tools to support its educators. This Educator Support Framework (see p.28) emphasizes that the right content is effectively delivered to all teachers and administrators, with tight integration into a broader talent management system including evaluation and career pathways, and built-in mechanisms for continuous improvement.

Providing comprehensive and ongoing support to teachers is a priority. Today, all teachers participate in eight days of in-service before school and four days of in-service throughout the year. Harmony aims to include hands-on practice with new technologies and to include time to practice or rehearse new strategies and skills prior to returning to the classroom, and teachers have access to support from campus-based coaches and data analysts who model high-quality learner-centered instructional practices. Harmony's professional development model is built around deep knowledge of content and how to effectively teach that content using the Harmony Instructional Framework, further supported by the Harmony Teacher Evaluation and Support System (H-TESS). Modules are subject-specific and provide links between curriculum, assessment, instruction, and professional learning in the context of a specific content area. Through the lens of content area instruction, the needs of special populations are met through

## **2016 TIF Project Narrative: Harmony Supporting Top Educators Program**

collaboration between the content area and special programs departments in the development of professional development modules that will equip teachers with the necessary knowledge and strategies to effectively reach our students with disabilities, English language learners, and gifted student populations.

A recent focus of Harmony is providing more targeted and individualized professional development to teachers based on the components of the teacher evaluation and support system and identified areas of need (see p.4-8). A driver of Levers 1 and 3 of this TIF project (see p.28), this strategy is rooted in personalizing “adult learning” through individualized plans, and includes a variety of supports and opportunities such as online training and videos, external training sessions, access to mentor teachers and instructional coaches, stretch roles, and more.

Professional development is further differentiated through an emerging career pathways system that links stronger teacher-leaders with new and novice teachers, as well as offers them stretch opportunities (that include financial rewards via stipends). Effective teachers can opt into curricular leadership and instructional coaching and development roles to mentor new and developing teachers, write curriculum and lessons plans that other teachers can leverage, design professional development modules to spread effective techniques and strategies, and lead departments. In addition, effective educators have access to the Harmony Employee Education Program (HEEP), which supports employees in continuing their formal education.

Harmony promotes leadership development for rising and current administrators by providing a set of systematic, strategic, and tailored professional development opportunities. Major components of the leadership development program are (1) Harmony Aspiring Leadership Academy (HALA), a cohort-based program focused on expanding leadership and technical skills of educators preparing to take on the assistant principal and principal roles; (2) Leadership

## **2016 TIF Project Narrative: Harmony Supporting Top Educators Program**

Academy, a series of quarterly workshops for current principals and assistant principals that cover a variety of adaptive and technical skills based on identified educator needs; (3)

Leadership Summit, a summer program where all administrators gather for both inspiration and cohort-based collaboration time; and (4) New Campus Leader Summit, a summer onboarding and development program for new principals and assistant principals.

### ***Harmony uses disaggregated evaluation information to identify development needs***

Harmony prioritizes implementing quality professional development that directly impacts student achievement. Central office, district, and campus administrators analyze student assessment data and data provided by H-TESS to identify student needs—and how educators can better address those needs through collaboration, coaching, and supports. The examples below are indicative of the level of granularity Harmony regularly achieves in its approach to using evaluation data to inform professional development requirements.

As part of its effort to better integrate and automate H-TESS, Harmony has partnered with Teachscape, which provides online, self-paced, grade span supports connected to Harmony's Instructional Quality rubric, and trains and certifies instructional leaders for stronger, better-calibrated observation and evaluation. (94% of principals are certified by Teachscape, all in the past two years.) Harmony is able to cut information by individual teacher, by grade/subject, and by campus, and identify an appropriate response based on areas for improvement. At Harmony Science Academy-Dallas, for example, campus leaders used the summary reporting features in Teachscape Reflect to identify trends in teacher performance, finding consistently low scores in Questioning and Discussion Techniques. In response, campus administrators, with the support of district coaches, developed a training module on this topic and provided that training during a campus professional development day. Similarly, an

## 2016 TIF Project Narrative: Harmony Supporting Top Educators Program

identified need for improved Low English Proficiency (LEP) performance by the Houston South District Academic team led to a comprehensive effort including training for teachers and campus leaders as well as targeted support from instructional coaches. Both efforts led to improved performance from 2014-15 to 2015-16.

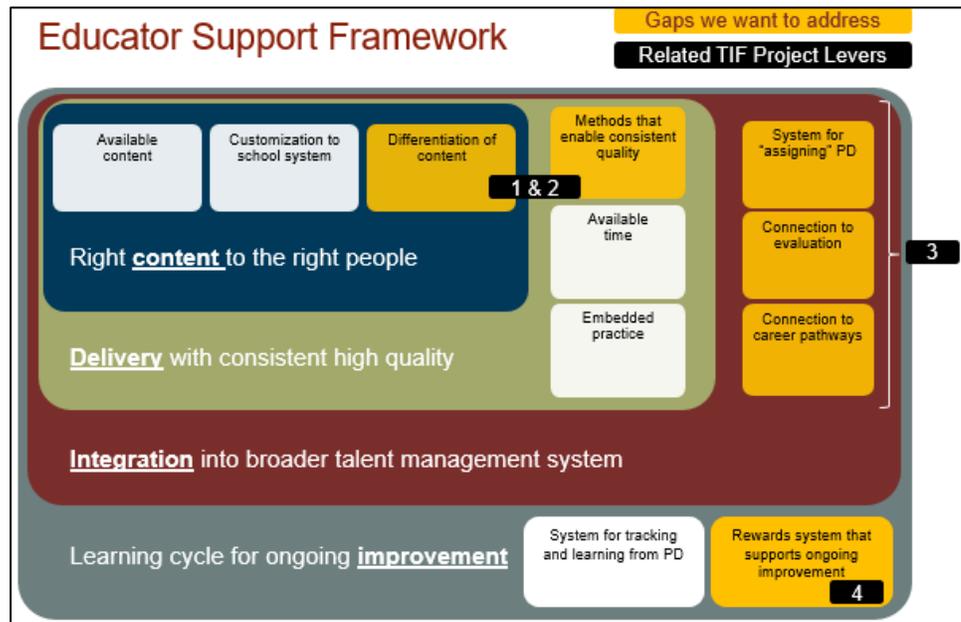
### *Harmony’s proposed TIF project directly works to address remaining needs*

Harmony’s instructional model requires a significant shift in traditional roles of teachers and students. Students drive self-regulated learning with teachers acting as learning facilitators and enablers, not simply as providers of information. Teachers must bring not only foundational classroom management and instructional skills, but also more sophisticated techniques to enable student-led, interdisciplinary, and project-based learning, as well as mastery-based adaptive learning in blended environments. As with teachers, Harmony’s growth as a school system has led to a large number of administrators new to their role alongside more experienced ones, necessitating deeper

and differentiated development for this group on dimensions of instructional leadership, school culture, and people leadership as well.

Using the Educator Support Framework as

**Figure 4: Educator Support Framework and Related Levers**



## **2016 TIF Project Narrative: Harmony Supporting Top Educators Program**

reference (see Figure 4), Harmony conducted a deep assessment of professional development needs in 2014-15, surveying all educators as well as conducting focus groups of teachers and administrators in multiple regions. This assessment clarified a need for greater differentiation of content for both teachers and administrators, delivery methods that ensure more consistent quality across schools, systems that allow for more personalized and targeted “assignment” to development opportunities and a stronger connection between development, evaluation, and career pathways, and rewards to promote continuous improvement. *As shown in Figure 4 above, each TIF Project Lever directly works to address the needs identified.*

### **IV. MANAGEMENT PLAN**

The TIF Management Plan builds off Harmony’s commitment to innovative excellence and its experience executing against big goals, including: successfully winning and managing a \$30 million RTT-D grant supporting 37 schools across 16 Texas cities; successfully managing a very complex \$14.5 million Texas STEM initiative since 2006 in 14 geographically distributed schools; and opening two or more new charter schools annually since 2006 (with support of a \$5 million Charter Schools Program Replication Grant in 2011). Harmony has learned several lessons from the above efforts and has explicitly incorporated these into its TIF plan, namely: (1) Seasoned executive team and experienced large-grant project manager, (2) Strengthened and strengthening organizational structure ready for next steps, and (3) An ambitious yet achievable timeline with clear project milestones and objectives.

#### ***Seasoned executive team and experienced large-grant project manager***

Harmony’s executive team has demonstrated experience in successfully managing large human capital projects as well as large federal grants. While the group collectively will be held accountable against the project outcomes outlined in the logic model, each team member holds

## **2016 TIF Project Narrative: Harmony Supporting Top Educators Program**

specific oversight and leadership responsibility for at least one Lever. High-level overviews of the executive team involved in the project can be found below (full resumes in Appendix D):

**Project Director, Burak Yilmaz:** Mr. Yilmaz is an experienced Project Director who will be dedicated to this project, overseeing the entire scope and reporting directly to the Superintendent of Schools. He currently serves as the Director of the RTT-D effort, which will provide a natural transition with the RTT-D project closing this year as the TIF work begins. A former Harmony STEM teacher, principal, and project lead on Harmony's recent professional development assessment, Mr. Yilmaz also brings experience in training, budgeting, stakeholder engagement, implementation, and grant reporting. He completed his undergraduate studies in mathematics, holds a master's degree in education, and will soon be completing his doctorate of education.

**Superintendent of Schools, Zekeriya Yuksel:** In his role as Superintendent, Mr. Yuksel bears ultimate responsibility for Harmony's academic and financial health. He will guide the success of the TIF project and ensure the activities are streamlined for programmatic and financial efficacy. Mr. Yuksel brings more than 20 years of educational experience in various administrative positions, including Principal, Area Superintendent, Director of Communication, and Chief Talent Officer. He holds a Bachelor's of Science in Physics Education and a Master's of Education degree in Educational Leadership.

**Associate Superintendent and Chief Academic Officer, Dr. Ozgur Ozer:** Dr. Ozer will play a key role in the design and implementation of all elements of the proposed TIF project, engaging educator stakeholders across the work and providing particular oversight over Lever 1. He is responsible for overseeing academic activities, including curriculum development and implementation, assessment and accountability, high school programs, special education services, and professional development. Dr. Ozer began his career as a science teacher at the first

## **2016 TIF Project Narrative: Harmony Supporting Top Educators Program**

Harmony campus in 2000, and became Harmony's first elementary school principal. In 2005. He holds a B.S. degree in Physics, M. Ed. degree, and Ed. D. degree in Curriculum and Instruction.

**Chief Talent Officer, Darren Polat:** In his current role, Mr. Polat will oversee the HCMS and lead project activities related to Lever 2 in particular, bringing deep expertise in academics and human capital. He is an experienced, award-winning teacher and administrator, with over 20 years in the traditional public and charter school system as a principal, curriculum director, and director for college counseling. Passionate about administrator development, Mr. Polat holds a master's degree in educational leadership, and has presented at conferences, seminars, training, and workshops for new and experienced administrators and principals.

**Director of Accountability, Dr. Ahmet Cetinkaya:** Dr. Cetinkaya will help evolve and execute Harmony's PBCS (Lever 4), including oversight of performance evaluation of educators, data analysis, and calculation of financial incentives. Dr. Cetinkaya has been an educator for 22 years in both public and private schools as a teacher, principal, and district level administrator. He holds a doctoral degree in educational leadership and holds Superintendent and Principal Certifications along with a Texas Educator Certificate.

**Director of Development, Bronwyn Beauchamp:** With strong relationships to local Texas funders and a deep understanding of Harmony's unique value to the community, Ms. Beauchamp will focus on ensuring the long-term sustainability of the proposed TIF project. She will lead the development of fundraising streams that will ensure Harmony's expanded PBCS is rewarding educators long after the TIF grant period is over (Lever 4). Ms. Beauchamp was brought on earlier this year as the Director of Development for private philanthropy at Harmony after dedicating the last 7 years to helping organizations such as Habitat for Humanity, Girl Scouts and Asia Society Texas Center achieve their philanthropic goals.

## **2016 TIF Project Narrative: Harmony Supporting Top Educators Program**

**Budget Management:** Burak Yilmaz, the dedicated Project Director, will manage budget tracking, analysis, and implementation with the support of Academics, Talent, and Finance Department staff. This team has worked together on grant management in the past and understands the requirements of large-scale budget management and implementation.

**Additional Capacity:** Harmony has budgeted for a dedicated, full-time TIF project manager to support Mr. Yilmaz, as well as to oversee Lever 3 in particular given the complexity of that work. This internal or external hire will bring human capital design experience, plus comfort working with third party consultants as needed. Harmony also plans to create additional staff capacity to ensure the high-quality, successful implementation of the proposed project, largely drawing on the in-house expertise of the Talent team and Academics team. Finally, the proposed project budget includes stop-gap capacity and expertise from third party consultants, who will support professional development content creation and delivery, competency and career path alignment, platform integration, and fundraising across all four Levers.

### ***Strengthened and strengthening organizational structure ready for next steps***

Harmony's successful growth over the past decade is due, in large part, to a thoughtful and responsive organizational structure. Harmony has mapped and communicated a clear set of roles, responsibilities, and decision rights across Central Office, District Offices, and campuses that ensures efficient and effective management and a deep fidelity to the model. These have been refined over time to ensure that processes, policies, and autonomies are complementary and strengthen overall operations. To this end, Harmony has begun to outline the roles that all three structures will play in the success of the proposed TIF project. A basic breakdown of responsibilities is included below, with a full org chart and responsibilities by function available in Appendix F (see *Harmony Org Structure* and *Figure 8. Functional Operating Model*).

## **2016 TIF Project Narrative: Harmony Supporting Top Educators Program**

- **Central Office:** Central Office provides direct support for all seven districts and 46 campuses by setting organization-wide and high-level regional strategy, standardizing policies and procedures, providing approaches, tools, and templates for talent and other functions that districts and campuses can adapt, building district and campus capacity, and holding campuses accountable for academic performance. Central Office will hold primary responsibility for implementation of the TIF project.
- **District Offices:** District Offices serve as a critical bridge between Central Office and campuses. Offices build academics capacity in campus leadership teams and teachers, provide operations and finance services to campuses to reduce administrative responsibilities and free school leaders to focus on student achievement, and manage regional external relations and community outreach. District Offices will ensure that the TIF project is implemented with an eye towards educator needs on their campuses.
- **Campus:** Harmony campuses are ultimately accountable for student outcomes, and are primarily focused on instruction and student achievement. Campus responsibilities include creating an effective learning environment for students, managing teacher recruitment and professional development, budget management, and tailoring approaches, tools, and templates provided by Harmony to specific campus needs. Campus leaders will benefit from TIF project supports as well as enable effective implementation of supports for educators on their campus.

### ***An ambitious yet achievable timeline with clear project milestones and objectives***

The activities and milestones for this project, detailed in the figure below, are intended to be both specific and actionable, and to enable Harmony to achieve its project objectives (\*note that major activities are *italicized* and milestones are **bolded**).

## 2016 TIF Project Narrative: Harmony Supporting Top Educators Program

**Figure 5: Implementation Timeline: Major Activities, Milestones, Owners and Timing\***

Major activities and milestones	Owner	Timing
<b>Grant Management</b>		
<i>Finalize project budget with key stakeholders</i>	Project Director	Oct 2016
<i>Determine external technology development partnerships</i>		Oct-Dec 2016
<i>Submit ongoing grant requirements to the U.S. DOE</i>		Oct-Nov 2016
<b>Lever 1: Deepening and differentiating professional development (PD) for teachers</b>		
(1) Deepening and differentiating content		
<i>Develop new professional development content</i>	Dir. of Secondary Curriculum, Dir. of Elementary Curriculum	Oct 2016-Dec 2017
<i>Integrate new professional development content with existing options and make available for educators</i>		Jan 2017-May 2018
<b>Build individualized PD plans through performance reviews tied to H-TESS and expanded PD opportunities</b>		By May 2018
<i>Continue to refine content based on project monitoring</i>		May 2018-Sep 2021
(2) Enabling broader access		
<i>Gather video and project-based learning examples from across Harmony system</i>	Dir. of STEM	Oct 2016-May 2017
<i>Improve &amp; adjust online PD technology platform</i>	Dir. of Instructional Technology	Oct 2016-Feb 2017
<i>Design online item bank</i>		Oct 2016-May 2018
<b>Open online PD hub to subset of pilot schools</b>		By May 2018
<b>Open online PD hub to all eligible schools</b>		By May 2018
<i>Continue to refine platform based on project monitoring</i>		May 2018-Sep 2021
<b>Lever 2: Deepening and differentiating professional development (PD) for administrators</b>		
(1) Coaching program		
<i>Solicit administrator feedback on coaching program</i>	Dir. Of Leadership Development	Dec 2016-Feb 2017
<i>Design new administrator coaching program</i>		Feb-May 2017
<i>Train administrator coaching program coaches</i>		May-Jun 2017
<b>Open new coaching program to new administrators and those identified through performance reviews</b>		By May 2017
(2) Expansion of professional development offerings		
<i>Improve &amp; adjust online PD technology</i>	Dir. Of Instructional Technology	Oct 2016-Dec 2017
<i>Develop new administrator PD content</i>	Dir. Of Leadership Development	Jan 2017-May 2018
<b>Build individualized PD plans through performance reviews tied to T-PESS and expanded PD opportunities</b>		By May 2018
<i>Continue to refine content based on project monitoring</i>		May 2018-Sep 2021
<b>Lever 3: Enhancing consistency in career pathways across the system</b>		
(1) Alignment of competency systems		
<i>Finalize AP and counselor evaluation approaches, building off H-TESS and T-PESS</i>	Project Director and TIF Program Manager	Oct 2016-Feb 2017
<i>Engage consultant to identify opportunities in competency alignment and engage stakeholders</i>		Feb-May 2017
<b>Alignment of competency systems across teachers and administrators</b>		By May 2017
(2) Build-out of technical platforms		
<i>Identify external partner and educator design team for platform design</i>		Oct 2016-Feb 2017

## 2016 TIF Project Narrative: Harmony Supporting Top Educators Program

<i>Outline requirements for platform/s selection</i>	Project Director and TIF Program Manager	Feb-May 2017
<b>Platform selection</b>		By Aug 2017
<i>Implementation and rollout of new platform</i>		Aug 2017-Aug 2018
<b>Platform ready for educator use</b>		By August 2018
<b>Lever 4: Rewarding teaching and leading with financial incentives</b>		
(1) Pilot opportunities to expand definition of student achievement and growth		
<i>Research and build out innovative approaches to evaluating student growth and achievement in non-tested subjects</i>	Project Director, Director of Accountability	Oct 2016-May 2017
<i>Pilot innovative bonus measures in high-needs schools</i>	Director of Accountability	Aug 2017-May 2018
<i>Gather pilot feedback from educators and administrators</i>		Feb-Jul 2018
<b>Adjust non-tested bonus approach for scale across Harmony system</b>		By Aug 2018
(2) Assess goal-setting approach of test-based goals		
<i>Analyze internal data and research other system approaches to STAAR and NWEA-MAP goal-setting</i>	Director of Accountability	Oct 2016-May 2017
<i>Propose adjustments and test with stakeholders</i>		May 2017-May 2018
<b>Finalize changes to Performance Bonus goals</b>		By Aug 2018
(3) Develop sustainable long-term funding strategy		
<i>Expand Priority Schools bonus system to include more high-need schools</i>	Project Director, Chief Academic Officer	Oct-Nov 2016
<i>Develop an external fundraising strategy to continue to implement the program after federal funds expire</i>	Director of Development	May 2017-Oct 2018
<i>Execute and refine external fundraising strategy</i>		May 2018-Oct 2021
<b>Full transition of bonuses into non-TIF funds</b>		By Oct 2021

### Evaluation

Harmony plans for thoughtful, ongoing monitoring against project objectives, including both analysis of quantitative

data and consistent

educator engagement, as

shown in Figure 6. In

addition to internal

monitoring, Harmony will

partner with a seasoned

external evaluator to build

a deeper understanding of

the impact of the TIF grant on educators and students. The external evaluation will seek to

**Figure 6: Monitoring Approach**

	Metrics reviewed	Frequency	Stakeholder feedback & engagement
Project Management	Budget & spending	Quarterly	• N/A
	Overall TIF progress	Quarterly	• Teacher and administrator working group to adjust and problem-solve • Communicate progress to wider harmony system
Project Outputs	PD system data on scale of educator and administrator usage, and frequency of usage	Bi-Annually	• Qualitative interviews with teacher pilot working group
	Educator feedback on online PD systems, working with partners to adjust as needed	Bi-Annually	• Qualitative interviews with teacher pilot working group • Survey sent to all online PD participants
	Success and impact of educator PD topics and content	Annually	• Engage teacher working group and adjust as needed
	Success and impact of administrator PD topics and content	Annually	• Engage administrator working group and adjust as needed
Project Outcomes	Educator evaluation data	Annually	• N/A
	Educator engagement data	Annually	• Annual K12 Insight survey
	Educator retention data	Annually	• N/A

## **2016 TIF Project Narrative: Harmony Supporting Top Educators Program**

understand the impact of individual investments and the project as a whole on (1) student growth and student success and (2) educator effectiveness, engagement, and retention. Year 1 will be treated as a “baseline year” to collect the information needed (because current teacher retention and engagement data is not nuanced enough for this project) and setting more specific quantitative targets in Year 2

### **V. ADEQUACY OF RESOURCES**

#### ***(1) PBCS developed with input of educators in schools to be served by the grant***

Harmony believes that major initiatives *must* be designed and supported by the teachers and leaders who are affected by them, and puts great weight on stakeholder engagement. The PBCS outlined in this application was developed with significant educator input from the onset, as part of Harmony’s 2020 strategic planning process that identified “Enhance current salary scales with a compensation system that rewards all staff for performance” as one of nine key initiatives to support its goal to “Recruit, develop, and retain a talented workforce.” This planning process included a system-wide survey with 100% response rate as well as interviews, focus groups, and district meetings that helped Harmony leadership to align on the initiatives and approach. A Strategic Plan Steering Committee, comprised of central office leadership, a district superintendent and school principal, and the Board President, guided the process and unanimously recommended the plan. The following year, as part of a compensation project outlined in the 2020 Strategic Plan, 625 Harmony staff members shared their feedback on compensation, bonuses, career options, and needs.

This TIF grant development process is no exception: Harmony has solicited input from educators to ensure that all proposed investments meet the needs of educators and will positively and meaningfully impact student outcomes. Harmony sent an overview of the TIF program and

## 2016 TIF Project Narrative: Harmony Supporting Top Educators Program

its goals and rationale for submitting an application to all educators, inviting them to submit questions or concerns and allowing them to “opt in” to provide detailed project input over the summer break. The opt-in group of 43 campus educators and all seven district superintendents reviewed detailed elements of the proposed TIF project, including the logic model and full list of potential investments, helping shape the focus of the project as well as project investments and budget. Principals for all 36 eligible schools also had the opportunity to review the project plan, and all have indicated their enthusiastic support (see Appendix E, p.1).

### *(2) Harmony has a strong plan to sustain financially the activities conducted and systems developed under the grant once grant period has expired*

Harmony is committed to lasting impact and success of this grant. The total budget for Harmony’s Teacher Incentive Fund program as described in this proposal is **\$43,677,152**. Of this amount, **\$29,957,488 (69%)** is requested from the **Teacher Incentive Fund**; the remaining **\$13,719,665** will come from **Texas State** sources that currently fund Harmony LEAs on a per-pupil basis. Harmony’s budget captures the investments in educator capacity, rewards, and technology essential to execute its program in a fiscally efficient manner.

Harmony’s **robust financial standing** and **current investments in instructional technology and professional development efforts** establish an ideal incubation environment for this program. Harmony LEAs are open-enrollment public Texas charters and, as such, derive the majority of their funding from the Texas Education Agency on a per-pupil basis. According to Standard & Poor's financial rating report, **Harmony’s financial status is strong.**<sup>6</sup> Over the

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<sup>6</sup> [https://www.harmonytx.org/Documents/pressreleases/PR\\_05022016\\_HarmonyPublicSchoolsSeIlsRecordBreakingLowInterestBonds.pdf](https://www.harmonytx.org/Documents/pressreleases/PR_05022016_HarmonyPublicSchoolsSeIlsRecordBreakingLowInterestBonds.pdf)

## 2016 TIF Project Narrative: Harmony Supporting Top Educators Program

years, Harmony has developed a lean financial system, which, coupled with strict fiscal management, has resulted in financially sustainable schools. Per-pupil state funding should remain strong based on past growth and high demand.

Harmony's sustainability plan centers on two critical approaches:

**(1) Alignment of State funds:** As it has done with other major time-limited grants, Harmony will align its teacher and principal professional development system with TIF program objectives and utilize State funds to continue the program after TIF funds expire.

Harmony leadership team will integrate, share resources from other existing programs and assist participating schools to implement the grant objectives after the program ends.

**(2) Private philanthropy:** Harmony has a proven record of success in securing additional financial resources for key initiatives, though private philanthropy, by design, has historically contributed only a very small percentage to Harmony's per pupil expenditure (i.e., Harmony schools are largely sustainable on the public dollar). Harmony's T-STEM initiative, for example, has been funded by public and private entities since 2006 and has added over \$14.5M of funding to the system from funders such as The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and The Michael & Susan Dell Foundation. Harmony has begun to ramp up its fundraising efforts over the past year, and has already added a Director of Development to its team and engaged with outside fundraising consultant Dini Spheris, a leading national nonprofit fundraising consultant firm with 47 years of experience with premier national, regional and local nonprofit institutions. Harmony plans to develop a systematic fundraising strategy for the continuation of TIF programming into its broader plan, and has built external support into its project approach.

## **2016 TIF Project Narrative: Harmony Supporting Top Educators Program**

### **COMPETITIVE PRIORITY 2: IMPROVING TEACHER EFFECTIVENESS AND PROMOTING EQUITABLE ACCESS TO EFFECTIVE EDUCATORS**

Beginning with the launch of its first STEM-themed school in Houston in 2000, Harmony schools have transformed the way Texas students, especially traditionally underserved populations, engage with math and science. Harmony operated 46 schools across Texas in the 2015-16 school year, serving a diverse student population of nearly 30,000: 50% of students are Hispanic/Latino, 20% are African-American, and 22% are English Language Learners. 36 of Harmony's schools have at least 50% of their student populations receiving free and reduced-price lunch, and 19 schools have at least 70% of students receiving free and reduced-price lunch.

Harmony is committed to ensuring that all of its students, including minority and low-income students, have equitable access to effective teachers. Harmony reviews evaluation data annually to monitor the distribution of effective (and developing) teachers across campuses using a system-wide rubric (see p.5-8 for additional detail). Harmony intentionally provides additional supports to the highest-need, highest-risk schools ("Priority Schools") and has a proactive culture of mobility, with strong administrators and teachers supported in relocating to geographically-dispersed and highest-need schools (both detailed on p.8-10). To date, these strategies have been successful: as an indicator of overall educator effectiveness leading to strong student outcomes, eight of the 19 campuses with 70%+ free and reduced-price lunch earned five or more Texas state distinctions out of a possible seven, and only one of 46 schools is not meeting standards.

Despite these successes, gaps remain in teacher performance and retention between the highest-need schools and the rest of the Harmony system. Harmony still sees a performance and retention gap between its schools with 70%+ free and reduced-priced lunch and its ten schools

## 2016 TIF Project Narrative: Harmony Supporting Top Educators Program

with lower than 50% free and reduced-priced lunch, with an average of 2.7 distinctions and a staff engagement level of 76% in the former group and an average of 4.2 distinctions and engagement level of 80% in the latter, indicating a need to expand and escalate efforts.<sup>7</sup> In this TIF project, as described on pages 15-20, Harmony identifies four levers to escalate its efforts to improve educator effectiveness in its high-need schools through improved instruction and retention; the implication of *not* taking this work on is a continued performance gap.

Harmony's current approach and proposed levers are well-aligned to the Texas "State Plan to Ensure Equitable Access to Excellent Educators," developed in 2015. The state plan identified two root causes for gaps seen between high-poverty/high-minority and low-poverty/low-minority schools: (1) Insufficient training and support for teachers and (2) Campus leadership challenges. Two of the levers in the TIF project map to (1): Lever 1 is focused on deepening and differentiating support for teachers, and Lever 4 includes expansion of the Priority Schools program. Harmony is already actively engaging with the state on addressing (2). Harmony is a participant in the state's strategy to "facilitate campus leader training and support," as part of the Texas Principal Evaluation and Support System (T-PESS) pilot, and will be eligible to benefit from further state support for administrator development (Lever 2) as the program expands. Lever 3 focuses on clarifying career pathways for teachers, which the state is actively exploring through its Creating Turnaround Educators Pipelines (CTEP) initiative. Texas is piloting Public Impact's Opportunity Culture model—designed to identify exceptional teachers and expand their reach by flexing classroom time and physical boundaries—in two of Texas's Title I districts, and is looking to expand this pilot as part of the state plan. Harmony is interested in partnering with the CTEP program to extend the reach of excellent teachers.

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<sup>7</sup> K12 Insight Overall Engagement Index conducted in 2016.