

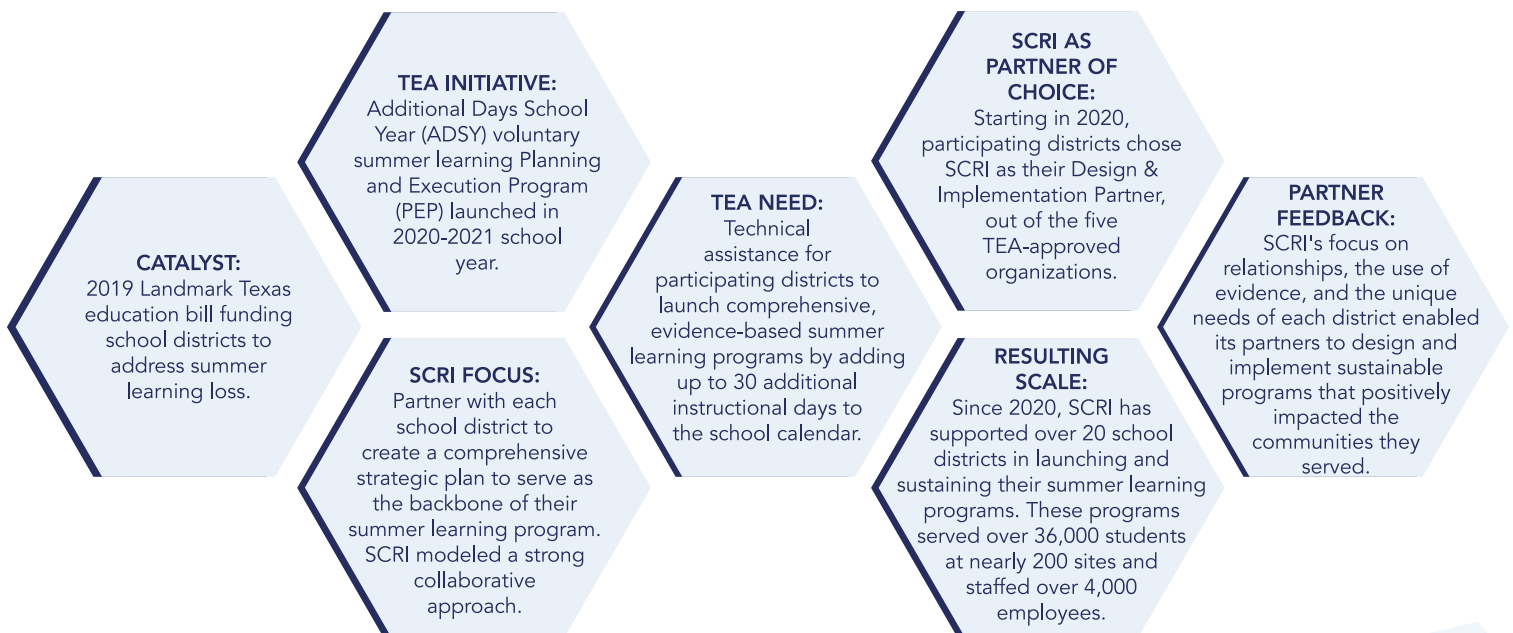


SCRI's Innovative Approach to Technical Assistance Leads to High Impact for Texas Schools

MULTI-YEAR PARTNERSHIP ROOTED IN THE EVIDENCE BASE

In 2019, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) secured funding from a landmark education bill, Texas House Bill 3, to launch initiatives across the state that addressed summer learning loss. The initiative, called Additional Days School Year (ADSY), provided funding to participating school districts to add up to 30 additional instructional days to their school year calendar. The voluntary summer learning component of ADSY called the Planning and Execution Program (PEP), offered districts support for planning and program design to develop and launch comprehensive, evidence-based summer learning programs.

Texas Education Agency (TEA) Partnership At-a-Glance



One such support was the requirement to select a Design and Implementation (D&I) partner from an approved list of technical assistance vendors before implementing the ADSY PEP initiative¹. At the initiative's launch in 2020, SCRI was selected by all seven districts participating in ADSY PEP as the technical assistance partner of choice (from a list of five TEA-approved partners). In each year since the launch, new school districts across Texas have joined this initiative and partnered with SCRI.

The combination of SCRI's deep practitioner expertise and BellXcel's 30 years of evidence-based education solutions provided districts with access to proven strategies, resources, and tools known to result in strong youth outcomes.

REDEFINING TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

D&I partners supported districts in developing comprehensive strategic plans that would serve as the backbone of their summer learning programs. The strategic plan included design, operational, and academic elements closely aligned with the leading research on what creates high-quality summer learning programs².

SCRI's successful partnership and practitioner expertise during the initiative's first year influenced TEA to update its expectations for D&I partners, including collaboration with and building the knowledge of key stakeholders, sharing examples of tools, resources, and ideas, and serving as experts in the initiative design and completion of their strategic plan³.

Throughout its engagement with the ADSY PEP initiative, SCRI worked closely with districts building strong collaborative relationships that met each district's unique needs. In doing so, SCRI elevated and redefined the idea of technical assistance, resulting in districts reporting that their perspective on the power of technical assistance shifted greatly.



Hutto ISD



Hutto ISD



Hutto ISD

SCRI'S APPROACH TO TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

ADSY districts benefited greatly from SCRI's enduring principles such as, building strong relationships, blending evidence-based practices with district strengths, and focusing on the unique needs of the community.

Grounded in these principles, SCRI's approach leveraged the following technical assistance strategies:

- **Meet partners where they are.** Be flexible, accessible, and supportive in the strategic planning process.
- **Lead with empathy.** Honor partners' knowledge, experience, and unique strengths.
- **Incorporate continuous quality improvement.** Encourage partners to think creatively about their processes and systems toward achieving short- and long-term results.
- **Emphasize innovation.** Provide new or additional tools, resources, and guidance to streamline an overwhelming process into a manageable, successful effort.
- **Focus on sustainability.** Standardize systems, while replicating processes and procedures to scale and sustain over time.

These SCRI strategies enabled the ADSY districts to flourish and shifted how they defined technical assistance.

CASE STUDY: INTERVIEWS WITH 10 SCRI PARTNERS

In December 2023, SCRI interviewed 10 of its ADSY PEP partner districts to understand how SCRI's technical assistance impacted their summer programming, if it shifted their concept of technical assistance, and if there were any insights to share into the overall value of the partnership. For the interviews, SCRI selected districts whose ADSY PEP journeys spanned the entirety of the initiative: some had been with SCRI from the first year of the initiative, while some were moving into their second year.

The interview questions were divided into two timeframes: "before ADSY" and "after ADSY." SCRI found that the differences in the responses to these questions before the initiative and after the initiative were dramatic.

See Appendix A for the questions asked of SCRI partners as they reflected on their experience.



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Before ADSY PEP

Before participating in ADSY PEP, SCRI's partners defined technical assistance in a few ways:

- Troubleshoot technology problems or IT help desk

"We thought technical assistance would be technology or equipment and usage in the classroom."

- Help or support filling out forms
- Supervise and control closely, like 'babysitting'

Some had no experience with technical assistance and didn't know what to expect from the work with SCRI.

Any previous experience with "value add" from technical assistance was either non-existent or limited to new technology use.



Victoria ISD

"Before ADSY I had not seen proof of a value ADD to technical assistance. I knew somehow there was a reason behind it. I thought somebody else was getting paid money to do something that could be reinvested into the school system. I had not seen proof of value."

After ADSY PEP

After participating in the ADSY PEP initiative with SCRI, district perspectives shifted to realize the power of technical assistance in achieving their goals:

- Elevate the quality of their strategic plans by collaborating with a strong thought partner
- Innovate and think creatively through an encouraging process
- Avoid a potentially overwhelming process given SCRI's ability to distill it into a manageable undertaking.

KEY INSIGHTS AND THEMES FROM SCRI'S ADSY PARTNERS

Five themes emerged from SCRI's interviews: a flexible partnership approach, manageable and accessible effort, continuous quality improvement, leading with empathy and curiosity, and a focus on the future. These themes are described below with partner quotes to illustrate.

FLEXIBLE PARTNERSHIP APPROACH

SCRI's approach to technical assistance focused on flexibility, approachability, and support. Practitioners honored where districts were in their summer programming and co-created strategic plans--key to building strong relationships.

SCRI's partners described how beneficial the relationships proved to be:

- "It's a **true partnership**. We refer to SCRI as our friends. We are getting **support to grow**. We are friends in the work and having a positive experience." (Edgewood ISD)
- "Every time we meet you all are so positive, and heartwarming. You always say 'You know you got this. You can do it.' **You're very motivating. And that's what we all need, because, our regular days here at the school can sometimes be a challenge.**" (Pharr San Juan ISD)
- "The first month of working with the ADSY PEP grant was fuzzy for me. Many things had to get done. It became a group project. **My technical assistance was a partnership, unlike a vendor situation where I'm paying you to do your job. This wasn't it...it was a partnership. SCRI was as invested in my district and my students as I was.**" (Victoria ISD)

MANAGEABLE AND ACCESSIBLE EFFORT

SCRI helped partners distill an overwhelming process into a manageable, successful effort and provided additional evidence-based tools, resources, and guidance where needed.

SCRI's partners described how SCRI helped make the work feel doable:

- "We couldn't have done this without SCRI. **The ADSY process is overwhelming, and the partnership made the project possible. On my own, it would have continued to feel overwhelming.**" (Hutto ISD)
- SCRI provided "historical artifacts, documentation for planning processes, accountability, help meeting deadlines. **We were able to work in and through the process in increments, making it more manageable by doing a little at a time, with incremental steps to complete the larger document.** You were considerate of our needs." (Prairie Lea ISD)
- SCRI "**clarified different parts of the strategic plan submission and always had ideas, recommendations, and examples or schools to look at and reference.**" (Karnes ISD)

CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

SCRI's unique approach builds systems and processes for continuous quality improvement. By implementing such a framework in the summer program planning process, SCRI aimed to help its ADSY partners identify opportunities to strengthen their practices and elevate the overall quality of their summer programs.

SCRI's partners discussed how technical assistance paired with a continuous quality improvement lens was a value add to their strategic plans and overall summer programs:

- SCRI helped with the **“expansion of programming and a focus on the quality of our programming. We ended up changing our math curriculum to ensure high-quality instructional materials were used.”** (Pharr San Juan ISD)
- SCRI was **“pushing back on our ideas and processes. It’s good to have someone with the talent and skill set pushing back. It’s nice to get thoughtful and supportive feedback to challenge us as we improve.”** (Edgewood ISD)
- **“A major accomplishment we had was creating the culture and feel of something ‘different’ than normal summer school. SCRI helped us think outside the limits of normal summer programming to provide our staff and students a summer camp experience where they didn’t feel it was school as usual.”** (Ferris ISD)

LEADING WITH EMPATHY AND CURIOSITY

SCRI prioritizes understanding its partners, their strengths, and their needs. Taking the time to ask questions, listen, and digest information allowed SCRI to identify both individual and programmatic pain points, challenges, and goals.

SCRI's partners described feeling heard and understood, and a foundation of trust was built:

- SCRI provided **“huge value - support, advice suggestions, detailed schedules timelines. It was helpful to get ideas from other districts, and context clues. Having felt alone, the collaboration and support made me feel like we are in it together.”** (Ferris ISD)
- **I needed the big picture, guidance, and as much information as possible, and that was immediately heard. The meetings I had were very valuable, and there is no way I could have done my job without the technical assistance. It truly was technical assistance, a partnership with someone outside of my district who knew what I was doing.”** (Victoria ISD)
- **“SCRI came in recognizing the individual needs of the district. It wasn’t just about providing information and helping to find answers. Their effort was personalized to our district. They complement us; we’re a unique district and it felt like a good fit.”** (Prairie Lea ISD)

A FOCUS ON THE FUTURE

SCRI focuses on the sustainability of its partners' programs by working alongside them to build standardized systems, processes, and procedures that ensure their programs can be scaled and sustained over time.

SCRI's partners described feeling empowered to continue their programs in the future:

- **"One goal of the initiative was making sure we can do this on our own. We CAN, and we feel good about running this on our own as a result of SCRI's support."** (Prairie Lea ISD)
- **"Our entire program was more intentional and we've learned so much. We were able to justify our budget because of the quality of our program design. We exponentially grew the program. We had thought partners to make our program the best it can be, and step-by-step guidance to make sure the program is the best it can be."** (Pharr San Juan ISD)

CALL TO ACTION: LEVERAGE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PARTNERSHIPS TO TRANSFORM OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME PROGRAMS

SCRI's experience with the talented, hard-working school districts across the state of Texas magnified the transformative power of successful technical assistance partnerships, and unearthed some key takeaways for technical assistance providers in the larger OST field:



Victoria ISD

- **ADSY districts had a limited, even literal understanding of what to expect from technical assistance.**
 - "Now I understand it's not just IT, it's everything. From suggestions to implementation guidance, the whole picture of summer school implementation." (Uplift)
- **An individualized approach provides the foundation for a strong relationship.**
 - "The SCRI team transitioned to our district months after strategic planning began. Without hesitation, they navigated our district's steering committee positively to complete the essential framework for programming." (Raymondville ISD)

- **Technical assistance with a focus on growth can lead to major shifts in thinking.**
 - **“Working with SCRI helped to get our summer program to where summer school is not viewed as punishment.”** The experience was invaluable for me as a professional and also for the impact of the work I have done within the district. SCRI helped me to think big and dream big because I had a thought and planning partner to help make it happen.” (Victoria ISD)
- **Technical assistance can be a tool for sustainability when an intentional focus is placed on building systems and processes for scale and replicability.**
 - **“Because of the technical assistance we received, we can now pass this work on to someone else and they could pull it together.** We have more of a product now.” (Prairie Lea ISD)
- **When technical assistance is done well, it can lead to great change and high impact.**
 - “Our first program was very successful (especially building the positive culture) and that was due to the careful planning that SCRI helped me complete.” (Hutto ISD)

Technical assistance should be a critical component of any large educational initiative serving many diverse communities, particularly in large and complex community-based initiatives. These partnerships excel when they strive to meet communities where they are, understand the goals they aim to achieve, and know that trust and cultural awareness are essential.

The sustainability and scale of successful programs can be achieved through intentional, customized, and collaborative technical assistance, where a focus on relationships, continuous improvement, and trust is prioritized. Leveraging these practices can make a lasting, positive impact on schools and, in turn, the larger communities they serve.



Victoria ISD

APPENDIX A:

- Before participating in ADSY, how would you have defined the service or act of “providing technical assistance”? If someone came to you before ADSY and said “you are about to receive technical assistance,” what would have been your expectations?
 - Is there a value-add to technical assistance?
 - Could you explain what that value add is or was?
- After participating in ADSY and receiving technical assistance from SCRI, how do you now define technical assistance?
 - What changed in your definition of technical assistance from before ADSY to now?
 - Was there a value-add in receiving technical assistance?
 - What unique value did SCRI provide around technical assistance? Was there something you received that you didn’t expect?
 - Could you explain what that value add is or was?
 - What has been one or two of the most helpful examples of technical assistance provided to you by SCRI?

SOURCES

1. Texas Education Agency. <https://tea.texas.gov/academics/learning-support-and-programs/adsy-pep-approved-vendor-list.pdf>
2. Schwartz, Heather L., Jennifer Sloan McCombs, Catherine H. Augustine, and Jennifer T. Leschitz, *Getting to Work on Summer Learning: Recommended Practices for Success*, 2nd Ed. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2018. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR366-1.html.
3. Texas Education Agency. <https://tea.texas.gov/academics/learning-support-and-programs/adsy-pep-design-and-implementation-2.pdf>