



Austin Independent School District

Department of Program Evaluation

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COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL REFORM: TEXAS HIGH SCHOOL INITIATIVE GRANT SUMMARY REPORT, 2005-2006

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Southern Regional Education Board's (SREB) *High Schools That Work* audited the Austin Independent School District's (AISD) high school college and career preparation program and identified areas for improvement. To prepare students better for postsecondary enrollment and workforce demands, SREB recommended that the district: (1) increase the rigor of academic core curricula; (2) facilitate transition from high school to college and careers; (3) improve instructional quality, (4) raise classroom standards and expectations; (5) expand career/technical education offerings; (6) create a strengthened education and career advisement system; (7) strengthen support structures for struggling students; and (8) build campus-level leadership teams involving administrators and teacher leaders.

To address SREB's campus-level recommendations, Johnston, Johnson (LBJ), and Travis high schools obtained funding from the Texas Education Agency's (TEA) Comprehensive School Reform (CSR): Texas High School Initiative for a period of three years. The purpose of this discretionary grant program is to promote school-wide improvements based on campus needs-assessments, focusing on teacher professional development and increased parent involvement. In its first year of implementation, January 1 through December 31, 2005, the CSR program in AISD received \$389,258 from TEA. In the second program year, TEA awarded \$312,923. Between January 1 and June 30, 2006, the three high schools spent \$99,359.

During the 2005-2006 school year, the CSR program at Johnston, LBJ, and Travis high schools supported integrated strategies to enable all students to meet increasingly challenging academic standards. Each campus developed CSR grant leadership teams, participated in an in-depth study of student performance, and identified areas for improvement. After the needs-assessments were completed, the schools began improving their student academic support systems by developing or enhancing campus literacy interventions, creating advisory seminars, and providing tutoring before, during, and after school. SREB's *High Schools That Work* technical assistance program also provided teacher professional development opportunities for each school. The schools encouraged parent involvement through increased opportunities to participate in student academic support activities and in advisory groups.

METHODOLOGY

Evaluation Objectives

Evaluation objectives include the following:

- To comply with state law requiring an annual evaluation of the Comprehensive School Reform-Texas High School Initiative grant.
- To provide project decision-makers with information about program effectiveness necessary to support implementation decisions.

Data Collection

Staff in AISD's Department of Program Evaluation collected qualitative and quantitative data pertaining to clearly defined performance measures to assist program staff with determining areas of need, articulating goals and objectives, and measuring the progress towards program goals. A description of data sources and data collection follows.

- ***Student Enrollment and Achievement Data:*** Student attendance rates, course enrollment and passing rates, TAKS scores and passing rates, dropout rates, grade level retention rates, graduation plan participation, and graduation rates were used to establish a baseline of student performance during the first year. Program staff used these data to identify campus needs, to articulate goals and objectives, and to construct program implementation plans.
- ***District Surveys:*** The campus-level results from the AISD Parent Survey, Campus Staff Climate Survey, Student Climate Survey, High School Exit Survey, and Employee Coordinated Survey were used to identify campus needs. Program staff

used this data to articulate program objectives and develop program implementation plans.

- ***Comprehensive School Reform High School Progress Report:*** In March 2006, campus-level program facilitators completed a required progress report developed by TEA. Within this progress report, campus program facilitators described program activities, levels of implementation, and the successes and challenges associated with the initial planning and implementation of school reform initiatives.
- ***Program Records and Notes:*** Program implementation plans and requirements, budget records, and meeting notes provided detailed information pertaining to program implementation.

Data Analysis

Since the program was in the initial stages of operation, the evaluation of the CSR program focused on describing how campus plans were developed and implemented. Program implementation information was gathered, and content analysis techniques were used to identify important details, themes, or patterns occurring in the program implementation process. The evaluation of implementation processes is useful for monitoring program implementation, identifying initial successes and challenges affecting the program implementation, and providing information to decision-makers for program modification and improvement purposes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The examination of CSR programs at Johnston, LBJ, and Travis high schools during the 2005-2006 school year revealed that each

campus experienced success in the initial implementation of program activities. When describing the progress made on their campuses, the campus program facilitators reported that they were “on schedule” and were engaged in moderate to high levels of implementation. When rating the degree of difficulty in program implementation, the campuses reported varying degrees of difficulty in implementing their curriculum and instruction, support services, professional development, parent and community involvement, and performance assessment components. Descriptions of their successes and difficulties follow.

Each campus established a leadership team and engaged in self-assessment to determine areas for campus improvement. While this needs assessment was reported to be “tedious” and “time consuming”, all of the campuses were able to develop program implementation plans and priorities for their execution. The overall success experienced by the program facilitators was attributed to the time spent identifying individual campus needs.

In 2005-2006, SREB provided technical assistance to each campus. During these professional development sessions, all faculty and staff from each campus were introduced to SREB’s *High Schools That Work* framework for school improvement and increased student achievement. As a result, the campuses articulated their goals and objectives and identified best practices for achieving them. Based on this initial phase of planning, each of the campuses also identified additional technical assistance providers to foster their work. Next year, campus support may also be provided by the School Redesign

Network at Stanford University, First Things First, and the Institute for Learning.

CSR campus program facilitators identified the professional development component of the grant as an important and “easy” intervention to implement. Teachers participated in ongoing professional development opportunities for improved classroom instruction, effective implementation of the advisory curriculum, and development of smaller learning communities. In keeping with articulated priorities, the CSR program will continue to support professional development opportunities for teachers in the next school year.

Each campus found increasing academic rigor through the improvement of curriculum and instruction to be a difficult process. While the district’s curricula are aligned with the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), each campus reported re-evaluating teacher instructional practices and finding that teachers needed ongoing professional development opportunities and time to improve their instructional skills. To support this effort, the CSR program facilitators purchased instructional materials to increase academic rigor and to improve the advisory curriculum.

The CSR program facilitators reported challenges in increasing the levels of parent involvement at their schools. While one facilitator reported high participation in parent meetings, the others reported low turnout for their parent education activities and forums pertaining to high school redesign. Each of the schools continuing to develop plans for additional parent outreach services.

Finally, CSR program facilitators indicated the need for additional collegial interaction and support throughout the school year. During 2005-2006, they participated in one district-level program meeting focused on the evaluation of their program. At that time, program facilitators expressed the need for ongoing opportunities to share best practices, discuss their intervention strategies, and develop solutions to the challenges they were encountering.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The results of this process evaluation indicate that all of the schools experienced success in their initial implementation of program activities. Each school identified program challenges and developed plans to address them. Based on these findings, it is recommended that district and campus administrators enable campus program staff to meet as a group, bi-monthly, to ensure the continuing success of CSR program implementation.

AUSTIN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

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