



The University of Texas
University Charter School System

UT University Charter School Teacher Incentive Allotment Handbook



2023-2024 School Year



Teacher Incentive Allotment Handbook

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS UNIVERSITY CHARTER SCHOOL

2023-2024

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Architect Team

The following faculty and staff comprised the Architect Team that created this handbook in 2021.

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Introduction, Rationale and Description

Introduction

The Teacher Incentive Allotment (TIA) program was created by the Texas Legislature as part of House Bill 3 to provide a realistic pathway for top teachers to earn six-figure salaries and to help attract and retain highly effective teachers at traditionally hard-to-staff school (Teacher Incentive Allotment, 2021). This handbook details the Teacher Incentive Allotment program implemented by University of Texas University Charter School (UTUCS). This handbook is published for the 2023-2024 school year, UTUCS's first year of participation in the TIA. This handbook is subject to change and will be updated as needed.

Rationale for Participation

The University of Texas University Charter School is unique, even among charter schools. UTUCS is a charter school composed entirely of campuses serving students across the state in a wide variety of instructional settings, including hospitals, rehabilitation facilities, and shelters. Most UTUCS students transition in and out of UTUCS quickly, as the facilities in which UTUCS campuses are located often provide short-term services for students struggling with behavior or psychiatric problems, addiction, or abuse. While most often not a permanent school choice option, UTUCS is committed to providing the best for students during their most challenging times in life and hopes to incorporate TIA into our plan to recruit and retain the best available talent best suited to serve our student population.

Description

The UTUCS TIA for the 2023-2024 school year involves both a Teacher Observation and a Student Growth component. This handbook is published annually and made available to all teachers prior to the beginning of each school year. Teachers receive an annual TIA training as a part of the beginning of year pre-service training.



Teacher Eligibility and Weighting

Teacher Eligibility

Only teachers that meet the criteria below are eligible for TIA designation. In order to be eligible teachers must:

- Have a current Standard Teaching Certificate issued by the State Board of Educator Certification in good standing;
- Be employed by UTUCS as a classroom teacher (PEIMS Role code 86) prior to the 2023-2024 Snapshot date;
- Be assigned to at least 10 students that take both the pre/post-tests; and
- Have a completed Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS) observation (as defined in T-TESS section of this handbook) per the T-TESS Implementation Dates published in Appendix A of this handbook.

Weighting

In the calculation of the UTUCS TIA, the Teacher Observation component is weighted 50% and the Student Growth component is weighted 50%.



Teacher Observation Component

Observation Overview

UTUCS employs the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS) as the teacher observation tool for the teacher observation component of the TIA. UTUCS implements the T-TESS per the [T-TESS Implementation Guidebook](#) posted on teachfortexas.org. Additionally, UTUCS sends all teaching staff an implementation calendar, complete with action items, due dates, and detailed information on each component of T-TESS (See Appendix A). Each year, teachers must have a minimum of four full scored observations: 2 formal and 2 informal walkthroughs. Additional unscored observations can be conducted as needed. UTUCS requires a total of four scores for each dimension of the rubric. There will be no appraisal waivers for any TIA-eligible teachers. UTUCS's T-TESS appraisal system complies with Texas Education Code §21.351 and §21.352.

Though the T-TESS has a total of four domains, only Domain 2 (Instruction) and Domain 3 (Learning Environment) are considered for the TIA teacher observation score. After the final T-TESS scores have been calculated for each teacher, Domain 2 and Domain 3 scores will be averaged to create a Teacher Observation Score for each eligible teacher.

The UTUCS TIA is aligned to the Texas Education Agency's required performance standards for teacher designations. Per the TEA, in order to receive a designation, teachers must have a minimum average domain score and a minimum rating for each dimension in Domain 2 and Domain 3. The table below displays the minimum scores for each.

Designation Level	Minimum Average Score Across Domain 2 and 3	Minimum Rating Required for each Dimension in Domain 2 and 3
Recognized	3.7 (74% of possible points)	At least 3 (proficient) on all dimensions
Exemplary	3.9 (78% of possible points)	At least 3 (proficient) on all dimensions
Master	4.5 (90% of possible points)	At least 3 (proficient) on all dimensions

Appraisers

Appraisals will be conducted by at least two different administrators. Administrators are required to be T-TESS certified and are required to recertify every three years. Additionally, the district T-TESS Coordinator oversees certification compliance, training and calibration of all appraisers. Training requirements for each appraiser include:

- Attend the annual Region XIII training;
- Participate in two Appraiser Refresh trainings that review T-TESS domains, dimensions, scripting, feedback and calibration exercises; and
- Perform calibration exercises prior to scheduling formal observations.

Appraisers meet collaboratively with the T-TESS Coordinator each quarter to evaluate teacher observation data, specifically looking for any skew in the data. Data will be reviewed by appraiser, grade level, and content area. The T-TESS Coordinator will facilitate this analysis and share all information with campus-based teacher appraisers. Instances of perceived skew may result in second appraisals being conducted on some teachers.

Observation Data

Observation data is collected by appraisers and uploaded into the T-TESS System with datapoints that allow for effective disaggregation by grade level, subject, and teacher demographics. The UTUCS appraiser supervisor reviews teacher observation data at least three times per school year. Observation data is compared 1) among raters to ensure raters are calibrated, 2) to the previous year's data to identify outliers in observation, and 3) to student performance data to identify any non-congruence and to all other teachers. Skewed data presents itself as significantly or consistently higher or lower data points.

Because UTUCS has utilized T-TESS for several years, it has a repository of teacher observation data to be used for annual comparison. Because this data has been reviewed by UTUCS T-TESS Coordinator and appraisers, previous skew and other areas of concern in observation have been well documented. After each observation, data is compared to the repository observation data and reviewed by all of the trends identified above and by individual teacher. If the distribution of scores in any of the areas is higher or lower than previous trends, the data is examined and discussed so that root causes of the skew can be identified. If the root cause of the skew is related to the scores of one particular appraiser, that particular appraiser is provided additional support. If the root cause is identified to be a malalignment to the rubric, improper collection of evidence, or lack of calibration among appraisers, all appraisers are provided additional support.

When the root cause is identified and discussed to consensus among the T-TESS Coordinator and appraisers (i.e. one appraiser is not calibrated to the rubric), additional training and support are provided by campus T-TESS experts, as well as additional calibration and training exercises from Region XIII.

Observation Data and Student Growth Data

UTUCS reviews correlation between teacher observation and student growth data at the end of each school year. Specifically, student growth is calculated for each teacher and the teachers' observation scores are compared. For an easy visual comparison, teacher student growth scores are graphed against teacher observation scores using a scatterplot graph. On top of the scatterplot, a line of best-fit is overlaid and the teacher observation and growth scores that are farthest from the line of best fit are reviewed. When reviewing, T-TESS coordinator and appraisers are looking for trends in outliers in appraiser, subject, grade level, instructional style, and teacher demographic.

The root cause of a lack of correlation between teacher observation data and student growth data is identified by the T-TESS Coordinator and appraisers. At the end of each school year, the scatterplot of teacher observation and student growth data allows for the teachers with weakest and strongest correlation to be identified. Then, trends in appraiser, grade level, subject area, and demographic are examined so that root cause can be identified. Key to the root cause determination is external validation of student growth scores to STAAR scores and progress measures. In the student growth calculation procedures, the T-TESS coordinator and appraisers compare STAAR performance to student performance on the pre/post-test. If there is weak correlation, the Architect Team is tasked with implementing a plan for improvement.

The lack of correlation is addressed in multiple ways depending on the root cause. If the root cause is test validity, the test is reviewed and improved per the procedures in the Student Growth section. If the root cause is a problem with appraiser scores being skewed by instructional practices, a lack of appraiser calibration, or other observational issue, the T-TESS coordinator and appraisers formulate a plan for additional training and calibration exercises over the summer and additional training and exercises within the school year to improve observation scoring.



Student Growth

Student Growth Component

For several years, UTUCS has successfully used Edmentum's *Exact Path* Diagnostic Assessment pre/post-tests to monitor student progress, provide student support, and to guide instruction. Edmentum is an award-winning curriculum and assessment provider used by over 8,000 school districts across the nation, and over 2,400 schools and districts in Texas. *Exact Path*, a diagnostic assessment, has been proven to be strongly correlated with STAAR performance.

When TIA was presented to our stakeholder group, the *Exact Path* pre/post-tests were seen as a way to seamlessly transition into use for TIA while still supporting student growth. Proven to be both a valid and reliable measure of student growth, *Exact Path* tests have assisted teachers in improving student performance and have assisted district leadership in supporting teacher instruction. Teachers, leadership, and stakeholders chose to use pre/post-test over other measures because of TEKS alignment and because of UTUCS's use of the tests for both student and teacher development.

Test Creation

Edmentum creates the *Exact Path* assessments used for pre/post-tests. Edmentum has conducted research studies to show that *Exact Path* assessments are aligned to STAAR performance. The studies showed a strong correlation between *Exact Path* and STAAR across grade levels and subject areas, thus the two tests measure the same knowledge and skills.

Test Approval

UTUCS approves the use of Edmentum's *Exact Path* assessments for TIA.

Test Security

The *Exact Path* Diagnostic Assessments are not released to the public, nor do teachers or students have access to the tests outside of the secure testing platform.

Testing Window

To be determined prior to the beginning of the 2023-2024 school year.

Test Administration

In order to administer the pre/post-tests with fidelity, UTUCS uses STAAR testing protocols for our pre/post-test administrations to assure valid administration. Training is provided prior to each test for all staff.

Scoring

Testing occurs online and scoring is completed within the *Exact Path* system. After administration of the pre and post-tests, the TIA Architect Team reviews scores to ensure score distributions per grade level and subject area are similar to the distribution of previous years. Where there is a concern, the TIA Architect Team reviews the results with the teacher(s) to determine the root cause and takes action.

If there is a scoring issue, the tests can be rescored up to one month after testing. After the pre/post-testing window is complete, the student scores are downloaded into a spreadsheet. Student scores are assigned to a teacher using the class rosters and marked as included or excluded from teachers' TIA scores. To be included in the Student Growth Score for a teacher, students must:

- Be enrolled in a teacher's classroom for at least 60 days;
- Complete the pre-test before the end of the published testing window with a valid test score; and
- Complete the post-test before the end of the published testing window with a valid test score.

Note - students receiving special education services are assigned to inclusion teachers based upon the classes in which they are providing services.

Within one week of completion of each test, the TIA Architect Team reviews the test scores to identify possible skew, inconsistent testing data, or other abnormalities. If none are found, the data are dated, marked final, and saved on the UTUCS server.

If abnormalities are found in testing, students are either excluded from the calculation (if a one or two student incident) or are retested if a larger interruption occurred (power outage, etc.). After investigation of the incident (including discussion with affected teacher) and within one week of administration of tests, the TIA Architect Team will make a recommendation to exclude student scores, retest students, or make a teacher ineligible for a school year's TIA program. If retests are recommended and approved, the retests must occur within one week of the final decision. The Superintendent has final approval authority over the TIA Architect Team's decision. The Superintendent will communicate final approval of the decision with the affected teachers within two days of the TIA Architect Team's decision and the affected teachers have two days to appeal the decision.

Growth Standards

The TIA statewide performance standards for student growth were adopted as the performance standards for UTUCS's student growth standards, so our plan is 100% aligned to the TIA statewide performance standards. The table below outlines the state performance standards UTUCS has adopted:

Growth Standard Group	% of students meeting or exceeding growth targets
Recognized	55%
Exemplary	60%
Master	70%

Growth Targets

The amount of growth necessary for each grade level and subject area to be demonstrated in order for a student to meet a growth standard is determined each year by the TIA Architect Team. The TIA Architect Team triangulates the amount of growth required for each grade level and subject area using multiple analyses. The expertise of the administrators, content experts, and teachers on this team combines to ensure the best possible determination of growth targets for each subject area and grade level.

For tests in the STAAR tested subjects, the team has two analyses upon which to base the growth target: comparison of pre/post-test growth to Progress Measures and comparison of pre/post-test growth to prior pre/post-test growth. First, the team determines which students met their Progress Measure on STAAR for a given year and their performance level. Using only the pre/post-test data for students that met their Progress Measure in each performance level (did not meet, approaches, meets, masters), an average increase in the pre/post-test questions answered correctly is calculated.

Second, the team reviews the pre/post-test growth in the current school year to pre/post-test growth given in previous years. Because UTUCS has given pre/post-tests in the STAAR tested subject areas and grades for several years, the expected growth is well-documented and a clear distribution of growth is consistently demonstrated each year. Using these two analyses for each test in each subject area, the team triangulates the growth targets.

For tests in the non-STAAR tested subjects, the team will determine growth based upon the distribution of growth in the STAAR tested subject areas. For the first few years of the program, the newly-developed tests are administered, the growth targets will be set based upon the distribution of the growth consistently demonstrated on pre/post-tests in STAAR tested grade levels and subjects for previous years. The growth target will be set so that a similar percentage of students across the district meet their growth target, as compared to tests in STAAR tested subjects. Because these data analyses are conducted each year, and as data is collected on the non-STAAR tested subject areas and grade level pre/post-tests, growth targets will be adjusted by the team.

For both types of pre/post-tests, the team presents findings and recommendations to be approved by the Superintendent each year. As UTUCS implements the TIA program, the district plans to collaborate with other local charter schools and the Education Service Center to externally validate growth results. UTUCS has every intention of the TIA growth metric identifying teachers of highest quality.



Designation Score Calculation

The TIA Architect Team, including the T-TESS Coordinator, Deputy Superintendent of Academics and Professional Development and Director of Curriculum, is responsible for collecting, analyzing, and finalizing the data. The Architect Team will recommend teachers for designation based upon the data and the Superintendent will give final approval to designations.

The Student Growth is weighted 50% and the Teacher Observation component is weighted 50% in the UTUCS TIA. Once the data has been finalized by the TIA Architect Team and the Superintendent, the data will be used to calculate the designation score for each individual teacher. Once designation scores are calculated and designations recommended, the results are presented to the Superintendent. The Superintendent finalizes the recommendations. The teachers are then notified of their designation score and their recommended designation, if any. Teachers have one week after notification to appeal the decision to the TIA Architect Team.

Teachers can submit an email describing the need for an appeal to their campus Principal, who will then share with the TIA Architect Team. The TIA Architect Team will consider all appeals and make a recommendation to the Superintendent one week following receipt of the appeal. The Superintendent will notify the TIA Architect Team and the teacher of the final appeal decision.



Spending Plan

The following section ensures UTUCS's compliance with Texas Education Code §48.112.

Spending Plan Development

After the first year of implementation, the TIA distribution was reviewed by teachers and other stake holders. They were represented on the TIA Architect Team, participated in TIA information and feedback sessions, and participated in a teacher survey where they indicated their personal preferences for the distribution. The district agreed that the funds should be distributed in a timely manner in the event that a teacher resigns within the subsequent year. The 10% district funds will be spent on professional development and the cost of submitting teachers for designation. District level human resources and the Chief Financial Officer were involved in the development of the spending plan. The resulting Spending Plan is communicated in this section.

Distribution of Funds

Per Texas Education Code, UTUCS will use 10% of the designation allotment to pay for professional development to support the TIA and the cost of submitting teachers for designation. Teachers earning a designation will receive 90% of the allotment. Teachers receiving a designation prior to employment at UTUCS will receive 90% of the allotment in their first year of employment at UTUCS, with the remaining 10% kept by the district to cover professional development to support the TIA and the cost of submitting teachers for designation. UTUCS will determine the total campus TIA allotment after determinations have been made in April of each year. At that time, UTUCS will determine the teachers who are eligible for the TIA distribution: local TIA designated teacher, incoming TIA designated teachers who earned their designation at a previous district, and current National Board-Certified teachers. UTUCS will then distribute the funds to the teachers at the stated 90%.

The TIA allotment funds will work in conjunction with the current district salary schedule. It will be paid to eligible staff as a stipend and will not be part of the teacher's base pay. Teachers are notified in April of their designation. The stipend is paid to TIA designated teachers in one payment each summer prior to August 31.

Teacher Mobility

If a teacher leaves the district after Winter Roster submission but prior to the end of the working school year, the payment to the teacher will be prorated based on the number of days worked during that school year. The remain funds from the teachers 90% allotment will be distributed equally to the certified teachers that remain on the campus by August 31. The district 10% will be used according to Texas Education code for professional development related to the TIA.

TIA designated teachers who have moved from one UTUCS campus to another before the Winter

PEIMS submission will receive the payment earned at their previous campus and payment will be made according to the TIA Handbook. If a teacher leaves after the Class Roster Winter Submission but before the end of the school year, pay will be prorated based on the number of days worked. The TIA stipend will be treated similarly.

National Board Certification

UTUCS will encourage National Board Certification (NBC) teachers to notify the district as soon as they receive their certification. Then the district will verify the NBC is listed on their Texas Teacher Certificate. Such teachers will be automatically eligible for the Recognized status according to our TIA Plan and eligible for the distribution.



Support for Teachers

UTUCS provides all new teachers a pre-service orientation where they are assigned a teacher mentor. Throughout the year, UTUCS provides formal opportunities for the mentor and mentee teachers to meet during professional development days. In addition to the induction and mentoring plan for all new teachers, UTUCS also plans to provide TIA cohort meetings for designated teachers directly with the campus principal at least each six weeks. Additionally, the Deputy Superintendent for Academics and Professional Development and the Director of Curriculum are available to provide additional, specific support to TIA teachers as needed.

Recruitment and Retention

UTUCS will use the availability of TIA funds to recruit highly effective teachers who are either already TIA designated, or who have the talent to become designated after arriving at UTUCS. UTUCS will market our TIA program through all our digital media, including social media. UTUCS plans to include information on TIA in our teacher recruiting materials and highlight existing TIA designated teachers through the district's webpage and through our annual report. In addition to being placed on the TIA "map" as a TIA school, UTUCS will aggressively market our TIA program when hiring teachers. We will proudly display our status as a TIA school on our webpage and digital media. Recruiting materials will include information on our TIA program.

Retention of the best teachers is critical to UTUCS. The current plan for teacher retention includes: providing a competitive compensation plan for teachers, promoting the amazing professional climate at our school, effective use of Professional Learning Communities (PLC) to provide support to teachers, and high-quality professional development and growth opportunities for teachers. Specifically, for TIA designated teachers, we will also provide group/cohort support from district and campus leadership and opportunities for designated teachers to build a PLC specific to them.

UTUCS plans to leverage the experience and expertise of TIA designated teachers in a number of ways that may lead to increased responsibility and authority. Designated teachers could be used as PLC leads and/or grade level chairs. Designated teachers will be encouraged to submit professional development at regional, state, and national conferences. And, if desired, designated teachers could be considered for campus and district leadership positions.



System Improvement and Evaluation

System Improvement

UTUCS will conduct a rigorous analysis of designated teachers, including but not limited to evaluating their educational background, certification type, and completed trainings. The idea is to use that information to help identify common indicators of teacher effectiveness and use that to inform future teacher recruitment efforts. Additionally, staffing assignments may be changed to place the most effective teachers with the students at highest risk or in need of the most support. UTUCS will conduct an annual internal TIA program evaluation that will consist of teacher performance data, student growth data, and internally developed teacher surveys to monitor TIA's impact on the district. UTUCS will require teachers and staff to participate in the TIA program evaluation surveys.

In addition to the teacher observation and student growth data required for designating TIA teachers, UTUCS will also administer teacher surveys to both designated and non-designated teachers. We will evaluate teacher retention stats, satisfaction surveys, and campus and district accountability data to perform a well-rounded, thorough program evaluation. The school will evaluate planning practices, organizational tools used by the teacher, curriculum resources used, and other instructional tools used by TIA designated teachers to assist in the development of future professional development plans for the entire staff.

Program Evaluation

UTUCS will require each TIA-eligible teacher to participate in the TIA Annual program survey. The information provided in this survey will help UTUCS understand the impact of TIA on the school. In addition to the teacher observation and student growth data required for designating TIA teachers, UTUCS will also administer teacher surveys to both designated and non-designated teachers. We will evaluate teacher retention stats, satisfaction surveys, and campus and district accountability data to perform a well-rounded, thorough program evaluation.



Appendix A

T-TESS Implementation Calendar

T-TESS Implementation 2023-2024		
Activity	Due Date	Details
All District Training	New Teachers: July 28, 2023 Returning Staff: Online	District wide training will be provided to all staff.
Self-Assessment Goal Setting Completed	September 15, 2023	Documentation through DMAC.
1-Formal Observation 1-Walkthrough (minimum of 2)	December 15, 2023	1 Formal Announced Observation with Pre and Post Conference and 1 informal
1-Formal Observation 1-Walkthrough (minimum of 2)	April 12, 2024	1 Formal Unannounced 1 Walkthrough (minimum)
Final observation/ Summative Evaluation	April 30, 2024	Summative Evaluation completed in DMAC.
Final Evaluation Conference with Signed Evaluation	May 6, 2024	Final Observation Conference Completed. Print and Sign Final Evaluation
Final Observation Summaries due to Human Resource	May 13, 2024	Final Appraisal Documents submitted to HR Manager.

Appraiser Training, Certification and Recertification Deadlines

- Proof of certification (or recertification every three years) is due to the T-TESS coordinator prior to August 1 of each school year.
- Annual ESC Region XIII T-TESS training, including recalibration to the scoring rubric, is due prior to the Self-Assessment Goal Setting Due Date for Teachers.
- Appraiser Refresh training due by November 1 and February 1 of each school year. Appraiser Refresh training includes: training, reviewing T-TESS domains, dimensions, scripting, and feedback and calibration exercises.
- Prior to scheduling formal observations, appraisers meet to complete calibration exercises.

Remote Learning Contingencies

In the event teachers return to remote learning due to COVID-19 safety and concerns, T-TESS appraisers will utilize the following data to inform teacher observations:

- Online instruction with students in small groups
- Lesson Plans
- Documentation of personalizing communications with students. (Evidence of continuous, frequent support and feedback.)
- Use a variety of communication techniques to provide empathy and personal approach than solely e-mail and web site.
- Documentation of the use of structured activities to provide an effective context for online learning.
- Review of data in online systems.
- Documentation of preparation and outline of assignments and due dates in advance so that students/families know what to expect and when.
- Documentation of producing supervised social interaction through group collaboration to facilitate student progress.
- Documentation that the teacher has assessed student's prerequisite technology skills at beginning of the course/activities.