

WHY WE ARE CONSIDERING THE TEACHER INCENTIVE ALLOTMENT PROGRAM

Sylvanus Thayer is not a name that is well known today, but he comes to me out of history for a simple reason. As an early superintendent he made such an impression on the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, that he is now known as the “father” of that institution. What he understood in leading his academy, he once said succinctly enough to be passed down through the centuries. He said, “To make a good army out of the best men will take three years.”

Here at Great Hearts Texas, we understand something about the years it takes to shape the lives of young people who will go on to achieve great things. We understand the difficulty of such work, and something of the sacrifice involved. Those sacrifices are never far from my mind, and I am perpetually looking for ways to make our work more rewarding in terms of the culture and camaraderie we build through our actions every day and in terms of each employee receiving the professional opportunities they deserve.

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One such opportunity for us rests in a program created by the state several years ago called the Teacher Incentive Allotment program, a state initiative that enables strong teachers to earn extra pay. TIA is no panacea, in fact no initiative ever is. What TIA is, however, is an opportunity to do three things: First, to assess the potential to gain access to additional funds to pay teachers. Second, to remain competitive with other school districts that are opting into the program and can thereby offer more to some of their most successful teachers. And finally, gaining entry into the

program will potentially give us greater flexibility in meeting tutoring requirements for students who struggle with STAAR exams.

There are risks and downsides to TIA, and other districts have experienced those shortfalls. In my view, the biggest risk involves successfully creating a teacher evaluation system that reinforces our culture and our values. There is, however, a crucial element to the program that has kept me focused on sorting through the challenges posed by TIA. In the end, we will own this initiative. It will be Great Hearts teachers and administrators who will drive any evaluation system, and it will be Great Hearts that develops the system and gives it life. It also will take something close to Thayer’s three years to implement. We started work on this initiative nearly six months ago, and won’t formally file an application until six months from now. What will follow will be a year of study and then a year of implementation.

Once fully instituted, I expect that the financial rewards of being in the program will be substantial. I wouldn’t yet say, how substantial. The state offers estimates that would be deeply appreciated by our teachers, but I also want us to confirm any number based on hard data specific to us before endorsing it here. I also would expect TIA would help us retain teachers who might be tempted to hop to districts that have TIA already, and I look forward to using TIA to meet some tutoring requirements.

I am telling you about TIA today because I would like you to learn more about the program. We would like to craft our approach to the program in a way that aligns with our core principles, philosophy, and culture. Hearing from you will help us towards that goal, so we ask that you take a second to [answer a few questions](#).

Where We Are In the Process

A major component of TIA is the evaluation framework. Our plan is to pilot an evaluation system that is compatible with state requirements but that matches our culture and values. Once we are comfortable with that system, we would then formally apply this Spring and then, if approved, begin a Great Hearts Texas-wide implementation plan next year.

There are eight headmasters who have volunteered to use a preliminary evaluation framework during the current school year. This group meets monthly with the project team to provide feedback and input from their experience with the evaluation system.

We are also engaging with faculty members to join our planning committee and will gather faculty input. One step in gathering that input will feature a lunch and learn on this topic in January.

Other touch points on TIA will include:

- More information on the program to be shared by email in January.
- The creation of a faculty information website with TIA program details.
- Opportunities for faculty and others to engage directly with the project team.

Your input is essential. If you have not filled out the survey link above, please take a minute to answer these few simple questions.

As always, if you would like to share any thoughts about the contents of this bulletin, please reach out to Superintendentscorner@greatheartstx.org.

With gratitude,

Brendan Miniter
Superintendent, Great Hearts Texas