BOOST Conference

Texas ACE is Rockin' Afterschool:

Systematically Improving Program Quality Using Research-Based Practices

Texas 21st CCLC

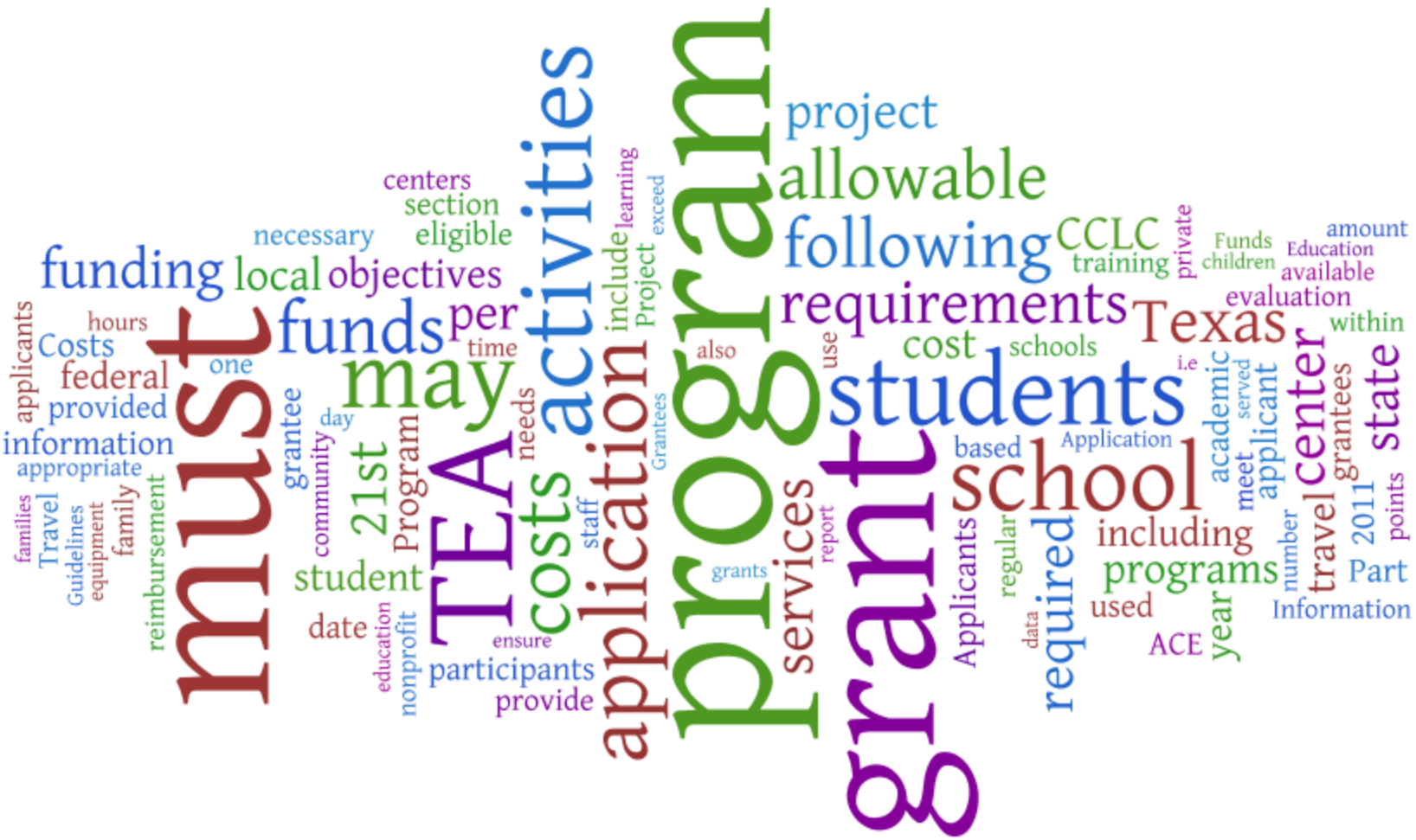
- Candace M. Ferguson, State Coordinator at the Texas Education Agency
- Re-braded to Texas ACE (Afterschool Centers on Education) in 2009
- Currently Texas serves Cycle 4, 5, and 6 which consist of 119 Grantees statewide representing 727 Centers and 884 participating campuses with around 180,000 students.

System of Support for Grantees

- TEA works with Program Enhancement and Quality Assurance contractor, Edvance Research
- Edvance employs a network of Technical Assistance Consultants and ACE Training Specialists
- We provide
  - Regional and Statewide Training and Conference
  - Online learning portal (MyTexasACE.org)
  - Public Website and Outreach Materials
  - Program Implementation Assurance support

Grantee Support Strategy

- Provide focused “systems” support and professional development to grant leaders
- Texas is HUGE!
- Focus on grant leaders to build their capacity to run high-quality programs.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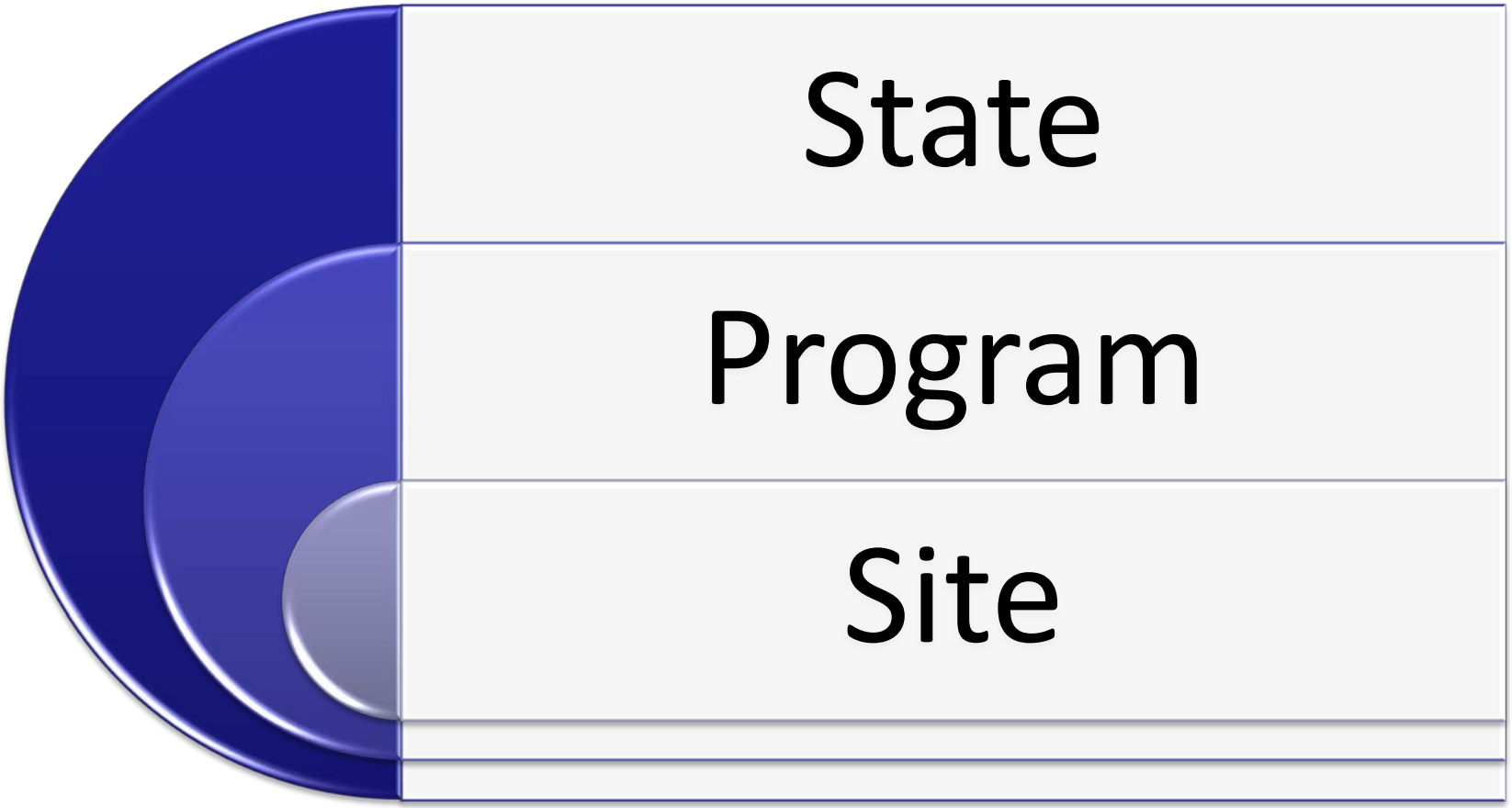
Session Goals:

- Review the Texas ACE PRIME Assessment Process, including a brief overview of the development process
- Reflect on your own program quality using the assessment
- Learn the results of implementing the assessment with 119 21st CCLC grantees across Texas – lessons learned content and process
- Explore the technical assistance services provided as follow-up to the assessment results for each grantee
- Access resources and tools provided to Texas grantees to improve program quality
- Brainstorm how to adapt and use this tested method in your state and program

Evidence-Based Internal Monitoring & Technical Assistance



21st CCLC Quality Assurance

- PRIME Blueprint for Texas ACE
- Site visit assessment tool (for TAC visits)
- Grantee Performance Status Report to measure grantee/program use of Blueprint (requirements and best-practices)
- Program Implementation Assurance Process & Assessment
- External Statewide Evaluation

Why Develop a Blueprint?

- Guide to help Grantees “build” TEA vision of 21st CCLC/Texas ACE
- Coherently blends program requirements with research-based information
- Creates framework of critical elements on which all stakeholders will focus
- Serves as organizer for training and communication
- Provides context for support

Edvance's Process for Development

1. Reviewed RFA's (with a focus on cycle 6, most recently improved)
2. Reviewed after-school research and best practices for critical and important program components
   - Seminal research, frameworks, national standards
   - Promising state/district tools
   - Other program standards
3. Mapped resources to RFA requirements
4. Reviewed initial findings with TEA
5. Developed three framework options

1. RFA Review

- Reviewed Cycles 4, 5, 6
- Some variations between documents, but enough similarities to “key” the blueprint off the Cycle 6 RFA.
- Identified 1 …th federal and

WOW!!!!
REALLY???

2. Research/Best Practices Review

- Essential Elements of After-School Programs
- TQS Standards (CIS)
- Moving Toward Success Framework for After-School Programs (Mott)
- National Afterschool Association Standards
- National Math/Science Partnership Evaluation
- CCSSO State Guide to Achieving the Promise of Extended Learning Opportunities
- A Guide to Continuous Improvement Management for 21st CCLC
- CA After-School Quality Self-Assessment Tool
- Other state models such as CO, FL, MI, NY

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3. Conclusion of Reviews

- Research convergence provides high levels of confidence regarding which elements are critical and important for success.
- Frameworks and evaluative tools coalesce around similar themes that primarily vary by degree of granularity.
- Available, high-quality tools were often variations of each other.
- Blueprints need to be broad enough to allow for flexibility, but categorical enough to allow for consistency in program work as well as meaningful evaluation and training.

4. Six Consistent Themes Were Noted From The Research Review

- Planning
- Grant Management and Operations
- Program Implementation
- School and Community Linkage
- Evaluation
- Sustainability

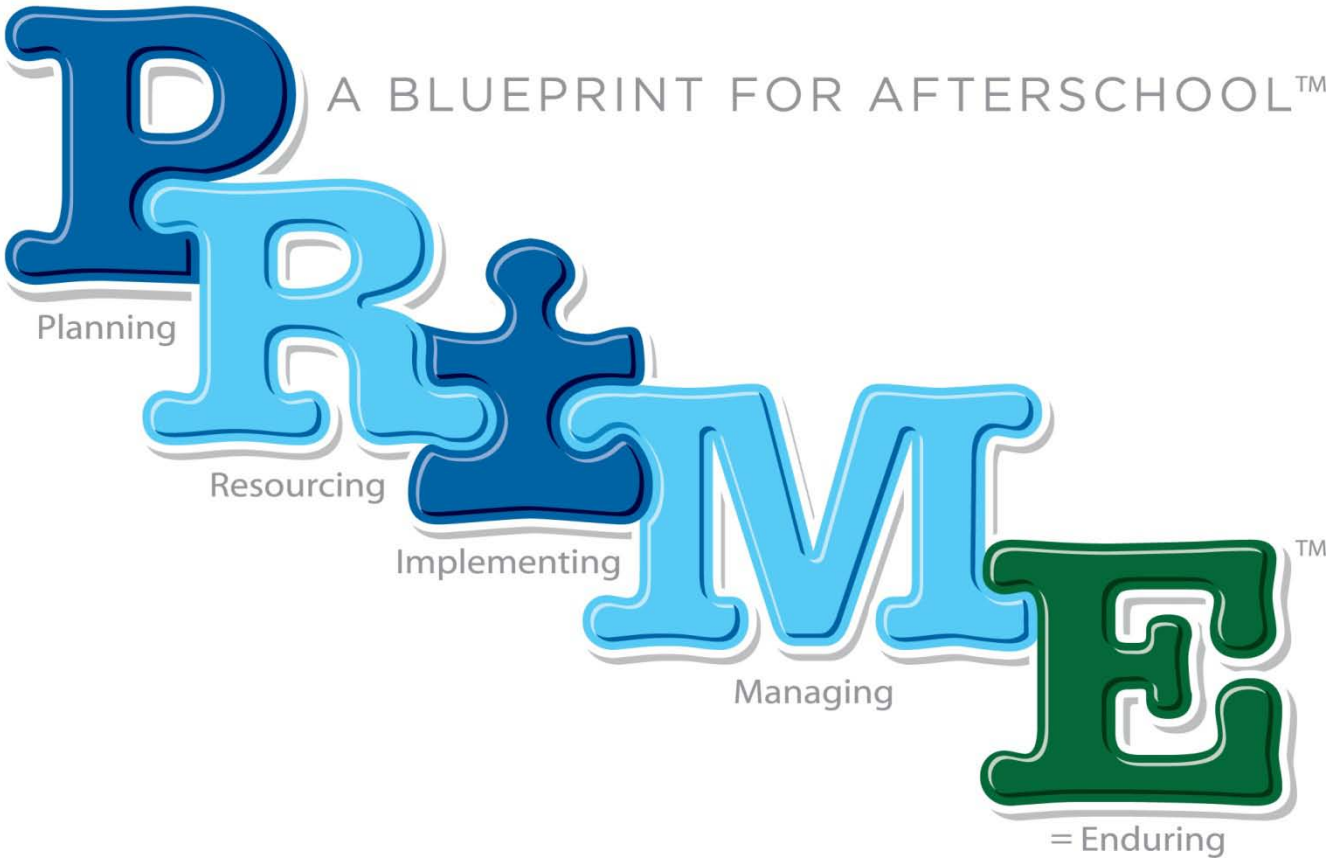
Based on the RFA review Grantee and Center responsibilities in Texas are aligned with these themes.

A Word About Sustainability…

- Is that what we mean or is it something else?
- Sustaining something principally means to support, hold, undergo, keep up, or bear up, typically structurally.
- Sustaining a program has become a task to be accomplished.
- What if enduring was the goal in terms of programs and the people impacted by them?
- When something endures it principally means it continues or lasts in the needed and embraced form and is generally acknowledged as having done so.
- Enduring can mean “going beyond sustainability” and be a key differentiator for the Texas program.

Making a Blueprint "Top of Mind"

- Blueprints (or similar documents) can be extremely valuable when remembered and acted upon regularly.
- Too often, strategy and blueprint documents are only consulted at the beginning of a project as a guideline or during evaluation (when an outsider is checking).
- To build the vision, a blueprint must be "lived" by every member of the organization—it must be more than notional, which means it must be remembered and acted upon regularly.
- Idea to use a mnemonic because learning research indicates that the more richly we encode information, the more easily we can retrieve that information when needed.


A BLUEPRINT FOR AFTERSCHOOL™
P
Planning
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= Enduring
™

The Blueprint Framework Theory of Action

- The blueprint is the guiding vision for the critical and important elements of the program. It forms the foundation on which everything else sits.
- Tools that are in their language such as checklists, forms, sample documents are created from and for the proposed tasks.
- Relating tools and activities to the blueprint helps grantees be more responsive to RFA requirements and improves their likelihood of success.

ACE PRIME Assessment

- Drafted the tool and process in 2009-2010
- Considered using this assessment process for both Technical Assistance and Monitoring as it was very thorough
- Piloted once in Spring with 5 grantees, then again using the revised format with another 5 grantees in the summer
- Surveyed pilot grantees to learn about their experience

ACE PRIME Assessment

- Let's take a look at it in Appendix 26
- Realized through this pilot that this process must be focused on technical assistance only
  - Focus on TAC role as supporter – history of "nurturing"
  - Too much required for financial and contract reviews as part of this process
- Rubric used statewide in fall of 2010 to evaluate every Cycle 5 and Cycle 6 program in Texas

Let's take a closer look…

- Review the site visit procedure
  - One and a half days!!! Wow that is not enough time!
  - We have 119 grantees and 727 centers, we cant get to all of them in a meaningful way annually
  - First, we review evidence
  - Then, visit sub-set of sites and conduct scheduled and ad hoc interviews
  - Focused on getting a snapshot with triangulated or corroborated data to help with issue diagnosis

Lessons learned from the process

- Grantees need more guidance to set up their evidence binders
- Reviewing the evidence binder first allows for time to organize additional questions
- Choose sites based on preliminary data review
- Conducting interviews with more than one Site Coordinator provided more information

Let's take a closer look…

- Review the ACE PRIME Assessment
  - Wow, it has 15 categories (better than the 21 we started with ☺)
  - Most categories are rubric based and grantees must "complete each level" to receive a higher score
    - For example, Blue Print Task #12
  - Four (4) categories are check boxes

Your Turn

- Complete the assessment to reflect on your own program quality
  - Suggestion: If you are here with a colleague from your same program, score them independently and compare the results
  - Won't be "building" your binder today, but think about the evidence your program has to support your rating
  - Consider how you might use or adapt this process

Lessons Learned from the Content

- Documentation Issues
- Communication Lacking
- Lack of Clarity related to Professional Development
- Independent Evaluation Lacking
- Family Engagement and participation in activities is still an area for much improvement

What do you think?

- What do you think about the process?
- Would you have the documentation to develop an evidence binder?
- Do you think the process would add validity to the program within the eyes district/organization administration?
- Did our lessons learned match with your thinking?

Now What!?!

- Each grantee visited and Tasks were scored
- Major compliance issues reported to TEA and addressed based on significance
- A Technical Assistance plan for the grantees was needed
- Grantees were demanding their scores!
- At the same time we were discovering the shortfall of our process, we were creating a more in-depth Blueprint document….

The PRIME Blueprint for Texas ACE

- Struggled with the PRIME organizer
  - (5 letters and 15 categories)
- Created Program, Data, Fiscal, QA Organizer

- Selected the Program, Data, Fiscal, QA categories
- Stress: Blueprint is not a repeat of the Request for Application, offers strategies and tools which are aligned

The Blueprint

- Ended up with 10 key tasks organized within Program, Data and Fiscal categories.
- Aha! This was our TA document, we could point grantees here first and supplement as needed!!
- Still, how to convey “results” of visit to them and we needed to incorporate other review processes that were ongoing:
  - Monthly data review (timeliness and quality)
  - Management issues and help desk concerns
  - Expenditure rates

GPSR

- Rolled every data element into the new Grantee Performance Status Report (handout)
- Mapped the 15 ACE PRIME Assessment categories to the 10 Key Tasks!!
- Created a rating level for needed technical assistance
  - High need
  - Medium need
  - Low need

Goals of TA Process

- Reality: Have a transparent systematic process in place to recognize grantee needs and address them with training and technical assistance support
- Ideally: We will move all grantees to “low need” rating.

TA Protocol

- Have a protocol to follow when providing service/TA to each level of need
- Implementing this protocol and updating the GPSR monthly to track our progress and test our theory of action

Using the Results

- Three statewide initiatives
  - **Leadership** – TTT
  - **Leadership/Staffing** – Colors
  - **Family Engagement** – Active Life
  - **Family Engagement** – Survey and Resource Bank
  - **Project Management** – highest need grantees and all new grantees - focused on the Blueprint and ACE PRIME Assessment

Using the Results

- Grantees are using information for overall management of program
- Future Training Needs
- Monitoring Grantee Expenditure Reimbursement Rates
- Grantees are sharing results with Administration, Task Force, Community

Questions

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