



May 11, 2010

Ms. Sharon Adams-Taylor
Associate Executive Director
American Association of School Administrators
801 N Quincy St, Suite 700
Arlington, VA 22203

Dear Ms. Adams-Taylor:

I am writing to express Education Service Center, Region 20's support for your organization's application to the U.S. Department of Education's *Investing in Innovation (i3)* fund for the purpose of performing a rigorous independent study of Tutor.com's on-demand tutoring and homework help service.

Thanks to funding from the Texas Education Agency, Education Service Center, Region 20 (ESC-20) implemented an online tutoring pilot in 2008-2009 and a pilot extension in 2009-2010 that included Palestine High School, a rural Title 1 school located approximately two hours east of Waco and two hours southeast of Dallas, serving nearly 900 diverse students. Our vendor partner was Tutor.com. The project was quite successful based on student comments at the end of each tutoring session, school leader surveys, and usage statistics. When students were stuck on their homework or needed help with a difficult concept, they simply logged into Tutor.com and received the help they needed from one of nearly two thousand tutors.

Students in rural communities often face challenges related to living in remote locations, such as limited resources or lack of internet access outside of school. Even when these students may have excellent classroom teachers, it is impossible for these teachers to address the unique needs of each individual student on an as-needed basis. School leaders used a variety of strategies and incentives to promote and maximize the use of online tutoring before, during and after the school day. Over the course of the pilot, Palestine High School students connected to highly qualified tutors many hundreds of times for just-in-time help. The average duration of a session was 26 minutes.

Recently, Palestine High School was recognized for the following: (1) raising its state accountability rating to the level of "Recognized" for the first time in school history, (2) double digit gains in Mathematics and Science, (3) above state average achievement in the Texas

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Growth Index (TGI) in all subjects, (4) 10th grade students' meeting of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for the first time in five years, and (5) a 50 percent reduction in discipline referrals [Source: <http://highschool.palestineschools.org/home>].

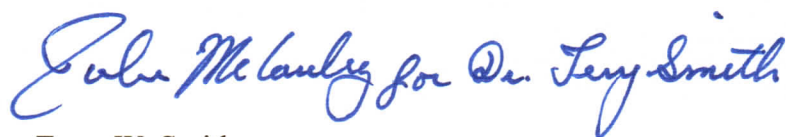
According to the pilot online survey results of 2008-2009, Palestine High School reported significant gains in student achievement, attendance and teacher morale, which were attributed in part to the positive impact of online tutoring in their school community. Given that the pilot did not include funding for a rigorous research study, it is impossible to quantify how much credit Tutor.com deserves for the above achievements. It is clear, however, from the usage statistics, session transcripts and post-session comments that students who used online tutoring have benefitted greatly from this service. Online tutoring enables them to master complex concepts, complete homework accurately, and feel better prepared to perform well in tests. A formal study of the impact of on-demand tutoring and homework help will, therefore, help document changes in student performance, attitude toward learning, attendance, discipline referrals, and teacher morale.

Since one of the requirements for a successful i3 grant application is that the proposed project must have "been attempted previously, albeit, on a limited scale or in a limited setting, with promising results that suggest more formal and systematic study is warranted," Palestine's experience with online tutoring over the past two school years appears to be an excellent example of such a previous attempt.

Should this i3 grant proposal be funded, ESC-20 will be available to support the American Association of School Administrators' efforts in the form of consulting services. We believe our knowledge and experience working with K-12 schools and online tutoring will help ensure the success of this grant implementation.

For questions and additional details, please contact Ms. Susanna Garza, Coordinator, Instructional Technology Services at (210) 370-5634 or by e-mail at susanna.garza@esc20.net.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Terry W. Smith for Dr. Terry Smith". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Terry W. Smith
Executive Director

TWS/lm