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Full Service Community Schools: Diboll, Texas

Partners for Rural Impact Annual Report (2025)

The U.S. Department of Education awarded Partners for Rural Impact (PRI) a Full-Service Community Schools (FSCS) capacity building grant in 2023 to support four schools in Diboll, Texas. FSCS capacity building grants, in contrast with other FSCS grants, focus on the early stages of developing a robust Full-Service Community School in a single school district. PRI's grant in Diboll aims to enhance the capacity of Diboll Independent School District, its schools, and the community to provide supports, resources, and services for students and their families. Evaluation findings highlight several early successes and strong initiatives that have already been established in the first two years of the grant.

Diboll is a small rural independent school district located in Angelina County in East Texas. The district includes four schools serving approximately 1,567 students in grades Pre-K-12. The student population is 51% Hispanic, 33% White, 12% African American, and 4% Two or More Races. The district serves a higher than average economically disadvantaged student body with 69% reported as economically disadvantaged compared to 60% across Texas.

About this Report

This report draws from needs assessment surveys of school staff, students, and families, and site visit interviews to illustrate how the grant is unfolding in schools and the community. Based on the data, this brief examines how the FSCS grant in Diboll is:

- Expanding enrichment opportunities
- Increasing instructional resources and supports
- Advancing postsecondary success
- Supporting students with disabilities
- Strengthening community partnerships

Evaluation Findings

Expanding enrichment opportunities

To build on the learning taking place during school and provide students with more opportunities to build strong connections, FSCS school coordinators introduced new extended enrichment activities after school and supplemental programs during the day. These opportunities allow students to pursue interests that complement classroom learning.

"...[Little Jack Leaders] has helped kids who don't normally get chosen for things...there are students who are basically nonreaders and they're able to participate in something that they wouldn't typically do, and they in turn are impacting younger kids."

— Principal

Through the Little Jack Leaders program at the elementary school, led by the school coordinator, students volunteer to read to other students during the school day. Addressing a priority of the elementary school principal, this program focuses on early literacy and reading incentives for students. The program also instills a sense of mentorship among students, including those who may not usually be recognized for achievement. The principal reported that there has also been improved behavior among participating students.

Additionally, FSCS has supported expanded resources for an under resourced art program at the school. The art teacher and school coordinator collaborated to expand access to art materials, including a school kiln for clay and pottery activities. Through partnership with PRI to strategically allocate grant resources in ways that yield sustainable opportunities, this vision became a reality. The new kiln is a sustainable resource expected to serve the school for decades and is an investment in expanding students' interests and engagement in the school through new activities.

Similarly, the FSCS grant has brought to fruition a goal of the junior high principal, which was to introduce a garden club for students through the purchase of gardening supplies. The new garden club gives students another way to be actively engaged within the school and take pride in their school community.

Increasing instructional resources and supports

Collaboration between school staff and PRI's FSCS school coordinators prioritized new and supplemental resources to encourage student learning and engagement. This partnership opened doors for innovative resources that encourage students to be excited about school and to view their school building as a place that cares about their development and interests.

FSCS is supporting literacy efforts through procurement of book vending machines for the intermediate school to encourage reading and improved attendance. School staff are excited about this new resource as it provides students with another fun way of developing an interest in reading. The library currently has reward systems in place to recognize students' attendance and reading habits, and the vending machine will further this effort and help more students become enthusiastic about coming to school and practicing their reading skills, promoting early literacy initiatives, and improved preparation for high school.

FSCS funding also expanded resources in an already established robotics lab at the high school, which provides competitive experiences for students and opportunities for students to practice hands-on skills that can be useful after graduation. FSCS supported these efforts by providing funding for the robotics team at the school, minimizing the school's expenses for competitions. As a result, students can explore and build engineering interests and skills, broadening their horizons for what careers they may be interested in pursuing after high school.

Advancing postsecondary success

In SY 2024-25, career awareness and college readiness programs were the most requested programs parents/guardians reported through the needs assessment that they wish their students had more access to. In response, the school coordinator worked in collaboration with guidance counselors to understand students' needs for life after graduation and to identify ways of expanding existing services to serve more students and families.

For example, students received one-on-one Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) support in English or Spanish. As more students began to learn about this targeted support, they sought out the school coordinator's assistance. In addition, the FSCS grant helped organize an event for the entire community so that students and their families could learn about the FAFSA process. Through collaboration with community partners, such as Angelina College, the Volunteer Generation Program grant, and local childcare services, families could attend and receive customized FAFSA support. Addressing a priority area highlighted throughout Diboll, this support helps strengthen the relationship

between families and the school in addition to helping the school to meet state requirements for completing the FAFSA form.

I set up a system to where kids could just sign up for appointments with me...I would sit down and kind of explain the process to them...and that also leads to our FAFSA tailgate clinic that we had...we were able to get food, childcare, and then one-on-one FAFSA assistance in both English and Spanish.

— School Coordinator

The FSCS grant also supported college tours so that students can gain a better idea of the college experience. Students participate in college visits to experience being on a university campus and to identify which college would be the best fit for them. They receive support with their college applications and have the school coordinator as a resource when questions arise. This arrangement helps students make better informed decisions about college and supports guidance counselors in the work they do with seniors. Future plans for this support include continuing these efforts and even expanding college visits to provide more tailored options of campuses and programs depending on students' interest.

Supporting students with disabilities

The FSCS grant has also brought new experiences for students with disabilities in Diboll who often do not have the opportunity to go on field trips or participate in other events. The FSCS school coordinator helped to arrange for members of the community to visit the classroom to share experiences from their line of work and how they contribute to their neighborhood. These roles include firefighters, police officers, hairdressers, and more. Through the visits, students learned about community roles, appropriate interactions, and saw emergency vehicles firsthand.

I am very grateful because I could use all the help I can get. My kids don't usually get the out in public opportunities so having the opportunities here at the school now is huge.

— Special Education Teacher

The students also visited the zoo thanks to collaboration with the FSCS grant. This was the first time these special education students were taken on a field trip. For trips such as this, the FSCS grant has helped to purchase t-shirts for all participants for easy tracking of and increased safety for students.

Strengthening community partnerships

The T.L.L. Temple Memorial Library brings a variety of services and programs to Diboll, and through a strong partnership with the FSCS grant team, they were able to provide additional opportunities for students and their families.

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library had been an idea in the past, but funding made it difficult to secure. With support from the FSCS grant, the Imagination Library was finally scheduled to come to Diboll. Programs such as this aim to encourage excitement around reading and, in turn, improve literacy among students and the community.

[PRI] is helping to launch the story walk that's going to be installed in our park so families can be active, enjoy the park, but also be immersed in reading.

— Local Librarian

Additionally, a partnership between the local librarian and the school coordinator helped to establish Story Walk that encouraged immersion in reading while enjoying the local Diboll public park. This Story Walk event created a bridge between the school, local library, and community, providing families with an opportunity to enjoy the outdoors while being immersed in reading and storytelling.

Recommendations and Next Steps

The following recommendations and suggested next steps build on the findings above. We offer them to identify high leverage ways to build on the early progress to date.

- **Rebuild and reset expectations of PRI in the school community.** Build on the early foundation set to navigate school coordinator turnover and re-establish expectations to maximize ways PRI can best support and build capacity at the school level. As schools begin to plan for the next school year, consider identifying a leader to support planning to ensure the knowledge of PRI's work goes beyond school leadership at each campus to teachers, parents, and other key stakeholders. Due to Diboll's small size, there is also an opportunity to establish clearer vertical alignment of resources across the four schools which can strengthen availability and use of supports.
- **Continue to partner with and utilize local community hubs to bridge support between the school and community.** The library, parks, and other central points in Diboll play a critical role in offering services to community members and maintaining open communication to further strengthen family engagement. By continuing to work with these local hubs and through hosting events, learning opportunities can be provided to help maintain and improve engagement with families and the broader community.
- **Build capacity to maintain academic and enrichment resources and support made available through the FSCS grant.** Due to limited state funding, schools will likely not have the capacity to support many programs and supports to the extent that the FSCS grant has been able to do. To ensure schools continue to benefit from resources beyond the life of the grant, prioritize resources that are sustainable (e.g., the kiln for the art program) and support the school to navigate alternative funding sources (e.g., braiding funds, external grants).
- **Expand access and resources to support family engagement.** Both FSCS school coordinators and school staff noted that family engagement is a challenge, affecting the reach of services offered. Advisory councils can play an important role in building upon existing engagement strategies and creating other avenues for engaging families and community members. By expanding these councils and continuing to uplift their voices, community members know that their opinions are valued and taken into consideration. Continuing community involvement may amplify engagement and participation overall.

