



Newman International Academy

2011 S. Fielder Road, Arlington, TX 76013

September 28, 2020

To: House Public Education Committee, Chairman Huberty and Vice Chairman Bernal
Re: Request for Information, Interim Charge 1, Question 1

Chairman Huberty, Vice Chairman Bernal, and Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit a response to Interim Charge 1: *Can the state delay implementation of the teacher incentive pay program to push it out to the next biennium? If so, what would be the impact on the current budget, as well as budget implications for the 2022- 23 biennium?*

This letter is submitted on behalf of Newman International Academy, a charter school with nearly 3100 students in seven locations and in four cities namely Arlington, Fort Worth, Cedar Hill and Mansfield. Out of these seven locations, six are Title I campuses. Our more than 300 hard-working teachers have been eager and anxious to see the dream of salary enhancement that is commensurate to skills, qualifications and student outcome become a reality for them.

The Texas Legislature cannot fail them now by delaying the implementation of the teacher incentive pay program. It will not only be a blow to their faithfulness to the students they serve but also an undermining of their faith in the educational system of Texas. The few thousands of Newman's stakeholders—Board, staff and parents have been encouraged by the opportunity that the Teacher Incentive Allotment (TIA) has given to Newman International Academy to recruit and retain qualified and skilled teachers. Even our students celebrated our teachers who were nominated and/or awarded the allotment based on whether they were in the "Masters," "Exemplary" or "Recognized" category. Administrators, faculty and support staff have been working hard since mid-2019-2020 academic year to win this allotment for Newman teachers, fine tune the validity and reliability of the program, and also train and mentor teachers to maintain or attain a high designation with the goal of producing better student outcomes. As a charter school, the luxury of rewarding, retaining and recruiting outstanding teachers that was far beyond our reach, has become a possibility because of the Teacher Incentive Allotment. In this 2020-2021 academic year, new teachers have believed in Newman and the State of Texas's awesome Teacher Incentive Allotment (Newman is one among 26 schools in the

State of Texas to get the TIA approval), and have joined Newman. We are doing everything we can to keep the torch of education in Texas burning bright.

The questions we are facing now are the following: “Would this torch keep burning bright with the fuel that the State promised to provide us?” “Would we be able to maintain the momentum we have gained in raising the standard of teacher qualification, training and commitment to our students?” “Could we keep our promise to our teachers regarding opportunities for better salary and opportunities for mentorship, ranking and incentive this year so we do not lose our exceptional teachers?” “Can we continue to believe in the support of our State for the success of our teachers and students without any delay?” To be able to say, “yes” to these questions, we cannot but strongly urge the Texas Legislature to continue the Teacher Incentive Allotment’s current and projected funding levels as-is, **without any deferment in time or funding amount.**

We have invested time, money and resources to developing a fair and rigorous local designation system that enables us to fund increased compensation for our top teachers while providing them incentives to teach especially at our low-income campuses.

Starting in 2016, Newman International Academy held discussions with its stakeholders about giving incentives to its outstanding teachers who have been responsible for tremendous student growth and progress. We realized that these teachers were our assets and the very reason why students who scored as low as 5% to 40% in standardized tests in 2011 (when Newman Academy started), were scoring 80% and above in a matter of few years. Newman Administration desired that these teachers, whose dedicated work and commitment to children caused such student growth, must be recognized and encouraged, and also retained. Desires and discussions that started out as gift baskets and words of appreciation, took shape in 2017 as Newman Academy Teacher Incentive Rubric resulting in a \$ 1000 incentive for " The Best District Teacher of the Year Award," a \$ 500 - incentive for "The Best Campus Teacher of the Year Award," and a \$ 500 - incentive for "The Perfect Attendance Award." In 2018-2019 academic year, this Newman Teacher Incentive Program grew to give \$ 500 to all our "Distinguished Teachers," \$ 250 for all our "Recognized Teachers," and \$ 150 to all our "Standard Teachers" according to the Newman Rubric. The Best Teacher Awards for the District and Campuses, as well as the Perfect Attendance Award continued. Yet, Newman Administration felt that it was unable to provide a substantial increase in the money awards to our extraordinary teachers. The State's Teacher Incentive Allotment Program came as Newman's lifeline to reward, sustain and further the great work of its teachers and the success of its students. A task force team made up of the superintendent, senior principals and administrators working closely with other principals and faculty members put in many months of painstaking work and applied for The TIA Cohort A. Our application was approved, and thus, the dark road of teacher incentivization to improve Newman student success was lit up with a bright light of TIA.

Newman's goals in applying for and participating in the TIA were/are to (1) continue and better our student progress and growth in all campuses especially in campuses where there are more than 50% of at-risk students, (2) retain and attract high quality teachers, (3) encourage and reward our deserving teachers, so they can continue with their work of excellence, (4) sustain and promote student progress through value-added measurement, and (5) enhance teacher progress and development through regularly calibrated, valid teacher assessment system (such as T-TESS that Newman is currently using).

TIA has enabled Newman to focus on:

1. Recruitment and retention on highest needs and/or low-income campuses;
2. Modification of its teacher incentive program/designation system to align more with the State's performance standards;
3. Equitable distribution of talents and incentives by enhancing salaries of TIA designated teachers and also allocating funds (out of TIA awards) to other teachers to keep up the morale and success of all teachers;
4. Increased efforts to recalibrate teacher evaluation process and procedures for accuracy of assessment by enabling principals and assistant principals (if they assessed teachers) to attend T-TESS training more frequently;
5. Fine tuning both the Newman-TIA and Newman-District rubric and the subsequent teacher designation process through weekly District-Campus administrators' discussions to be approved by the Board (the input of campus administrators includes teacher input as well);
6. The Professional Learning Community (PLC) of principals and assistant principals who meet every week to mentor and counsel one another to improve their ability to assess their teachers, achieve valid assessments of teachers and improve student success;
7. assessment of the validity of teacher designation and selection by the district and campus administration – the selection process and rubric were discussed and modified at the weekly administrative meetings;
8. development of and modification of teacher surveys to get their input and participation in increasing their skill set, qualification and enhancing student learning;
9. celebrating and encouraging teacher talents and the vocation of teaching - TIA put joy and value in the teaching profession that was beginning to wane in the darkness of all the challenges involved in the noble and yet very demanding profession of teaching. All our teachers who received the TIA nomination, monetary award were celebrated in District employee and campus public meetings;
10. the pathways provided by TIA for our district's educators to make significantly more money sooner in their careers, and;
11. more equitable distribution of educational talents among Texas schools and Newman campuses.

Newman has made its monetary commitment to the recipients of the Cohort A TIA award. We request that the State keeps its commitment. Newman is committed to continue its support of teachers to equip and encourage them in their dedication to teaching. Newman and its stakeholders ask that the State supports us in our efforts to produce and keep outstanding teachers with no hampering of this process strengthened by TIA.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, when teachers were afraid to be back in the school system and teach students who could be carriers of the virus, the Teacher Incentive Allotment has been a talking point for schools like Newman to encourage good educators to stay in the fight for the future of our students and convince them that the profession of teaching is still valuable for their own career and financial future as well. Throughout the application and information process, it was communicated that TIA was a fulfillment of HB 3 and that the program was fully funded. Reversing or delaying the legislative action to propel TIA would negatively impact both the morale and funding for teachers at a very difficult time.

Newman International Academy greatly appreciates the Legislature's recognition of attracting and retaining the very best educators, and we ask you to follow through on your commitment by funding the Teacher Incentive Allotment in full. Newman requests that the bright light of TIA not be dimmed and our road to success not be made dark at this point of our journey of success as a charter school.

Sincerely,
Sheba K. George, Ph. D., Ed. D.
Superintendent