Texas Study of the

High School Redesign and Restructuring (hsrr)

Grant Program

Interim Report

Qualitative Analysis of Cycle 1 Programs

January 2007

Resources for Learning

INTRODUCTION

Hᴵɢʜ school education is widely criticized, to the point of being characterized as obsolete (Wagner, 2001). While many reform initiatives of the 1990s focused on elementary and middle school education, high school education has become the focus of many reform initiatives in this decade because of the need to fast-track innovation in preparation for post-secondary education and employment.

The Texas High School Project (THSP) is a $261 million public-private initiative dedicated to increasing high school graduation and college enrollment rates all over Texas. The four key strategies of the THSP are rigorous curriculum, effective teachers, building leadership, and multiple pathways. Through programs such as the Texas High School Redesign and Restructuring (HSRR) Grant Program, THSP provides opportunities for Texas high schools to create innovative ways to ensure that all students are served (Texas Education Agency, 2005). This program is open to high schools that have been rated "academically unacceptable" for one year in the Texas Accountability Rating System. Grants require schools to develop and put into place a comprehensive design for effective school functioning. The redesign is not intended to be an add-on to any existing program and is intended to avoid a piecemeal or fragmented approach. Each school's redesign needs to align the school's curriculum, technology, and professional development into a cohesive, school-wide plan.

In considering potential foundations for eventual impacts on student achievement, the application of a wide variety of models and approaches to even more varied school contexts and a spectrum of implementation issues present challenges for evaluation. Resources for Learning (RFL) has modeled its approach on the Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) evaluation designs that take into account context and implementation in the identification of preliminary indicators of successful practices in high schools.

The evaluation was guided by the following objectives:

- **To document grant implementation**
  The evaluation describes grant implementation through assessing school context and elements important to school change, such as capacity, support, focus, pedagogy, outcomes, and school climate.

- **To extract preliminary indications of effective components and promising practices**
  The evaluation identifies schools associated with strong overall implementation and provides preliminary analysis of promising practices and effective redesign components.

The evaluation was based on the following questions:

1. **How did grantee schools differ in their implementation of the High School Redesign and Restructuring grants, including:**
   a. use of grant funds,
   b. degree of implementation,
   c. level of external technical assistance,
   d. teacher buy-in, and
   e. leadership qualities?

2. **What barriers and successes have schools experienced in implementing redesign plans?**

3. **What was the climate of each school and how has it changed over the course of the grant?**

4. **What methods and objectives were associated with positive change in school climate?**

METHODS

The interim evaluation includes case studies and evaluation findings consisting of a cross-case analysis.

The case study components include:
- school profiles developed from document review,
- site visit data including interviews and focus groups, and
- surveys of Technical Assistance Providers (TAPs) and school staff.

The evaluation findings include:

- descriptive statistics across various indicators, such as elements of school change, school climate, overall implementation, and assessment of TAP support.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Summary of early aspects of grant implementation including case studies and qualitative analysis at twelve Cycle 1 schools, which received their grant funds in April 2005, is the focus of this Interim Report. Also included is School 5, a site non-competitively funded by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) as a part of a multi-school THSP redesign project in a major urban district, for a total of 13 schools. Key study components included case studies of the Cycle 1 schools and a cross-site analysis summarizing qualitative findings. Quantitative findings will be presented in the Final Report in December 2007.

Implementation Levels

Evaluators used all data points available to assess the strength of implementation with a 53–point overall scale that covers important HSRR components by breaking each component into sections that focus on measurable standards. After reviewing grant applications, budgets, school documents, progress reports submitted to TEA by the schools, site visit data, and survey data, evaluators assigned an implementation score to each school on each of the implementation components (USDE, 2003b). (See Appendix A for protocol.) Scores on each of the components were then summed, and an overall implementation score was assigned to each school that corresponds with one of five school reform implementation levels (Bodilly, 1998). Schools were then categorized into three implementation-level groups. Clear differences arose for one group of schools, which included the three charter schools and which served student populations very unlike the students in the other nine schools. This group included a residential facility and three other schools that are assessed under the TEA Alternative Education Accountability. Although their implementation scores are quite high, the circumstances at these schools, such as small number of teachers needing to be trained, make them difficult to compare to the regular public schools.

The implementation level and type of school are listed in Table E.1 for each of the sites.

Table E.1. School Implementation Score and Type

School	Implementation Score (0-53)	Implementation Level (Low-High)	Type (Regular/ Alternative)
School 1	33.12	High	Regular
School 2	37.25	High	Regular
School 3	38.74	High	Regular
School 4	23.50	Mid	Regular
School 5	29.50	Mid	Regular
School 6	26.96	Mid	Regular
School 7	14.23	Low	Regular
School 8	21.70	Low	Regular
School 9	17.67	Low	Regular
School 10	27.67	Mid	Alternative
School 11	41.44	High	Alternative
School 12	32.62	High	Alternative
School 13	26.26	Mid	Alternative

For the five schools identified for inclusion in the high implementation category, the overall implementation score on the strength of implementation scale described above averaged 37 out of a possible 53 points. The five middle-level implementation category schools had a mean of 27 out of 53 points, while the three low-level implementation category schools averaged 16 out of 53 possible points.

Table E.2. Mean Overall and Self-Assessed Implementation Scores by Group

Overall Implementation		Self-Assessed Implementation Score**
Level	Score*	
High-Level Implementation	37	2.83
Middle-Level Implementation	27	3.04
Low-Level Implementation	16	3.14

*Note. 1-53 scale

**Note. 1-5 scale

Self-assessed implementation levels from school progress reports were then compared to the overall implementation categories assigned by evaluators. Results from the self-reported implementation levels contradicted the implementation category scores. Schools with high levels of implementation on the 53-point scale used by evaluators averaged 2.83 on a scale of 5 for the self-assessed school implementation score. Schools with middle-level implementation had an average score of 3.04, while schools with low levels of implementation rated this construct an average of 3.14. (See Table E.2 for mean self-assessed implementation score by group.)

The discrepancy between overall implementation score calculated by evaluators and the self-assessed implementation score may result from low-implementing schools lacking a thorough understanding of the HSRR grant requirements, and therefore not fully comprehending what high levels of implementation should look like. Rather the influx of money is used to fill badly needed gaps in basic services and supplies, which is greatly appreciated by staff.

Summary of High-Level Implementation Schools

School 1 is part of a rural school district in East-central Texas. Student enrollment in 2005–06 was 330 students. Sixty-two percent of students are African American, 29% Latino/Hispanic, and nine percent White. Seventy-six percent of students are economically disadvantaged, and 63% are at risk. Student mobility is 15%. The school has adopted Accelerated Schools (AS) as its HSRR program.

School 2 is part of a large urban school district in East-central Texas. Student enrollment in 2005–06 was 2,678 students. Ninety-one percent of students are Latino/Hispanic, six percent African American, three percent White, and one percent Other. Eighty-nine percent of students are economically disadvantaged, and 82% are considered at risk. Student mobility is 24%. The school has adopted Schools for a New Society (SNS) as its HSRR program.

School 3 is part of a large urban school district in Central Texas. Student enrollment in 2005–06 was 735 students. Eighty-one percent of students are Latino/Hispanic, 18% African American, two percent White, and one percent Other. Eighty-three percent of students are economically disadvantaged, and 87% are at risk. Student mobility is 40%. The school has adopted High Schools That Work (HSTW) as its HSRR program.

School 11 is a charter school in a major urban area in Central Texas. The school serves 329 students in grades PK–12. Seventy-eight percent of students are Latino/Hispanic, 12% African American, and 10% White. Seventy-nine percent of students are economically disadvantaged and 58% at risk. Mobility is relatively low at 22%. The school has adopted International Center for Leadership in Education/Agile Mind/Capturing Kids' Hearts as its HSRR program.

School 12 is a charter school in a major urban area in Central Texas serving 111 students in grades 9–12. The majority (78%) of students are Latino/Hispanic, with 16% White and six percent African American. Ninety-six percent of students are economically disadvantaged and 96% at risk. Student mobility is a concern at 56%. The school has adopted Accelerated Schools (AS) as its HSRR program. This is the smallest school in the high-implementing group.

Schools with high levels of implementation as assigned by evaluators tended to vary widely in their local context. Schools with high levels of implementation all reported high levels of External Support. These schools had the highest scores on Internal Focus, and reported high levels of buy-in from teachers, whether or not they had been involved in choosing the program being used for restructuring. The school climate was reported to be the most positive at these schools, with the highest scores on the leadership scale and the lowest scores on the order scale, in general.

Summary of Middle-Level Implementation Schools

School 4 is part of a large urban school district in East-central Texas. Student enrollment in 2005–06 was 668 students. Eighty-eight percent of students are African American, 11% Latino/Hispanic, and one percent White. Eighty-five percent of students are economically disadvantaged, and 85% are at risk. Student mobility is 39%. Twenty-eight percent of students require special education services. The school has adopted SNS as its HSRR program.

School 5 is part of a large urban school district in South-central Texas. Student enrollment in 2005–06 was 1,408 students. Ninety-nine percent of students are Latino/Hispanic and one percent African American. Ninety-nine percent of students are economically disadvantaged, and 77% are at risk. Student mobility is 34%. The school has adopted HSTW as its HSRR program.

School 6 is part of a large urban school district in East-central Texas. Student enrollment in 2005–06 was 1,359 students. Ninety-one percent of students are African American, eight percent Latino/Hispanic, 0.2% White, and 0.7% Other. Seventy-two percent of students are economically disadvantaged, and

79% are at risk. Student mobility is 35%. The school has adopted SNS as its HSRR program.

School 10 is a charter school residential facility located in eastern Texas. The 91 students live in cottages with other students and house parents. Fifty-two percent of students are White, 35% are African American and 12% Latino/ Hispanic. One hundred percent of students are economically disadvantaged and 93% at risk. Student mobility is very high at 80%. The school has adopted Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound (ELOB) as its HSRR program. This is the smallest of the schools in the middle-level implementation group, and the nature of the school makes it quite different from the other schools.

School 13 is part of a large urban school district in north Texas. Student enrollment in 2005–06 was 223 students. Seventy-three percent of students are Latino/Hispanic, 19% African American, and seven percent White. Forty percent of students are economically disadvantaged, and 100% are at risk. Student mobility is very high at 71%. The school is a non-traditional option for students who are English language learners or who have previously dropped out of high school and has adopted HSTW as its HSRR program.

Schools with middle-level implementation scores as assigned by evaluators in general reported scores more similar to low-level implementation schools than high-level implementation schools. In general, like high-level implementation schools, teachers were not involved in choosing the program for redesign. However, in these schools, there was not the level of reported enthusiasm and support once the program began, that there was in the high-level implementation schools. Scores on the Capacity construct were lowest for this group of schools. The school climate scores were highest on the instruction scale and lowest on the order or involvement scale for the middle-level implementation schools. Results on the scales in general were more mixed than those for the high-level implementation schools.

Summary of Low-Level Implementation Schools

School 7 is located in East-central Texas in a small rural town. Student enrollment in 2005–06 was 76 students. Ninety percent of students are African American, seven percent Latino/Hispanic, and three percent White. Ninety-three percent of students are economically disadvantaged, and 86% are at risk. Student mobility is 18%. Twenty-nine percent of students require special education services. The school has adopted HSTW as its HSRR program.

School 8 is located in Central Texas and is its own school district. Student enrollment in 2005–06 was 69 students. The school serves grades PK–12, and the demographic data represents all grade levels. Thirty-eight percent of

students are White, 31% African American, 31% Latino/Hispanic, and one percent Other. Sixty-six percent of students are economically disadvantaged, and 53% are at risk. Student mobility is 20%. The school has adopted the Dana Center Support and Odyssey Computer Program as its HSRR programs.

School 9 is located in East-central Texas and is part of a district that is adjacent to a large urban school district. Student enrollment in 2005-06 was 1,251 students. Seventy-three percent of students are African American, 26% Latino/Hispanic, 0.6% White, and 0.4% Other. Ninety-six percent of students are economically disadvantaged, and 55% are at risk. Student mobility is 28%. The school has adopted a locally-developed HSRR program.

Low-level implementation schools had the least in common. In general, they reported high expectations but low levels of evidence for any of the five constructs related to school reform, other than Capacity. This is likely due to the influx of resources related to redesign and lack of understanding among the many new staff members of the requirements of the redesign program. This group of schools had their lowest average score on the Restructuring Outcomes construct, probably because their implementation was not yet at the stage of being reflected in outcomes.

Summary of Restructuring Constructs
This section identifies the main factors that facilitated or hindered HSRR implementation at the sites and provides a summary of the evidence.

Local Context
➢ *Staff turnover, limited resources, shifting accountability ratings, and pre-existing reform initiatives influenced the context in which initial implementation of the HSRR efforts occurred.*

Schools in all three implementation categories ranged from very small to very large. Discipline and staff turnover were greater problems at the middle- and low-level implementation schools than they were at the high-level implementation schools.

Model Adoption and Implementation
➢ *Redesign plans included a variety of models, but awardee schools did not consistently research selected redesign plans; nor did they involve staff in their selection and development.*

School staff members were rarely involved in the selection or development of redesign plans. However, in high-level implementation schools, teachers

reported supporting the model once it was implemented. This was less common in middle-level implementation schools. Locally developed plans varied widely in terms of unified vision, specificity, and support structures. About a third of grantees implemented some form of smaller learning communities.

Capacity
➤ *Redesign funds equipped needy schools with basic materials and enabled them to develop credit recovery options, facilitate teacher collaboration, and increase professional development.*

High-level implementation schools allocated the largest portions of their grant funds to professional salaries or contracted services, as did middle-level implementation schools. However, the middle-implementers tended to budget higher proportions of funds to categories such as capital outlay or supplies. Low-level implementation schools had a higher score on this construct than either of the other groups, which may indicate staff appreciation of the influx of money into the school, without a real understanding of the requirements of the redesign program.

External Support
➤ *The perceived effectiveness of Technical Assistance Providers varied, as did the intensity and depth of support provided by professional development. School districts generally provided little support.*

Due to the wide variation in redesign approaches, schools used a variety of TAPs. Focused, intensive professional development was often associated with an external model provider, with local efforts being less cohesive and intensive. High-level implementation schools report strong support, while middle-level implementation schools indicate a weak level of TAP support. Low-implementers report varying levels of support and varying quality of the support received.

Internal Focus and Buy-In
➤ *Most schools had limited initial staff involvement and staff buy-in, with limited staff understanding of redesign. Schools also faced pressure resulting from their accountability ratings.*

Campus or district officials often developed the HSRR application and selected the design plan with minimal staff input. Turnover in administration resulted in limited understanding of the HSRR program by new school leaders, which impeded the garnering of staff support. While staff in high-level implementation schools bought into the program once it was adopted, staff in middle-level implementation schools were less enthusiastic,

and staff in low-implementation schools reported a "wait and see" attitude. Teachers in these schools were not as well versed in the program as teachers in the other schools.

Pedagogical Change

➢ *For most grantees, the period of time covered in this Interim Report was too short for significant pedagogical change to be measured.*

Staff most frequently characterized the level of pedagogical change as a new awareness of enhanced, more student-centered teaching strategies. They reported that they had not yet had enough time to reflect upon training, apply new strategies, or monitor changes in classroom teaching as a result of redesign activities. A focus on learning teams was the most-reported activity in middle- and high-level implementation schools.

Restructuring Outcomes

➢ *Stakeholders shared a sense of immediacy and common purpose and*
reported school climate improvements, improved relationships, increased engagement in learning, and improved staff attitudes and commitment.

Teachers in general felt it was too early to see much change in student achievement outcomes, but they were positive about the changes in relationships and climate. The small learning communities adopted by some schools resulted in increased contact with and responsibility for students by specific identified teachers, and collaborative structures in smaller learning communities built stronger ties among staff. Student engagement in learning was positively impacted by the investment in improving teacher quality and in properly equipped classrooms. Students also tended to appreciate the availability of more advanced academic opportunities and increased exposure to career-aligned study at some schools. Teachers were extremely appreciative of improved classroom resources, availability of professional development, improved school climate, and in some schools smaller class sizes.

• Link to report full text:
http://www.tea.state.tx.us/opge/progeval/HighSchoolCollege/HSRR_Interim_Report.pdf