



**Districts of Innovation Report 2015-16**  
**District: TAYLOR COUNTY**

**Monitoring process part III**  
**Elements of District Specific Plan**

**key areas of success** changes for 2016-17

**Innovation Strategy/Model**

**Waiver 1**

Waiver of funding (based on average daily attendance) and state mandated test taking requirements so students can take the tests upon completion of the course or grade and not have to wait until the end of the semester/year.

Briefly describe progress toward meeting the goals and expected outcomes stated in the plan and include data to support reported outcomes.

Goals:

- Increase number of students who utilize anytime/anywhere learning to access the district's online library of common core classes and submit assignments electronically.
- Reduce the amount of missed days and impact to funding. School would receive funding on completion of standards, not ADA.
- Increase the number of students who graduate early and attend college.

Expected outcomes:

- Established an attitude of no limits for learning
- Provide flexibility which models existing personal and career cultures
- Develops students who are responsible for their own learning

*TCHS created a Cardinal Academy where students can design their own daily learning schedules. Once students have completed a self-paced learning course by mastering the standards, they move on to the next course – ex. When a student completes Math 7 they move on to Math 8. The number of students completing high school coursework and taking college courses continues to grow. Enrollment in Cardinal Academy has nearly doubled for 2016-17 and will include monthly seminars at school. From STEM activities to community people sharing information about their career fields to field trips to colleges and businesses, these activities are an expansion of learning outside the classroom and centered around career pathways the students are interested in.*

**Waiver 2**

Waiver of the KEES funding statute so funds can pay for early college credit classes while students are still in high school.

This waiver was **DENIED**

Goal:

Increase number of students, especially low income, who attend college.

Expected outcomes:

Briefly describe what, if anything, the district has done to meet this goal without benefit of the waiver. Include data to support outcomes. Were discussions held with KHEAA?

*Through the Race To The Top grant, a small amount of funds were allotted for students for college/career readiness, so we have set aside high school funds for partial scholarships for students who wish to take the Medical Nursing Assistant certification at Campbellsville University. This is for students who wish to get an early start on their medical careers. TCHS helped approximately 15 students with this financial burden.*

**Waiver 3**

Waiver of EPSB certification restrictions on subject areas so current teachers can teach additional subjects. The purpose of this waiver was to allow awarding of credit from certified professionals and allow teachers to provide instruction outside of their current content/grade level certifications.

This waiver was **DENIED**

Goal:

Increased college and career readiness; improved soft skills

Expected outcomes:

- Expanded course and learning opportunities
- Exposure to greater variety of occupations
- Connections to potential employers
- Increased connection between school and business
- Workforce prepared with local workforce skills
- Improved soft skills

Briefly describe any resolution to this issue through collaboration with EPSB. What other innovative strategies has the district employed to attain the expected outcomes? Did the district develop qualifications for outside professionals?

N/A

**Waiver 4**

Waiver of class size restrictions for multi-age, self-paced classrooms, with individualized learning stations where students learn standards at their own pace.

Goal:

Increased individualized education for students.

Expected outcomes:

- Classroom will create a sense of community and foster a support network for children
- Network will be between teachers and students and students and other students
- Level of interaction will enable the teacher to identify specific needs of each student
- Classroom will enable valuable data collection to determine effective styles of education

Briefly describe how this plan has enabled the district to increase the personalization for all students. How has the data collection informed teaching and learning? How has the level of interaction between teacher and student enabled the teacher to identify specific needs of students? Were students able to take state mandated tests based on completed standards rather than IC status? What were the outcomes?

*Through the RTTT grant, all schools have gone through the Leader In ME training program, and as a result, teachers have built a capacity for creating a sense of community and personalizing learning for all students. Students still test with their original grade level, however performance-based students enrolled in high school course do take the End of Course assessments, but their scores cannot 'count' until they reach ninth grade. Self-paced classes at the elementary level are being implemented in math so that students have a complete self-paced pathway all the way through high school.*

**Waiver 5**

Waiver of graduation requirements specific to subject matter so the district can tailor specific subjects to student interests and the student's service plan.

Goal:

Allow the district to tailor specific subjects to student interests and the student's service plan.

Expected outcomes:

- District will be able to choose courses which still meet curriculum content but are in line with the student's individual education plan.

Briefly describe how the district has altered its course structure to meet student needs while still satisfying curriculum content. How many students have benefitted from this approach? By what percentage has teacher participation in CIITS increased?

*Teacher participation in CIITS has increased from approximately 38% to over 90%. Students who are online and learn at their own pace are able to co-op and work to earn money once they have completed required courses and are on track to graduate. Students who are unable to find a job are able to do work-based experience through the many programs we offer at TCHS to help meet the needs of those students and their service plans. Approximately six to eight students benefit from this approach each year.*

### **District of Innovation Support Plan**

Briefly describe how the professional development needs identified in Table 7 of the plan have been, or are being, met. Provide information on professional development provided and resources allocated for professional development (money spent, KDE resources utilized, peer-led PD, UK Leadership Academy, etc.) based on the list of PD opportunities outlined in Table 7.

*As part of the RTTT grant, professional development needs have been met through the Leader in Me training and the 7 Habits of Highly Effective People for 2014-15. The RTTT grant has also provided professional development (through the KidFRIENDLy grant program) for personalized learning. Approximately \$9000 has been allotted our district for professional development opportunities for 2014-15.*

Briefly describe how the District Parent Advisory Council has been involved with the implementation of the innovation plan. How have parents been involved in the STEM Classroom of Innovation and the anywhere/anytime learning opportunities available for their children?

*The DPAC meetings allow time for parents and community members to learn about what's going on in our district and a chance to be informed about federal programs, testing, college/career readiness, online classes, property taxes, and generally any information stakeholders may deem important.*

Briefly describe any growth in early college, dual credit, early graduation, and graduation rates. Provide any available data that demonstrates that these gains are due in whole or in part to the implementation of the innovation plan. KDE understands that the first year or two of implementation will likely yield mostly baseline data. What measures will the district use to measure progress of the plan?

*The district will measure early graduate rates and increases in dual credit/early college rates.*

**Do you intend to seek additional waivers?**     Yes     Not at this time

**Did you apply for a grant from The Fund for Excellence in Education?**     Yes     No

If yes, what was the outcome?

Did you apply to be one of the Integration Districts to pilot performance assessments in science? \_\_\_Yes \_\_X\_\_No  
Was your district chosen?

Is your district a member of one of the Race to the Top consortia? If yes, what effect does the Race to the Top scope of work have on your innovation plan? Are they aligned? Have you used Race to the Top funding to support your District of Innovation plan?

*Yes, our district is a member of the RTTT consortia. The grant did allow monies for teacher professional development networks in communities of practice, personalized learning, and most recently we've planned trainings from The Buck Institute for project-based learning. Some funding has been used for students to take college courses, for example, MNA certification (as stated above).*

### Executive Summary

In 2015-16 Taylor County Schools continued to reach outside the box while “Reinventing the Wheel”. We were able to expand our Cardinal Academy model into all three school levels. This model allows students the freedom to choose the activities daily that they will utilize to master the standards at hand. Our six-spoke wheel of learning has received attention nationwide. (Included below is an article featured in a national educational innovation publication called *Getting Smart*). Expanding the number of students in Cardinal Academy at all three schools is a goal for 2016-17. Students who are in Cardinal Academy are also invited to attend monthly seminars at school. From STEM activities to community people sharing information about their career fields to field trips to colleges and businesses, these activities are an expansion of learning outside the classroom and centered around career pathways the students are interested in.

In addition to the multiple publications and national presentations, Taylor County Schools hosted the first ever TC Innovation Summit. Over 150 participants from 9 states traveled to Taylor County to observe, study, and partner with us and see our performance based learning model. The summit included approximately 30 of our most innovative teachers utilizing TC Students to conduct LIVE demonstrative sessions. Summit participants were also given the opportunity to tour our newly constructed performance based campus.

Feel free to contact me if you need additional information. Enjoy the article below.

## Student Choice Is a Key Ingredient for a 100% Graduation Rate

Having students sit in a classroom with their feet planted firmly on the ground listening to lectures and completing worksheets 175 days a year is just not working for all of today's students. At Taylor County Schools in central Kentucky, we follow what we call the four non-negotiables:

1. No student is held back from learning at his or her ability level due to age.
2. No student is allowed to drop out.
3. No student is allowed to fail.
4. Each student is afforded the opportunity to choose an instructional setting that best suits his or her learning style.

By tailoring the education of all 2,600 students, as opposed to using traditional methods, Taylor County Schools achieves a 100% graduation rate without a single student dropping out in seven years (going on eight). We realize this success is due to embracing an innovative, student-centered approach to teaching and learning. We dropped the cookie-cutter approach years ago, choosing not to "imprison" any of our students in a classroom setting that isn't conducive to their education.

As one of the first five districts in Kentucky designated a District of Innovation by the state Department of Education, Taylor County's creative approach gives us more flexibility to educate students. Our performance-based model allowed us to apply for this distinction, and in return, we are granted a waiver from the state's seat-time requirements.

In Taylor County, we support a performance-based model, placing students in classes based on ability rather than age. We implement a Wheel of Learning approach that includes six "spokes" (options) for students to choose how they want to learn: a traditional learning approach, a virtual model, project-based learning, peer-led instruction, self-paced learning, and Cardinal Academy (for gifted/advanced students). Both our students and teachers choose which approach is right for them, and we match students to the teachers and modes of instruction they desire.

"It's simple," said Charles Higdon, Jr., the assistant superintendent of Taylor County Schools. "Performance-based education is looking at every individual student and asking, 'How does that student perform best?' and customizing their education so they can achieve success."

Here are details of our six "spokes."

**Traditional Model:** Some students and teachers still prefer the traditional approach where kids come to class each day and receive direct instruction. As long as students still desire this model of education, we'll continue to offer it.

**Virtual Learning:** Students can work at their own pace using Odysseyware's online courses. In the virtual academy, students log in to their online classes from a computer lab, and a fully certified teacher serves as an on-site guide.

Working individually, students are in control of their own education, and have the freedom to listen to music or take a walk to clear their mind if they need to. Since we opened our virtual academy, many at-risk students are now moving through the curriculum at an accelerated pace, graduating early and entering the workforce more quickly. This is an option many school districts do not offer.

**Project-Based Learning (PBL):** In these classrooms, units are set up based on authentic, real-world problems. At 5:15 in the video below, Taylor County science teacher Kellie Jones explains how she used to do a culminating project at the end of a unit so students could show what they learned.

Now, projects come at the beginning, giving students a reason to learn, which increases engagement levels and incorporates 21st-century skills. When students apply their knowledge in real-world settings outside of school, they see more of a value in their education, as opposed to just memorizing facts for a test.

PBL has also increased community involvement. For instance, a local business donated LEGO engineering kits to one of our elementary classes, and students worked together in groups to design factories. We also offer several mentorships and real-life experiences for our students through school-based enterprises like our student-run bank, high school gift shop, a culinary arts catering service, an aviation course where students can earn their pilot's license, and a greenhouse run by agricultural students. Additionally, our students have a business called tBay, our version of eBay, where students sell goods online for the public and earn a percentage.

**Peer-Led Instruction:** In these classrooms, students learn from each other, with the teacher acting as a facilitator. Students who master a concept or content will help other students learn. For some, it helps to hear an explanation from one of their peers rather than a teacher. Additionally, Taylor County has a program called STARS (Students Teaching and Reaching Students) which has helped more than 250 students to successfully become mentors.

**Self-Paced Learning:** In this personalized, blended approach, learners access teacher-created video lessons as opposed to direct instruction. Students move through the content at their own rate, using a pacing guide that provides specific directions on how to master each standard.

In this setting, educators play a facilitator role, formatively assessing on a daily basis through various interactions including partner activities, projects, online simulations and exercises, whole-group activities, and one-on-one instruction. Students are able to access

content from home and re-watch instructional videos as needed in order to learn the material. We base our self-paced approach on achievement level, not age, so students who finish grade-level content before the school year is over can move on to the next grade. (To see the Taylor County self-paced classroom in action, check out the video above from 3:00–4:30.)

Cardinal Academy: In this new high school program, students develop their own learning plan and schedule under the guidance of an academic advisor. They decide what subjects they will work on, when, and for how long, and can choose to learn off campus through internships.

At 6:50 in the video, gifted and talented coordinator Debbie Gumm explains how one student is taking all elective and CTE courses after completing his state requirements. At 10:30 in the video, Superintendent Cook breaks down how nearly 100 students come to school every day without a specific teacher or schedule. Cardinal Academy provides middle school students an opportunity to earn high school credits and work ahead in subjects they excel in.

There's a fit for every student; we just need to guide them in finding it and embrace the fact that all students learn differently. Letting students learn at their own pace and giving them choices in how to learn empowers them to take control of their education. We live the successes of this approach every day.

*Roger Cook is superintendent for Kentucky's Taylor County Schools. Follow them on Twitter: [@TC\\_Schools\\_KY](https://twitter.com/TC_Schools_KY).*