

Evaluation of the Texas Adolescent Literacy Academies (TALA): Final Report



Executive Summary

December 2010

Submitted to:
Texas Education Agency



Submitted by:
ICF International
9300 Lee Highway
Fairfax, VA 22031

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For additional information about ICF, please contact:

ICF International

9300 Lee Highway, Fairfax, VA 22031-1207 USA

Phone: 1.703.934.3603 or 1.800.532.4783

Fax: 1.703.934.3740

Email: info@icfi.com

Authors

Thomas J. Horwood
Rosemarie O'Conner, PhD
Katerina Passa, PhD
Stephanie Tung
Allison Nebbergall, PhD
Carol Hawk, PhD
Teresa Duncan, PhD
Erin Williamson
Kelle Basta
Jessica Zumdahl
Jocelyn Vas

Prepared for

Texas Education Agency
1701 North Congress Avenue
Austin, Texas 78701-1494
Phone: 512-463-9734

Research Funded by
Texas Education Agency

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Throughout the present report, all references to the initial evaluation report (Interim Report #1) refer to the following citation: Evaluation of the Texas Adolescent Literacy Academies (TALA): Interim Report #1 (May 2009), which can also be accessed on the TEA website at:

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Throughout the present report, all references to the second interim report (Interim Report #2) refer to the following citation: Evaluation of the Texas Adolescent Literacy Academies (TALA): Interim Report #2 (December 2010), which can also be accessed on the TEA website at:

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Executive Summary

This evaluation report provides the final set of evaluation findings related to Texas Adolescent Literacy Academies (TALA) activity through the 2009-10 school year, and final conclusions based on the overall TALA evaluation. This report examines the impact of TALA on student achievement through the 2009-10 school year and presents an analysis of the cost-effectiveness of TALA. An initial interim report focused on activity through summer 2008 was published in May 2009 and a second interim report focused on activity through summer 2009 was published in December 2010. The first interim evaluation report focused on TALA training related to Grade 6 teachers. The second interim evaluation report focused on TALA training related to Grade 7 and Grade 8 teachers and to Grade 6 teachers' implementation of TALA during the 2008-09 school year. (Both reports can be accessed on TEA's website at http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=2914&menu_id=949.)

About TALA

Texas House Bill 2237 was passed in 2007 in order to improve high school success and increase college readiness in Texas public schools, and it provided specific direction and funding for TALA. TALA was created to improve literacy rates among middle school students. In order to achieve this goal, TALA focuses on improving teaching by providing Grades 6-8 English language arts (ELA)/reading and content area teachers with research-based strategies for improving their students' academic literacy.

The TALA Model

The goal of TALA is to provide professional development for ELA/reading and content area teachers in the use of scientifically-based literacy practices to improve academic literacy. TALA is intended to help prepare middle school teachers to design appropriate instruction for all students, including those who are struggling with reading due to limited English proficiency (LEP), learning disabilities (e.g., dyslexia), and other risk factors for reading difficulties.

TALA instructional routines emphasize implementation of a three-tier reading model consistent with a response to intervention (RTI) model. RTI emphasizes ongoing data collection and immediate intervention for students who demonstrate a need in one or more reading skills. TALA is tailored for the unique structure of middle schools and is framed within a schoolwide approach to addressing the needs of struggling adolescent readers.

The Format of TALA

As designed to date, TALA consists of two separate academies: ELA academy and content area academy. The ELA academy is designed for reading and English language arts teachers. The content area academy targets math, science, and social studies teachers. Both academies provide professional development in scientifically-based, general literacy instructional strategies. ELA academies consisted of three days of face-to-face training, followed by a one-day online practicum follow-up. The content area academies consisted of a day and a half of face-to-face training, followed by a half-day online practicum. During TALA, trainers provided examples of the strategies and their applications, both in hard copy and video formats, with appropriate subject area materials in the middle school classroom.

TALA content was organized into seven units with individual modules that last between 30 and 75 minutes. Units 1-3 (Tier I strategies for all students) were covered in both ELA and content area academies, while units 4-7 (Tiers II and III strategies for students with reading difficulties) were only covered in the ELA academies. TALA training was first provided to Grade 6 teachers during summer 2008, while training for Grade 7 and Grade 8 teachers first occurred in summer 2009. While the content for the Grade 6 academies and the Grade 7 and Grade 8 academies was identical, grade-specific videos used in the training were different.

Implementation of TALA

Regional education service center (ESC) leaders were in charge of operations for the implementation of TALA statewide. The ESC leaders scheduled TALA ELA and content area academies in their respective regions, established locations, set dates and times, and worked with their information technology staffs to set up the registration information in their catalogs and develop a registration database to track participants.

In 2008 and 2009, TALA utilized a training of trainers (TOT) model in order to prepare trainers for the implementation of TALA statewide. Prior to the summer 2008 Grade 6 academies, the State TOT was held in March 2008, where master trainers trained state trainers. Three Regional TOTs were then conducted in May 2008 in which state trainers trained regional trainers. Finally, regional trainers conducted TALA Grade 6 teacher academies throughout the 20 ESCs with a maximum of 50 participants in each. The TOT model was repeated in spring 2009 followed by TALA Grade 7 and Grade 8 teacher academies in summer 2009. Teachers who teach at campuses that were rated Academically Unacceptable (AU) in reading were required to attend TALA. Grade 6 teachers attended these trainings in summer 2008, while Grade 7 and Grade 8 teachers attended trainings in summer 2009.

Approach to the TALA Evaluation

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) contracted with ICF International (ICF) to conduct a statewide evaluation of TALA. The comprehensive evaluation approach was designed to:

- Evaluate the quality of the TALA training, including the materials developed for use in training, the training of trainers, and the training of classroom teachers;
- Evaluate the quality and level of ongoing implementation of the TALA training in the classroom;
- Evaluate the effects of the TALA teacher training on student outcomes; and
- Conduct an analysis of financial data to assess the cost-effectiveness of TALA.

Specific research questions were developed to address each of the four overall evaluation objectives. These research questions guided the selection of data sources, the development of instruments to collect new data, and the analysis of the data.

Evaluation Findings

The Quality of TALA Training

Based on evaluation activities from summer 2008 through June 2010, TALA was generally perceived positively. Positive perceptions were held by the expert technical advisory board

(TAB) who reviewed the materials and training strategies, observers from the evaluation team who observed TALA training, trainers who attended training to become TALA trainers, the teachers who participated in TALA training, and the administrators at campuses from which teachers attended TALA.

Expert Review of Teacher Training Materials

The TAB reviewed both the Grade 6 training materials (see Interim Report #1) and the Grades 7-8 training materials (see Interim Report #2). They also reviewed overall descriptions of the training (e.g., time allotted for presenting modules). The TAB concluded that TALA materials are highly reflective of best practices in literacy instruction and teacher professional development and aligned with national and state standards for literacy education. One TAB member commented that “in the scheme of things, TALA is one of the best state academies that I have seen.”

Observations of TALA Training

TALA Grade 6 Regional TOTs and TALA classroom teacher academies and TALA Grades 7-8 classroom teacher academies were highly rated overall by observers. Observers indicated that TALA academies at all levels were implemented with high quality facilitation that led to participant engagement.

TALA Trainer and Classroom Teacher Participant Perceptions of TALA Training

Both state and regional trainers of the Grade 6 TALA training and Grades 7-8 TALA training had positive perceptions of the training. The overall quality and specific aspects of the TALA regional trainings of trainers (TOTs) was highly rated by ELA and, to a slightly lesser extent by content area regional trainers. Regional trainers indicated that the TOTs provided them with the knowledge/skills they needed, were of high quality, and were effective in preparing them for their roles and responsibilities as a regional trainer. Lastly, regional trainers were positive about the information they received from TEA, the developer, and state trainers regarding the goals of TALA and their responsibilities as a trainer.

This favorable perception of TALA training was echoed by ELA and content area classroom teachers:

- Of all teachers who responded to the survey, regardless of grade level or which session they attended (ELA or content area) or year (2008 or 2009), over 80% reported all aspects of the training they received as effective or highly effective. In particular, teachers rated the training materials, knowledge of presenters, and training content as effective or highly effective.
- Similar positive findings surfaced in the analysis of the participants' preparedness to implement TALA instructional routines, regardless of the year of the training attended (2008 or 2009) or the grade level taught (6, 7, or 8). ELA teachers indicated a high level of preparedness in implementing TALA Tier I routines, while it was evident that they felt most prepared to implement graphic organizers (i.e., the Frayer Model) as compared to any other Tiers II/III instructional routines. Content area teachers felt most prepared to implement routines to have students define words, pronounce words, generate examples and non-examples, and select words. This is not surprising given that these instructional routines are more conducive to content area curricula. Also, content area teachers are likely more comfortable with these routines than they are with other instructional routines.

- Regarding the TALA general strategies, both ELA and content area teachers felt most prepared to group or pair students, foster student engagement, and actively involve students.
- A majority of ELA and content area teachers across grade levels felt fairly well or very well prepared to design instruction for special populations of students.
- Teachers participating in TALA felt the training was relevant and helped improve their teaching and their peers' teaching. A majority of ELA and content area teachers across grade levels felt the training they attended helped them improve their teaching and felt the training was appropriate for their peers.

Classroom Implementation of TALA

Based on evaluation activities from summer 2008 through June 2010, TALA ELA and content area teacher participants reported feeling familiar with and prepared to implement TALA instructional routines and strategies in their classrooms. Furthermore, TALA ELA and content area teacher participants were actually implementing TALA instructional routines and strategies in their classrooms and reporting positive results. Specifically, TALA ELA and content area teacher participants were familiar with, prepared for, and actually implementing Tier I as well as Tier II/III instructional routines.

In addition to previously reported results, new evidence to support these findings since Interim Report #2 comes from the following data sources: (a) the 2009 survey of TALA ELA and content area teacher participants, (b) online follow-up training in which TALA ELA and content area teacher participants documented their implementation of TALA instructional strategies in their classrooms, and (c) observations of a sample of TALA ELA and content area teacher participants' classrooms during site visits. Findings are presented separately for ELA and content area teachers.

Implementation of TALA in ELA Classrooms

Evidence of positive outcomes of translating TALA training into ELA classrooms included the following:

- TALA ELA teachers in all grade levels feel prepared to effectively teach reading and writing instructional routines to students. As would be expected based on the high ratings of training quality reported in Interim Report #2, TALA ELA teacher participants, regardless of grade level, reported that they were confident in their abilities to implement a range of TALA reading and writing instructional routines.
- TALA ELA teachers' confidence translated into new lesson designs and implementation of TALA instructional routines and strategies in ELA classrooms. Data collected across time points from the online follow-up and teacher survey indicate that teachers implemented the TALA instructional routines and strategies and that the patterns of use were somewhat consistent across time (from 2008 to 2009) and similar across grades.
- TALA ELA teachers indicated that lessons in which they incorporated TALA strategies and routines were successful. Teachers who participated in the online follow-up training reported that the lessons they implemented as part of the practicum were highly successful regardless of whether they were developed for Tier I or Tier II/III interventions.
- TALA ELA teachers were incorporating TALA general strategies into their lessons. The majority of 2009 Grade 6 ELA survey respondents fostered student engagement, adapted

instruction to structure learning for all students, and grouped or paired students once a week or daily. Although a different scale was used, the 2009 findings are consistent with findings from 2008. In the classroom observations, the most often used general instructional strategies were providing feedback, fostering student engagement, and providing explicit instruction.

- TALA ELA teachers were incorporating TALA instructional routines into their lessons. Vocabulary and comprehension instructional routines (Tier I) were observed most frequently during classroom observations.
- TALA ELA teachers across all grade levels implemented what they learned in TALA in their classrooms. At least 82% of TALA Grade 6 ELA teachers (in 2008 and 2009) reported that they were incorporating what they learned into their instruction “to some degree” or “quite a bit” of the time. About the same percentage of TALA Grade 7 and 8 ELA teachers (84%) felt that they were incorporating what they learned into their instruction “to some degree” or “quite a bit.”
- TALA ELA teachers adapted TALA instructional routines, as evidenced by the percentage of time used in each phase of the three-step explicit instruction process. Grade 6 teachers who implemented the three-step explicit instruction process in their online follow-up activity for Tier I students reported that most of the time was used for the I Do: Modeling and the We Do: Teacher-assisted portion of the lesson (35% and 36%), followed by We Do: Peer-assisted (20%) and You Do: Independent Practice (9%). Teachers developing lessons for Tier II and Tier III students allowed more time for the I Do: Modeling and reduced the time for the We Do: Peer-assisted and You Do: Independent practice. The pattern for the Grade 7 and 8 teachers’ lessons was similar. However, teachers allotted more time for the You Do: Independent Practice in lessons for Tier II and Tier III students.

Implementation of TALA in Content Area Classrooms

Positive outcomes of translating TALA training into content area classrooms included the following:

- TALA content area teachers in all grade levels feel prepared to effectively teach reading and writing instructional routines to students. As would be expected based on the high ratings of training quality reported in Interim Report #2 and in the current report in Chapter 3, TALA content area teacher participants, regardless of grade level, reported that they were confident in their abilities to implement a range of TALA reading and writing instructional routines.
- TALA content area teachers at all grade levels implemented Tier I instructional routines at somewhat consistent levels across data collection periods and grade levels. More than two-thirds of content area respondents reported they had implemented the Tier I instructional routines. The most often used routines for Grade 6 respondents were defining words, building background knowledge, and pronouncing words. Although 2008 Grade 6 content area respondents were given a different rating scale, defining words, building background knowledge and generating examples and non-examples were reportedly used most often. Grade 7 and Grade 8 teachers used the defining words, building background knowledge, and pronouncing words routines most often.
- TALA content area teachers also adapted TALA instructional routines, as evidenced by design differences in the lessons they outlined in the online follow up training. Specifically, the percentage of time used in each phase of the three-step explicit instruction (scaffolding) routine. Content area teachers who implemented scaffolding in their online follow-up activity

for Tier I students reported that most of the time was used for the We Do: Teacher-assisted (43%) and We Do: Peer-assisted (26%) followed by I Do: Modeling (24%) and You Do: Independent Practice (7%). This pattern differed from what was reported for ELA teachers in that more time was spent in We Do activities (69% for content area teachers as compared to only 56% for ELA teachers. Grade 7 and Grade 8 teachers reported designs with the majority of time spent in I Do: Modeling (23% and We Do: Teacher-assisted (41%) followed by We Do: Peer-assisted (28%) and You Do: Independent Practice (8%).

- TALA content area teachers implemented all strategies and routines and provided suggestions for other teachers. Although some strategies and routines were used more frequently than others, responses on the 2009 survey of TALA content area teacher participants indicate that all routines were used by at least a subset of TALA trained teachers. See tables 5.13 through 5.16 and 5.25 through 5.28 for sample responses.
- Content area teachers reported that the lessons they implemented for the online follow-up activity were successful. One hundred percent of the Grade 6 content area teachers and 99% of the Grade 7 and Grade 8 content area teachers reported that the lessons they created and reported on in the online follow-up were successful.

Campus Support of TALA Implementation

Outcomes of the schoolwide implementation of TALA strategies and routines included the following:

- ELA teachers, as well as administrators, know more than content area teachers across grade levels about the extent to which teachers from their campuses attended TALA. Content area teachers do know more about which other content area teachers attended TALA than they know about ELA teachers. This indicates that content area teachers are still somewhat isolated from their ELA counterparts when it comes to discussing TALA implementation. However, findings also indicate that TALA may have made some progress in content area teachers' awareness of instructional strategies to help adolescents learn about literacy.
- Campus support for TALA was high. This is based on feedback from teachers and administrators, most of who indicated that various campus policies and practices were partially or fully implemented.
- ELA teachers are meeting with other ELA teachers to discuss TALA implementation, more so than content area teachers are meeting with any teachers at their campuses to discuss TALA implementation. Neither group as a whole was meeting with campus administrators to discuss TALA implementation.
- To a great extent, campus administrators made changes to or acted upon almost all campus support policies and practices for TALA implementation. However, it may take some additional time for these policies and practices to take hold and for teacher to become aware of them.
- Administrator respondents indicated that TALA positively affected changes in classroom literacy practices and student outcomes.
- Barriers to implementation that were noted included time, lack of buy-in, and lack of administrator training. The need for time included more planning time, time for professional development activities, and proper testing and small group instruction. Teachers reported a lack of buy-in from the students, whereas administrators cited difficulty with obtaining

support from teachers. Administrators reported that their lack of training with the actual TALA strategies and routines was a critical barrier to TALA implementation.

- The most often reported facilitators to TALA implementation pertained to the TALA training itself. The TALA training was reported as a facilitator to implementation. Another facilitator was the provided resources (TALA manual) that included helpful strategies for dealing with poor readers. Support from other teachers was also listed as a facilitator to implementation.

Impact of TALA on Student Achievement

The evaluation team investigated the effects of TALA on student achievement, in particular, reading, math, science, and social studies achievement. In addition, the effects of TALA on achievement by students identified as being at-risk. (i.e., special education, LEP, economically disadvantaged) were explored.

In order to best understand the impact of TALA on student achievement, campuses were first divided into three cohorts based on when the teachers attended TALA training:

- Cohort A: Campuses with Grade 6 teachers who participated in TALA training in 2008.
- Cohort B: Campuses with Grade 6, Grade 7, and Grade 8 teachers who participated in TALA training in 2009.
- Cohort C: Campuses with Grade 6 teachers who participated in TALA training in 2008, and additional teachers in Grade 6 through 8 who participated in TALA training in 2009.

Next, TALA campuses were classified on level of TALA participation (high, medium, or low). For each campus, a participation indicator was calculated by multiplying the percentage of eligible teachers who attended the TALA trainings and the percentage of TALA-trained teachers who completed the online follow-up module. Implementation-level subgroups were created within each cohort by classifying campuses based on whether their respective participation indicator value placed them in the lower, middle, or upper third of the distribution. The campus-level analysis assumes that all students on the campus had opportunity to have experienced teaching that had been impacted by TALA implementation.

To obtain preliminary evidence of the impact of TALA on student-level outcomes, the effect of TALA on student achievement was explored by comparing students who were taught by a TALA participating teacher during 2009-10 (referred to as TALA students) to students who were not taught by a TALA participating teacher (referred to as non-TALA students). It was possible to link individual student-level data to individual TALA teacher participant data from eight case study schools.

Reading Achievement

Comparisons of TALA Participating Campuses by Cohort

Results from the trend analyses of TAKS reading achievement of students (from 2005-06 to 2009-10) at TALA participating campuses were as follows:

- An examination of general trends over time on TAKS reading suggests that TALA participating campuses (high, medium and low) generally mirrored overall state trends.

- TALA campuses experienced general decreases in the percentage of Grade 6 and Grade 8 students who met the reading TAKS standard, while the percentage of Grade 7 students increased.
- Within TALA cohorts, no significant mean differences in students' reading TAKS scores were found between high, medium, and low participation TALA campuses.

Students of TALA Participating Teachers vs. Students of Non-TALA Participating Teachers

Results from the trend analyses (from 2004-05 to 2009-10) of TAKS reading achievement of students with a TALA participating teacher and students of a non-TALA teacher were as follows:

- Both TALA and non-TALA Grade 6 and Grade 7 students experienced a decrease in the percentage of students who met or exceeded the TAKS reading standard since 2008-09. The observed decline was greater for the non-TALA students at both grade levels.
- The percentage of Grade 8 TALA students who met the reading standard increased since 2008-09, whereas the percentage of non-TALA students remained the same.

Math, Science, and Social Studies Achievement

Comparisons of TALA Participating Campuses by Cohort

Results from the trend analyses (from 2005-06 to 2009-10) of TAKS achievement of students at TALA participating campuses were as follows:

- An examination of general trends over time on TAKS math suggests that TALA participating campuses (high, medium and low) generally mirrored overall state trends.
- TALA campuses experienced general increases in the percentage of Grade 6, Grade 7, and Grade 8 students who met the math TAKS standard.
- TALA campuses experienced increases in the percentage of Grade 8 students who met the TAKS standard in science and social studies.
- Within TALA cohorts, no significant mean differences in students' math, science, or social studies TAKS scores were found between high, medium, and low participation TALA campuses.

Students of TALA Participating Teachers vs. Students of Non-TALA Participating Teachers

Results from the trend analyses (from 2004-05 to 2009-10) of TAKS content area achievement of students with a TALA participating teacher and students of a non-TALA teacher were as follows:

- Both TALA and non-TALA Grade 6 students experienced a decrease in the percentage of students who met or exceeded the TAKS math standard since 2008-09. TALA students outperformed the non-TALA students (77% and 72% respectively).
- Since 2008-09, the percentage of Grade 7 TALA students who met the math standard increased (from 70% to 72%), whereas the percentage of non-TALA students remained the same (at 75%).

- Both TALA and non-TALA Grade 8 students experienced an increase in the percentage of students who met or exceeded the TAKS math standard since 2008-09 (75% and 76% respectively).
- The percentage of non-TALA students who met the science TAKS standard in 2009-10 was higher (70%) than the percentage of TALA students (65%).
- The percentage of TALA students who met the social studies TAKS standard in 2009-10 was significantly higher (93%) than the percentage of non-TALA students (89%).

At-Risk Student Achievement

Using student-level data comparing the same students from one year to the next, the change in percentage of Grade 6 through 8 students from TALA participating campuses (cohorts) who met the TAKS standards in reading and math (first administration) was examined for at-risk student groups. The at-risk groups included special education students, LEP students, and economically disadvantaged students. The team analyzed student level TAKS data to compare the percentage of students who met the TAKS standards in 2007-08 and the percentage of the same group of students who met the TAKS standards in 2008-09. The results included:

- The percentage of Grade 6 special education students who met the standard in reading increased for Cohort A and decreased for Cohorts B and C. The percentage of Grade 7 special education students who met the reading standard decreased across all cohorts, whereas the percentage of Grade 8 special education students increased across all cohorts. Across the grade levels, special education students at TALA campuses outperformed the state average for special education students in reading.
- The percentage of Grade 6 special education students who met the standard in math increased for Cohort A and decreased for Cohorts B and C. The percentage of Grade 7 and Grade 8 special education students who met the math standard increased across all cohorts. Across the grade levels, special education students at TALA campuses outperformed the state average for special education students in math.
- The percentage of Grade 6 LEP students who met the reading standard increased for all cohorts. The percentage of Grade 7 LEP students who met the reading standard decreased across all cohorts, whereas the percentage of Grade 8 LEP students increased across all cohorts. Across the grade levels, LEP students at TALA campuses outperformed the state average for LEP students in reading in 2009-10.
- The percentage of Grade 6 LEP students who met the math standard increased for Cohort A, decreased for Cohort C, and remained the same for Cohort B. The percentage of Grade 7 LEP students who met the reading standard increased for Cohort C and remained the same for Cohort B., whereas the percentage of Grade 8 LEP students increased across all cohorts. Across the grade levels, the state average for LEP students in math declined from 2008-09 to 2009-10.
- The percentage of Grade 6 economically disadvantaged students who met the reading standard increased for all cohorts. The percentage of Grade 7 economically disadvantaged students who met the reading standard decreased across all cohorts, whereas the percentage of Grade 8 economically disadvantaged students increased across all cohorts. Across the grade levels, economically disadvantaged students at TALA campuses outperformed the state average for economically disadvantaged students in reading in 2009-10.

- The percentage of Grade 6 economically disadvantaged students who met the math standard decreased for Cohorts B and C, and remained the same for Cohort A. The percentage of Grade 7 economically disadvantaged students who met the math standard increased for Cohort C and decreased for Cohort B, whereas the percentage of Grade 8 economically disadvantaged students increased across all cohorts.

Cost-Effectiveness of TALA

The evaluation team examined how funds were used to both develop TALA content and disseminate TALA. The analyses revealed the following:

- Overall, 16,341 teachers completed the TALA professional development in the two years of the program (through December 2010).
- For the ELA component of TALA, ESCs drew down an average of 46% of the funding allocated for the dissemination of TALA during fiscal year 2009 (compared to 59% for fiscal year 2008).
- For the content area component of TALA, ESCs spent an average of 35% of their allocated funding for the content area academies during fiscal year 2009 (compared to 48% for fiscal year 2008).
- Generally, when ESCs drew down smaller percentages of their total allotted expenditures, it was due to fewer teachers attending the TALA trainings.

TALA Academies for Grade 6

- During fiscal year 2009, ESCs spent an average of \$1,256 per teacher and \$17,554 per academy to conduct TALA Grade 6 ELA academies (compared to \$799 per teacher and \$18,093 per academy in fiscal year 2008).
- During fiscal year 2009, it cost an average of \$2,263 per teacher and \$12,131 per academy to conduct TALA Grade 6 content area academies (compared to \$761 per teacher and \$11,192 per academy in fiscal year 2008).
- The different in expenditures per teacher served for fiscal year 2008 and 2009 is attributed, in large part, to the reduced number of TALA Grade 6 academies as well as the reduced average number of teachers in attendance of these academies for fiscal year 2009.

TALA Academies for Grades 7-8

- During fiscal year 2009, ESCs spent an average of \$952 per teacher and \$19,272 per academy to conduct TALA Grades 7-8 ELA academies.
- During fiscal year 2009, it cost an average of \$982 per teacher and \$13,325 per academy to conduct TALA Grades 7-8 content area academies.

Comparison of TALA ELA and Content Academies

- Overall, the average cost per academy was larger for ELA academies than it was for content area academies across grade level and fiscal year.
- When broken down by cost per teacher, ELA academies were only higher than content academies for TALA Grade 6 academies occurring during fiscal year 2008.

Cost Effectiveness

- Based on estimates, if the cost of providing TALA professional development to teachers in the case study schools was \$135,992, and the implementation of the program led to 314 additional students meeting the standard on TAKS Reading, then the cost per additional student meeting or exceeding the standard on TAKS Reading was \$433. Assuming continued success under TALA, the cost per additional student meeting or exceeding the standard on TAKS reading would be \$232 by FY 2011, and would continue to decrease over time.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The overall findings of the TALA evaluation provide evidence that the TALA content is representative of best practices for literacy instruction, explicitly aligned to English language arts (ELA)/reading national and state standards, and illustrative of best practices for professional development. The development of these high quality TALA materials represents a large investment in statewide professional development curriculum. The TALA materials will continue to be useful and relevant, regardless of the delivery format (e.g., face-to-face, online).

The TALA training effectively prepared state and regional trainers for their roles as TALA trainers. The 2008 and 2009 TALA training of trainers has established a statewide network of prepared TALA regional trainers. The current network of experienced trainers will be able to provide TALA training for years to come.

The TALA training also prepared Grade 6 through 8 classroom teachers for implementation of the TALA routines and strategies in their classrooms. ELA and content area teachers who participated in TALA are implementing a limited number of TALA strategies and routines into their classrooms. About two-thirds of ELA teachers across all grades felt well prepared to administer and interpret results from the Texas Middle School Fluency Assessment (TMSFA), but only about half of them actually did so. It is important to note that content area teachers are implementing strategies in their instruction to improve adolescent literacy. Classroom teachers and campus administrators report campus support for the TALA program, consistent with the schoolwide approach of TALA.

Of the three grades (6 through 8), TALA was most clearly related to improvements on student achievement on TAKS in Grade 8 students. TALA is also impacting reading in the content areas, in particular, math and social studies. The percentage of students meeting the TAKS reading and math standards is increasing among LEP students and economically disadvantaged students. Special education students are also experiencing positive increases in TAKS scores in math, but less of an effect in reading. This could be due to lower percentages of classroom teachers reporting the use of Tier II/III routines than Tier I routines.

Recommendations Related to the Quality of TALA Training

While the perception of TALA by the TAB, evaluation team observers, TALA trainers and TALA participating teachers was overwhelmingly positive, some feedback was received that may provide guidance regarding potential modifications to TALA. Critical feedback included the following:

- **Recommendation: TALA trainers should seek to create a balance between closely following provided presenter notes and injecting their own style and examples into**

TALA training. Observers, trainers, and participants all noted that they felt that trainers read too much from presenter notes. This presentation style may have been due to the TALA training curriculum developer's detailed specifications (based on feedback from expert reviewers, TEA, and other stakeholders) on what information needed to be provided so TALA would impact the teachers as developers intended. While some regional trainers liked having more detail, this preference was likely based on their experience and comfort with implementing training that they did not personally develop. The focus on detailed presentation may have led to a higher level of implementation fidelity. However, it also may have hindered the presenters' spontaneity in a way that came off as "rote" and was distracting and/or off-putting. Providing guidance to trainers that allows a better balance between standardized presentation and unique presentation styles may be helpful in reducing these minimal negative perceptions.

- **Recommendation: TALA developers should continue to seek ways to fully engage content area teachers so that it is clear how they might connect TALA literacy strategies with their work in the classroom.** Content area trainers rated the quality of the TALA TOTs highly and reported that they were likely to attend a similar TOT. However, ELA regional trainers rated five of the eight quality aspects of the TALA training significantly higher than content area regional trainers. Content area teachers who attended TALA in 2009 felt slightly less prepared than ELA teachers to implement TALA Tier I instructional routines. In particular, content area teachers in 2008 and 2009 felt least prepared to facilitate partner reading. Partner reading is the one strategy that specifically involves reading as a strategy (the other strategies are more general) and this finding suggests that content area teachers may not be likely to incorporate the partner reading strategy into their teaching.

Strong evidence that content area teachers were not quite as engaged with TALA also came from results related to whether or not teachers attending TALA training would recommend it to their peers. While a majority of ELA and content area teachers across grade levels felt the training they attended helped them improve their teaching and felt the training was appropriate for their peers, ELA teachers would recommend it more so for their peers (i.e., other ELA/reading teachers) than for content area teachers. Similarly, content area teachers were also more likely to recommend TALA to ELA teachers than to other content area teachers. Similarly, the likelihood of recommending TALA to peers by both ELA and content area teachers declined through the content areas from social studies, to science, to mathematics, in that order. These findings are expected since TALA is focused on improving literacy instruction and part of TALA's goal was to reduce the stigma about teaching literacy through the content areas, particularly in mathematics. Recommending TALA to peers who teach social studies (as compared to math and science) may be the most recommended by teachers because learning social studies requires strong comprehension skills.

- **Recommendation: Additional support and/or training may be needed in order for ELA teachers to become proficient with the TMSFA.** A smaller proportion of ELA teachers across all grade levels (about two-thirds) felt prepared to administer and interpret results of the TMSFA compared to other TALA strategies (about three-fourths) after attending TALA. This aligns with qualitative findings that ELA teacher participants indicated the need for a separate training on the use of the TMSFA in their classroom.
- **Recommendations: Additional work may be needed within the TALA training materials regarding using strategies with students from special populations (e.g., dyslexia).** This may also be an area where teachers could use additional support or training during the school year. Among the special populations examined, a majority of teachers felt most prepared to design instruction for students from low socioeconomic environments (at

least three-quarters) and least prepared to design instruction for students with dyslexia (just over half). TALA may have a better effect on helping teachers design instruction for students with learning disabilities in general rather than specific disabilities like dyslexia. TALA may need a stronger focus on designing instruction for students with dyslexia, although this may already be available to teachers through more specialized training.

- **Recommendation: Consider developing a TALA administrator training that has a face-to-face component as well as additional content relevant to administrators.** The TAB concluded that the administrator training was “a step in the right direction” but that it would be improved if it was always offered in person with an online follow-up. While about half of the administrators rated the quality of the TALA administrator overview training to be “above average” or “excellent,” the other half rated the quality lower. This may be due to the variation in how trainings were delivered (e.g., face-to-face, online), as well as who provided the training (ESCs or another provider). This warrants the need for more consistency in the delivery of the administrator training. The TAB also recommended that the administrator training be extended to include detailed instruction on the use of the *Walkthrough Guide* and a simplified *Teacher Self-Assessment* included in the materials. However, in this case, a majority of administrators rated the training structure, training content, and training materials as “effective” or “very effective.”

Overall, based on substantial feedback from TALA participants from various groups, including the TAB, regional trainers, teachers, and administrators, as well as across two years of data collection, the quality of TALA has consistently been rated high. As TEA moves forward with ongoing implementation of TALA, consideration should be paid to some of the quality improvement suggestions that have been made throughout the evaluation.

Recommendations Related to TALA Implementation in the Classroom

While TALA ELA teacher participants are prepared to implement TALA instructional routines and strategies and have had success in implementing TALA in their classrooms, some feedback was received that may provide guidance regarding potential modifications to TALA. Critical feedback included the following:

- **Recommendation: As TEA moves forward with ongoing implementation of TALA, consideration should be paid to efforts to expand the number and types of TALA methods used by ELA teachers.** ELA teachers from Grades 6, 7 and 8 reported the Tier I instructional routines they used most often were building background knowledge, defining words, and identifying main ideas in text. These same routines were also the most frequently reported routines in 2008 (note: a new rating scale prevents direct comparison). The least often used routines were writing summaries, generating examples and non-examples and selecting words. The two Tier II/III routines implemented most often by 2009 Grade 6 ELA respondents either once a week or daily were also the two that 2008 Grade 6 ELA respondents indicated they used frequently. Although the response scale was not the same, the two routines most commonly implemented were using graphic organizers and generating Level I, II, and III questions. Grade 7 and 8 teachers also reported using these two routines, along with identifying text structures, the most often. The least often used routines for all grades were conducting morphemic analysis, identifying syllable structures, and identifying text structures. Observers saw fewer instances of word study (syllable patterns), word study (morphemes), fluency, and inferential comprehension routines (Tier II/III routines) during classroom observations. ELA teachers should be adept at implementing a wide array of TALA methods more frequently in order to engage students and improve student learning.

- Recommendation: Additional support and/or training may be needed in order for ELA teachers to become proficient with the TMSFA.** About two-thirds of ELA teachers across all grades felt well prepared to administer and interpret results from the TMSFA, but only about half of them actually did so. While only Grade 7 teachers are required to administer and interpret results to guide instruction for students who do not demonstrate reading proficiency on the Grade 6 TAKS Reading, other ELA teachers are able to use it to guide their instruction. This could continue to be a valuable tool for middle school teachers to use regardless of grade level. Additional training and support could be offered through online modules to remind TALA ELA teacher participants about the TMSFA and how to use it.

Recommendations based on feedback from content area teachers include the following:

- Recommendation: As TEA moves forward with ongoing implementation of TALA, consideration should be paid to efforts to expand the number and types of TALA methods used by content area teachers.** As noted earlier, some of the Tier I instructional routines were used more than others. Less than half of the content area teachers implement writing summaries (40%) once a week or daily. Also, less than half of the Grade 7 and Grade 8 content area respondents implement writing summaries once a week or daily.
- Recommendation: Increase the extent to which content area teachers are incorporating what they learned at TALA into their instruction.** Although 83% of content area teachers reported that they were incorporating TALA practices and strategies into instruction “to some degree” or “quite a bit,” fewer than 10% of the teachers reported the highest level of implementation (a great deal). Additional training and/or a focus on encouraging true schoolwide implementation of the TALA initiatives would benefit Texas students.

Recommendations Related to the Effectiveness of TALA

While the preliminary achievement findings are promising, it is important to note that for teachers who attended TALA in 2009, findings are based on one year of implementation. As previously stated, TALA appears to be making a greater impact on campuses where teachers had two years to implement TALA. TALA was designed as a schoolwide approach to adolescent literacy, and more time is needed to see the effects of the program.

- Recommendation: Continue to collect statewide participation data and look at trends in student achievement related to participation.** Since TALA is a schoolwide program, students may be exposed to the routines in a number of teachers’ classrooms. Theoretically, the more teachers from a campus who attend training and implement the TALA routines and strategies in their classroom, the greater the likelihood of change in literacy skills at the campus. That is, as the number of teachers who participate in training increase, so might students’ literacy skills and, ultimately, students’ achievement as measured by TAKS.
- Recommendation: Consider the possibility of intensive demonstration site studies where TALA is implemented schoolwide.** Case studies were conducted with a sample of the academically unacceptable schools that sent teachers to TALA. In addition, campuses that adopted TALA and exhibited a positive shift in TAKS scores (either reading or math) were selected as case study sites. This allowed a greater exploration of how TALA is being implemented in AU and high TALA implementing campuses. It also allowed the evaluation team to assess the level of campus support. Additional case studies of high TALA participating sites would provide more extensive information about how the program is being implemented schoolwide. These sites can be used as a guide illustrating how TALA can work in a school.