



Texas Study of the High School Redesign and Restructuring Grant Program (Cycles 1 and 2)

Final Report | February 2008

Prepared for the Texas Education Agency by



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TEXAS STUDY OF THE
HIGH SCHOOL REDESIGN AND RESTRUCTURING (HSRR)
GRANT PROGRAM
(CYCLES 1 AND 2)



Final Report

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CREDITS

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Resources for Learning (RFL) specializes in the development, implementation, and evaluation of standards-based reforms in education. RFL works with state and regional education agencies; universities, districts, and campuses; and other entities engaged in the education of young people.

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BACKGROUND

Over the past decades, the federal government, states, and the private sector have initiated numerous efforts to affect change in policy and practice in secondary education. These efforts are in response to growing concern that far too many students leave traditional American high schools, which have been characterized as obsolete, unprepared to succeed in college or the workplace (Wagner, 2001). Consequently, high schools across the nation are engaged in reforms that include secondary and postsecondary curricular alignment, smaller learning communities, alternative schools, enhanced career and technical education, middle college high schools, and competency-based promotion efforts (Plucker, Zapf, & Spradlin, 2004).

STATE CONTEXT

The Texas High School Project (THSP) is a \$261 million public-private initiative dedicated to increasing high school graduation and college enrollment rates across the state. The four focus areas of the THSP are creating new models for high school reform, working with school districts to implement student programs that increase academic opportunities, supporting educator training programs, and establishing a T-STEM initiative to focus on mathematics and science in integrated real world applications.

In 2005, as part of the THSP, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) implemented the Texas High School Redesign and Restructuring Grant Program (HSRR). This program is open to high schools that have been rated Academically Unacceptable for one year under the Texas Accountability Rating

System. Texas Education Code (TEC) §39.132 imposes sanctions on campuses that have been designated as Academically Unacceptable. The Commissioner of Education may permit campuses that have been designated as Academically Unacceptable to participate in innovative redesign of the campus to improve campus performance. High schools that meet the criteria for sanctions under TEC §39.132 are eligible to apply for Texas HSRR grants to assist them with the redesign process. These grants require schools to develop and put into place a comprehensive design for effective school functioning. The redesign must align the school's curriculum, technology, and professional development into a school-wide reform plan.

The HSRR grant program was funded, respectively, through Rider 67, High School Completion and Success, of the General Appropriations Act, 78th Legislature Regular Session, and Rider 59, Texas High School Initiative, 79th Legislature Regular Session.

Schools eligible to apply for HSRR grants were identified in the Request for Applications (RFA) distributed by TEA. In Cycle 1 of the HSRR grant program, TEA awarded \$3,897,164 in grants to 12 school districts with Academically Unacceptable high schools to build capacity for implementing school-wide improvement strategies. Cycle 1 grants were awarded April 1, 2005, with an end date of February 28, 2007. Awards ranged from \$204,180 to \$400,000, with an average award size for the group of \$301,551.

In Cycle 2, TEA awarded \$4,449,899 in grant funding to support 17 Academically

Unacceptable high school campuses. The grant period for Cycle 2 awards was February 1, 2006–February 28, 2008. Awards to Cycle 2 campuses ranged from \$104,500 to \$300,000 with an average award size of \$261,837.

In March 2007, TEA awarded funding for a third cycle of redesign grants to 15 Academically Unacceptable high school campuses with a grant period of March 1, 2007–February 28, 2009.

The focus of this evaluation report is Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 grantees. Evaluation of the Cycle 3 program is being conducted through a larger, multi-year statewide evaluation of the THSP.

HSRR Program Goals and Objectives

The Texas HSRR grant requires that high school campuses receiving funding implement a comprehensive design for effective school functioning. The redesign is not intended to supplement existing programming and is intended to avoid a piecemeal or fragmented approach. The goal is to meld the school's curriculum, technology, and professional development into a coherent school-wide reform plan. The specific program goals for the Texas HSRR grant are to:

- Correct the specific areas of unacceptable performance identified in the campus accountability rating;
- Increase overall student achievement;
- Raise academic standards and expectations for all students;
- Demonstrate innovative management and instructional practices;
- Ensure that every student is taught by a highly qualified, effective teacher;
- Develop leadership capacity in principals and other school leaders; and

- Engage parents and the community in school activities.

While state law requires all campuses rated Academically Unacceptable to implement targeted improvement plans, school districts or charter schools that receive grant funding from the Texas HSRR grant must engage in long-term, comprehensive reform efforts. High schools are expected to implement programs and activities that result in a redesigned school that is fundamentally different from the existing one.

EVALUATION DESIGN

TEA requested an evaluation of the HSRR Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 grant programs, including a descriptive analysis of the program (case studies and a cross-site analysis) and preliminary results of quantitative statistical analysis of student outcomes and other program outcomes.

Research indicates that due to the complexity of school reform it could take many years for intervention strategies to impact student performance (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). Thus, evaluations that study intermediate points and the process of whole-school reform are of value. A broad base of research using diverse methodologies indicates that successful school reforms include change in areas that can be collapsed into a theoretical model involving five constructs: school capacity, external support, internal focus, pedagogical change, and restructuring outcomes (Nunnery, Ross, & Sterbinsky, 2005). Finding impacts in these areas may positively impact longer term outcomes such as student achievement.

EVALUATION OBJECTIVES

This evaluation had two goals: 1) to document grant implementation; and 2) to extract

preliminary indications of effective school HSRR programs across both cycles. Evaluation objectives were the following:

- Objective 1: Describe grantee campuses;
- Objective 2: Compare student outcomes between HSRR schools and comparable non-participating campuses; and
- Objective 3: Measure student outcomes within grantee campuses.

Objective 1 was addressed in case studies and school profiles that described grant implementation through an assessment of school context and elements important to the process of school change, such as capacity, support, focus, pedagogy, outcomes, and school climate. Objective 2 required comparison of HSRR campuses with matched campuses that did not participate in the HSRR grant programs. Objective 3 compared schools within the same grant cycle. Comparisons across grant cycles were inappropriate for a variety of reasons described in this report.

The evaluation was based on the following questions:

1. How did grantee schools differ in their implementation of the HSRR 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 did schools experience in implementing redesign plans?
3. What was the climate of each school, and how did it change over the course of the grant?
4. What methods and objectives were associated with positive change in school climate?
5. How did student-level outcomes at grantee schools (within cycles) compare to those of similar students at similar schools that did not participate in the program?
6. How did student-level outcomes at grantee schools (within cycles) vary with the degree of implementation of the reform strategies?

An interim report published in January 2007 included case studies of each school in the Cycle 1 evaluation and a cross-site analysis of all Cycle 1 qualitative data collected.¹ Case studies of implementation at Cycle 2 schools were developed and submitted to TEA program staff. This final report includes profiles of Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 schools and quantitative analysis of outcomes for Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 schools featuring within-group comparisons as well as comparisons to similar schools that did not receive grant funds.

HSRR GRANTEES (CYCLE 1 AND CYCLE 2)

Districts or open enrollment charter schools that were eligible to apply for Cycle 1 HSRR grants were identified in the RFA for Cycle 1² and had:

1 To view the interim report, please see the TEA website: http://www.tea.state.tx.us/opge/progeval/HighSchoolCollege/HSRR_Interim_Report.pdf

2 <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/opge/disc/hsrr/index.html>

- (1) one or more high schools that, under the Texas Accountability Rating System, have been rated Academically Unacceptable in 2004; or
- (2) one or more high schools that, under the Texas Accountability Rating System, have been rated Academically Unacceptable in 2004 and in one or more consecutive previous years.

Campuses applied for a maximum of \$400,000 for the 22-month project period.

The RFA for Cycle 2³ grants included the same program description, purpose, and goals as the Cycle 1 grant but had different eligibility criteria and funding levels. Eligible districts or open enrollment charter schools had:

- (1) a school serving students in two or more of the following grades: 9, 10, 11, or 12; and,
- (2) a school with at least 50% of its student population in grades 9 or higher; and,
- (3) a school serving at least 100 students in grades 9 through 12; and,
- (4) a school that, under the Texas Accountability Rating System, had been rated Academically Unacceptable in 2005; and,
- (5) a school that is not a recipient of funds through the Texas High School Redesign and Restructuring Cycle 1 Grant or any other grant from TEA for innovative redesign of a high school campus.

Additional eligibility requirements focused on charter school eligibility related to financial viability, compliance with requirements of the Division of Program Monitoring and Interventions at TEA, and the status of the charter.

Depending on the size, needs of the high school, and the scope of the proposed project, Cycle 2 campuses were allowed to apply for a maximum of \$300,000, or \$750 per student enrolled on the campus, whichever was the lesser amount, for a 24-month project period.

Characteristics of Grantee Schools

SIZE AND DEMOGRAPHICS

The 12 Texas schools that received competitive Cycle 1 HSRR grants in April 2005 ranged from small public (regular and alternative education) and charter schools serving under 100 students each to large high schools with enrollments of over 1,000 students. Note that an additional school was included in the Cycle 1 evaluation for a total of 13 schools. This school was non-competitively funded by TEA as part of a multi-school THSP redesign project in a major urban district. The majority of Cycle 1 schools served large numbers of economically disadvantaged and at-risk students.

A total of 17 schools received Cycle 2 awards in February 2006, and 14 of these schools were included in the evaluation.⁴ Size of grantee schools ranged from small public or charter schools serving between 100–500 students to large urban high schools serving over 1,000

³ http://www.tea.state.tx.us/opge/disc/thrr_06/index.html

⁴ Three schools were not included due to the total evaluation budget. The three schools not included were randomly chosen to be dropped from the study.

students. Several of the Cycle 2 schools served less than 50% economically disadvantaged students, though most served high numbers of students identified as at risk.

ACCOUNTABILITY DATA

To be eligible for Cycle 1 grants, schools had to be rated as Academically Unacceptable in the state accountability system in 2004. Mathematics performance was the most commonly identified reason for the Unacceptable ratings, and four schools had low mathematics performance for all student groups. It is of note that by 2005 and the award of the Cycle 1 grants, seven of the 12 Cycle 1 schools had improved their accountability ratings to Acceptable, suggesting that these schools were able to address some deficiencies prior to grant implementation.

To be eligible for Cycle 2 grants, schools had to have received an Unacceptable accountability rating in 2005. As with Cycle 1 schools, mathematics performance was the most commonly identified reason for Unacceptable ratings in campus accountability data tables for Cycle 2 schools. By 2006, nine of the 14 Cycle 2 schools included in the evaluation received Acceptable accountability ratings based on state tests administered approximately three months after the grant was awarded in February 2006, suggesting that these schools were able to address some deficiencies prior to grant implementation.

Given the diversity of grantee sites in terms of size, demographics, and accountability history, the redesign models and strategies employed by the Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 schools and the specific activities implemented varied widely. An overview of site implementation at each school is available in the School Profiles chapters of this report.

METHODS

Data collection involved three primary methods: surveys, site visits, and compilation of student performance data.

Surveys

Staff surveys were conducted to collect information related to implementation, staff buy-in, barriers to and early indicators of success, and school climate. Instruments included the School-Wide Program Teacher Questionnaire (SWPTQ) developed by researchers at the Center for Research in Educational Policy (CREP) at the University of Memphis (Ross & Alberg, 1999) and the School Climate Inventory (SCI) (Butler & Alberg, 1989). Additional surveys were developed for the external Technical Assistance Providers (TAPs). Cycle 1 surveys were administered online in fall 2006. Cycle 2 surveys were conducted in spring 2007.

Site Visits

Two-member teams consisting of an educational specialist and a methods specialist conducted site visits to grantee schools. Site visit activities included interviews and focus groups with principals, redesign coordinators, teachers and counselors, parents, and students. Instruments were adapted from protocols developed by CREP at the University of Memphis to collect information about perceptions related to redesign implementation, school climate, and perceived improvement in student outcomes. One two-day site visit was conducted at all 13 Cycle 1 schools in fall 2006. A one-day site visit was conducted at the 14 Cycle 2 schools included in the evaluation in fall 2006, followed by a second two-day site visit in spring 2007.

Analyses

SURVEY AND SITE VISIT DATA ANALYSIS

Based on survey and site visit data as well as site documents, evaluators assigned an implementation score to each school using an instrument designed to assess HSRR-required components, including school-wide innovations as well as activities targeting areas of deficiency. An overall implementation score was assigned and schools were categorized into three implementation levels:

- High-Level Implementation category schools in the “Implementing” phase;
- Middle-Level Implementation category schools in the “Piloting” stage; or
- Low-Level Implementation category schools in the “Planning” stage.

School profiles of Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 grantees were adapted from case studies developed through analysis of survey data, site visit data, and document review. These profiles are included in chapters 2 and 3 of this report and provide descriptive summaries of Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 school context and implementation of HSRR.

STUDENT OUTCOMES ANALYSIS

Due to data availability constraints, and because the two grant cycles were implemented at different times (Cycle 1 in April 2005, Cycle 2 in February 2006) and for different lengths of time (22 months for Cycle 1 and 24 months for Cycle 2), student outcomes analyses varied by grant cycle.

Two sets of analyses were conducted for Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 schools. The first set compared grantee campuses to matched non-grantee campuses. Matched comparison campuses were selected from the Texas population based on the following:

- Campus type was either regular or alternative instruction;
- Campus had students in 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th grades in 2005, 2006, and 2007; and
- Campus did not have any missing data on matching variables (2005 TAKS reading % met, mathematics % met, campus size, % economically disadvantaged, % White, and % at risk).

From these grantee and non-grantee campuses, two groups of students were identified for use in a cohort analysis of Cycle 1 outcomes, and two cohorts of students were identified for use in the cohort analysis of Cycle 2 outcomes. Cohorts were chosen based on the grade level of students who attended HSRR schools for the longest period of grant implementation and who thus had maximum exposure to grant strategies. Between-group (HSRR and comparison) student cohort analyses looked at differences in TAKS performance for Cycles 1 and 2 and attendance (for Cycle 1 only). School completion analyses at the campus level were also conducted for comparison of graduation data between Cycle 1 HSRR and comparison schools.

A second set of analyses involved within-group differences in student outcomes between grantee schools.

Multilevel models were used in the comparison of student cohort outcomes between HSRR and comparison campuses, as well as between HSRR schools. Comparisons of outcomes aggregated to the campus level for HSRR and comparison campuses were conducted through the use of single-level analyses.

FINDINGS

The primary focus of this final evaluation report was a quantitative analysis of student

outcomes at schools participating in Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 of TEA's HSRR grant program. In considering results of this study of early effects of HSRR programs on student outcomes, it is important to consider that it is likely that existing challenges, school size, and student groups served would have some impact on implementation and effectiveness of HSRR programs, especially in the short term. Further, the timeframe of the grant period and the evaluation period likely influenced early findings.

Redesign Approaches

- **As a group, approaches to redesign and use of reform models in Cycle 1 were more diverse and often more comprehensive than the approaches initiated by Cycle 2 schools.**

As seen in the school profiles, Cycle 1 schools implemented a wide variety of redesign approaches characterized by implementation of national reform models or district-wide school-within-school initiatives supported by private foundations. Overall, models and reforms employed by many Cycle 1 schools involved substantive and complex restructuring efforts that required a longer timeframe than the grant period for complete implementation.

As a group, Cycle 2 schools tended to use the same model developed by a Texas-based Technical Assistance Provider (TAP). Site visit data indicated that the reform plans at most of the schools using this model without supplemental activities were less comprehensive by design, often involving one-year plans targeting specific areas of change. It should also be noted that many Cycle 2 schools modified their redesign plans after grant award, resulting in implementation delays at some schools.

Implementation

- **Implementation levels (high-, middle-, or low-implementing), which were assessed during grant implementation, measured comprehensiveness and alignment of reform plans with grant program goals.**

Due to the timeframe for data collection, implementation levels reflect HSRR reform plans rather than completed levels of implementation. High-implementing schools in both cycles demonstrated initial implementation of comprehensive redesign and restructuring plans as well as targeted activities in areas of deficiency that reflected the intent of the grant program as defined in the Request for Applications (RFA). Many of the middle-implementing schools initiated less substantial redesign efforts that did not address all aspects of school operations but still faced implementation challenges associated with context or logistics and coordination of HSRR plans. With some exceptions, most of the low-implementing schools did not engage in the same level of redesign and innovation, focusing on changes to one or a few aspects of school operations, often curriculum and instruction with intensive TAKS remediation activities.

Student Outcomes

- **Analyses of differences between HSRR and comparison campuses showed some possible links between attending an HSRR school and early positive effects on student achievement.**
 - **In Cycle 1 schools, there were no statistically significant differences between student**

outcomes at HSRR and comparison campuses.

- **In Cycle 2 schools, improved student mathematics performance was related to attending an HSRR school.**

Between-school analyses indicated that Cycle 2 students were more likely to meet the TAKS passing standard in mathematics in 10th grade if they attended an HSRR school than if they did not attend an HSRR school. These results were not apparent in the ELA analyses for Cycle 2 schools. On the surface, Cycle 2 findings were more positive than the results of the analyses of Cycle 1 schools where differences between HSRR and comparison schools were not statistically significant. However, when comparing Cycle 2 results to Cycle 1 results, consideration should be given to the fact that more schools in the Cycle 1 group had longer histories of low performance and associated existing challenges and were attempting to implement more comprehensive redesign efforts.

- **Analyses of differences between HSRR campuses on student achievement outcomes based on survey and site visit data showed no differences in student outcomes. These results are likely related to the timeframe for data collection and the early stage of implementation.**
 - **Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 campuses showed no relation between TAKS passing and School-Wide Program Teacher Questionnaire (SWPTQ) results.**
 - **Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 campuses showed no relation between TAKS passing and school climate.**

- **Cycle 1 and 2 campuses showed no relation between implementation score and TAKS passing in 2007.**

In general, measures based on survey and site visit data were more meaningful for qualitative cross-site analysis of early implementation than for analysis of student outcomes. It is important to consider that the timing of data collection coincided in many schools with a period of transition associated with early implementation of school reforms. Implementation score measured to what extent a school had begun or planned to implement a comprehensive set of activities to fundamentally change and improve the campus and was not indicative of implementation completion or success. Change often introduces disruption, and the larger and more substantive the changes initiated, the more intense the disruption, especially in the early stages. This finding is highly likely to have been affected by the timing of the evaluation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Continue to refine application requirements and processes.** TEA should continue to refine application requirements and processes as it did with the Cycle 2 per-student amount requirement and other criteria. For example, grant requirements might target schools with multiple years of low performance in order to direct support to those most appropriate for particular types of funding.
- **Provide support to schools in selecting and implementing school reform programs.**

The agency should continue to refine the support provided to schools in selecting and implementing school reform programs, such as it did with Cycle 2 and subsequent Cycle 3 HSRR awards. Schools appear to choose divergent models with different approaches to reform, which may conflict with intended grant goals.

➤ **Interpret quantitative findings with caution.**

While analysis indicates some positive quantitative findings associated with attending a Cycle 2 HSRR school, findings may have resulted from activities that were unrelated or that predated the HSRR grant at individual schools. Further, many of these schools did not implement comprehensive redesign efforts that addressed all aspects of school operations as outlined in the grant guidelines but rather targeted activities to improve deficiencies in specific subject areas.

➤ **Consider how grant timelines support grant goals.**

While limited by legislative constraints, the agency should continue to be aware of the limitations imposed by short grant timelines coupled with far-reaching grant goals on the possibility of accurately measuring program impacts, particularly when evaluations are required prior to grant completion.

of deficiency indicated by Unacceptable accountability ratings. Broadly speaking, caution should be used in comparing the HSRR impacts presented in this evaluation or generalizing across the grant program with consideration of the fact that grantee schools and reform efforts were extremely diverse coupled with the timeframe of the evaluation. Many of the HSRR grantee schools that faced the greatest challenges at the outset initiated more substantive and more complex redesign efforts, and it should be expected that positive student outcomes could take longer to realize in these contexts. In contrast, many of the HSRR grantee schools that did not have a track record of low performance or history of contextual challenges did not tend to engage in as intensive or innovative redesign efforts although effects might appear more quickly. In conclusion, given the scope of the grant program goals and objectives, existing challenges faced by many of the grantee schools, and the research base on school reform, it is to be expected that it might take longer to fully implement programs and impact long-term student outcomes at HSRR schools.



CONCLUSION

The purpose of the HSRR grant program is to support comprehensive redesign and restructuring reform plans affecting every area of school operations as well as areas