COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL REFORM:
Evaluation of the CSR – Texas High School Initiative and Improving Teaching and Learning Grant Programs

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) program was first established by Congress in 1998 as a demonstration project for the U.S. Department of Education (USDE), and was reauthorized in 2001 through Title I, Part F of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. CSR programs are intended to foster coherent school-wide improvements in high-poverty, low-achieving schools that cover all aspects of their operations, through curriculum changes, sustained professional development, and enhanced involvement of parents. To achieve these goals, schools are encouraged to examine and include successful, externally-developed models that incorporate well-researched and well-documented designs for school-wide change and that have been replicated with proven results. Models are required to include 11 components related to their design, activities, resources, evaluation, and research base in order to be included in the CSR program.

CSR funds in Texas are distributed through two grant programs. The CSR – Improving Teaching and Learning (ITL) grant program was the initial program through which federal funds were distributed to Title I eligible campuses at all grade levels. A total of 85 schools received funds for Cycle 3 of the CSR – ITL program (ITL Cycle 3), which began implementation on August, 1 2004 and will conclude its third and final year of funding on July 31, 2007. The current evaluation of the ITL Cycle 3 grant program covers the August 1, 2004 to July 31, 2006 period.

The CSR – Texas High School Initiative (THSI) grants began on January 1, 2005 with funding for 84 eligible Title I high schools that were not receiving CSR funds through ITL. This grant program will conclude its third and final year on December 31, 2007. The current evaluation of THSI activities covers the January 1, 2005 to July 31, 2006 period.

Evaluation Results

This evaluation report examines implementation and student outcome data for THSI and ITL Cycle 3 programs. Implementation data included progress reports completed by school principals, as well as surveys of teachers, staff, principals, and external technical

assistance providers (TAPs). Surveys also included information on participants' perceptions of the impact of CSR programs on professional development, classroom practices, student performance, and parent involvement. Student outcome data included Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) performance in reading and mathematics from 2004 to 2006.

Profile of CSR Students

CSR campuses in both grant programs enrolled an average of 863 students per campus (based on 2005-2006 enrollment data, the most recent year of program activities). Compared to statewide averages, a higher percentage of CSR students were Hispanic and classified as economically disadvantaged. The high proportion of students in both grant programs that were classified as economically disadvantaged is an indication that CSR grants are serving the intended student populations, in keeping with the goals of the grant program.

Program Implementation

According to school principals, CSR reforms in both grant programs have achieved high levels of implementation in the majority of the 11 core components of CSR. The only exception was parental/community involvement, which was reported as lagging behind by the highest percentage of school principals.

There was substantial agreement among principals, teachers, and TAPs about the most significant barriers to successful program implementation. A lack of time, poor parent/community involvement, insufficient human resources, and lack of teacher buy-in or support for the programs were commonly cited as key obstacles.

Principals and teachers agreed that the most important facilitators of successful program implementation were support from school administration, training and professional development, support/buy-in from teachers, and adequate financial resources.

Program Impacts

A number of positive program impacts were identified by principals, teachers, and TAPs:

- Professional development is being implemented at high rates and in various formats. Participants are rating professional development received as adequate and valuable;

- Parental/community involvement continues to be difficult to facilitate, though grantee campuses are making efforts;

- Principals and teachers are perceiving positive changes in classroom behaviors among students and on classroom practices. TAPs are perceiving positive changes among teachers.

- Preliminary, long-term impacts are beginning to be observed among THSI campuses. Among those grantee campuses with high concentrations of economically disadvantaged students, analyses of student achievement data indicated:

  o Grantee campuses are outperforming comparison campuses on TAKS reading; and
  o Grantee campuses are outperforming comparison campuses on TAKS mathematics.

Conclusions

Both THSI and ITL Cycle 3 schools seem to have successfully implemented nearly all components of the CSR program. Participants reported that the program had a number of positive effects on their campuses in professional development, classroom practices, and student behavior and performance. The primary difference found between performance of CSR schools and comparison schools, however, was for high schools with large percentages of economically disadvantaged students. The CSR program appears to have been particularly effective in improving reading performance among economically disadvantaged high school students, in line with grant program goals.

Future reports on the CSR program can help to shed light on these and other issues by examining more closely the effect of program implementation on outcomes, including student achievement and changes in school practices. Research on school reform has shown that quality of implementation can vary greatly both within and between schools, and is associated with student learning outcomes. Thus, it is important to understand how quality of implementation is related to student achievement outcomes. Given the

complexity of CSR programs, it is also important to evaluate effects not just for programs as a whole, but also for specific components to identify particular practices that may be useful in improving student outcomes. These issues will be explored further in the next statewide evaluation of CSR programs, which will be conducted by TEA in 2007.

Link to full text: http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/opge/progeval/CampusWide/CSR-01-07.pdf