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

Evaluation Project Staff
Andrew Moellmer
Li-Chin Wu
Sonia Castañeda
Erika Beltran

Program Staff
Elvis Shoaf
Rebecca Ligon
Barbara Knaggs
Tammy Kreuz

Executive Summary

The Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) program established by Congress is authorized through Title I, Part F of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. The program was developed to help high-poverty and low-achieving schools address common obstacles to improved student achievement through effective school-wide reform. CSR programs are intended to cover all aspects of high poverty and low-achieving schools' operations through curriculum changes, sustained professional development and enhanced involvement of parents, rather than focusing on improving programs selectively or adopting a piecemeal approach to reform.

Grants are awarded to local education agencies (LEAs)[1] in Texas through two different programs: 1) the CSR – Improving Teaching and Learning (ITL) grant program; and 2) the CSR – High School Initiative (HS) grant program. The CSR – ITL grant program is the initial CSR grant program through which federal funds were distributed to Title I eligible campuses seeking to implement the 11 required CSR components. The CSR – HS is a new grant program that was first implemented for the 2004-05 school year. The CSR – HS program distributes funds to other eligible Title I Part A schools serving high school students (including open-enrollment charter schools and all-grade campuses) that are not currently receiving CSR funds, or that did not already receive CSR funds prior to the 2004-05 school year.

This evaluation report examines implementation results for the first reporting period of the CSR – HS program and the first reporting period of Cycle 3 of the CSR – ITL program. Both of these programs were in the early stages of implementation when they reported the results covered in this evaluation. The first reporting period for the CSR- HS program occurred between January 1, 2005 and May 31, 2005 (i.e., five months). The first reporting period for the CSR – ITL Cycle 3 program occurred between August 1, 2004 and July 31, 2005 (i.e., 12 months). Therefore, the differences in reporting time

---

[1] LEAs include school districts and open-enrollment charter schools.

frames should be considered carefully when reviewing implementation progress for these two programs.

This report also examines final implementation results for Cycle 2, which concluded its fourth and final year of implementation during the 2004-05 school year. The reporting period for the final year of Cycle 2 was July 1, 2004 through June 30, 2005. However, the CSR – ITL Cycle 2 grant program was funded over the July 1, 2001 to June 30, 2005 period. Implementation data reported for the final year of Cycle 2 should be viewed as an indication of where grantees were on each of the CSR components after four years of program implementation. This report also presents findings from a statistical analysis that examines the relationship between levels of CSR implementation and student performance results as measured by performance on standardized state assessments such as the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) and the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS).

CSR – HS campuses and CSR – ITL Cycle 3 campuses were both in the early stages of CSR implementation when they submitted their first progress reports. It is to be expected that at this stage, compared to CSR – ITL Cycle 2, relatively few of the required activities would be fully implemented.

Key findings for the first reporting period (i.e., January 1, 2003 – May 31, 2005) at CSR – HS campuses include:

- The typical CSR – HS student was enrolled in grade 9 or 10, Hispanic, and economically disadvantaged;
- All but one (98%) of the high schools receiving grant funds, and all (100%) of the open-enrollment charter schools and all-grade campuses reported establishing an active leadership team on the campus. Especially among the high school campuses, leadership teams represented a wide cross-section of school staff, with school principals, teachers, curriculum specialists, and department chairs well represented;
- Although grantees had implemented a wide range of CSR-funded activities, in each reported activity area only 33% or less of campuses reported that the activity was either 'mostly implemented' or 'fully implemented';
- The most common obstacle to successful implementation was the lack of parental involvement, as cited by 51% of campuses that reported an obstacle. The most common means to resolve obstacles was to hire additional staff (23%).

Approximately 13% reported adopting or changing parental outreach programs to address obstacles;

- Open-enrollment charter schools and all-grade campuses were much more likely than high schools to establish a range of Parent and Community Involvement activities by the end of the first reporting period. Open-enrollment charter schools and all-grade campuses were much more likely than high schools to establish Parental Involvement in Decision-Making (73% vs. 58%), Parent Education/Training (67% vs. 44%), and Parent Volunteer Programs (60% vs. 28%);

- A majority of high schools reported that implementation of activities related to improving Curriculum and Instruction (94%), Professional Development (88%), Non-Academic Support Services (84%) and Annual Evaluation (78%) were 'on schedule' or 'ahead of schedule'. An even higher percentage of charter schools/all-grade campuses (93% or more for each activity) reported that these activities were on schedule;

- Parent and Community Involvement was the most common activity reported by high schools as 'behind schedule', with 28% of high schools reporting this to be the case. None of the charter schools/all-grade campuses reported this activity to be behind schedule;

- Nearly half (48%) of the high schools reported that Parent and Community Involvement was a 'very difficult' or 'difficult' activity to implement. None of the charter schools/all-grade campuses reported this to be the case;

- Campuses received technical assistance in a large number of reform areas by the end of the first reporting period. The most common areas of assistance were Professional Development, Curriculum, Instruction, and Student Assessment;

- Only 34% of the high schools, compared to 60% of the charter schools/all-grade campuses, received technical assistance in the area of Parent and Community Involvement;

- A somewhat higher percentage of high schools (11%) than charter schools/all-grade campuses (7%) reported dissatisfaction with their technical assistance provider; and

- The most common source of additional funding used to supplement federal CSR funds at high schools was local funds (52%). The most common source of additional funding for charter schools/all-grade campuses was state funds (60%).

CSR – ITL campuses share similar characteristics that distinguish them from CSR – HS campuses. Most notable is the fact that CSR – ITL grant funds are available to all campus types. Key findings for the first reporting period (July 1, 2004 – June 30, 2005) for Cycle 3 and for the fourth year of the grant program for Cycle 2 include:

- The typical CSR – ITL student in 2005 was enrolled in an elementary or middle school, Hispanic, and economically disadvantaged;

- Technical assistance providers indicated that between 71% and 91% of Cycle 2 campuses had mostly implemented or fully implemented all of the required CSR components by the end of the grant period.

- The three components implemented by the lowest percentage of Cycle 2 campuses were: Comprehensive Design (84%), Student Achievement (83%) and Parent and Community Involvement (71%);
- Technical assistance providers indicated that between 60% and 88% of Cycle 3 campuses had mostly implemented or fully implemented eight of the 11 required CSR components by the end of the first reporting period.
- The three components implemented by the lowest percentage of Cycle 3 campuses were: Research-Based Methods (59%), Annual Evaluation (58%), and Parent and Community Involvement (44%).

These findings indicate that by the end of the grant period, a high percentage of Cycle 2 campuses had implemented all 11 CSR components, in keeping with program goals. Not surprisingly, CSR – HS campuses and CSR – ITL Cycle 3 campuses reported lower levels of implementation, since each group of campuses had only concluded its first reporting period when it submitted its progress reports. Even so, CSR-ITL Cycle 3 campuses reported implementing each CSR component at a higher level than CSR – HS campuses. It is likely that this is due to the fact that the first reporting period for each group differed, with CSR – HS campuses reporting implementation during the first five months of the grant period, and Cycle 3 campuses reporting implementation for the entire first year of the grant.

A statistical analysis was conducted on Cycle 2 final evaluation data to determine whether CSR programs implemented over four years were related to improved student academic achievement. Comparisons of student performance were made between CSR campuses and non-CSR campuses, between non-CSR campuses and high-implementing CSR campuses, and between non-CSR and low-implementing CSR campuses. Several positive findings were found relating to the effectiveness of CSR reforms on student achievement, as measured by the percentage of students meeting state reading and math standards at each campus:

- CSR campuses that implemented program components at a higher level outperformed low-implementing campuses as measured by the amount of improvement in the percentage of students meeting state reading and math passing standards between 2001 and 2005;
- High-implementing CSR campuses also outperformed non-CSR campuses as measured by the amount of improvement in the percentage of students meeting state reading and math passing standards between 2001 and 2005;

- Five of the 11 CSR components were found to be related to improvement in the percentage of students meeting state reading passing standards between 2001 and 2005: Measurable Goals and Benchmarks, Support Provided for Staff, Parent and Community Involvement, Annual Evaluation and Coordination of Resources;
- Four of the 11 CSR components were found to be related to improvement in the percentage of students meeting state math passing standards between 2001 and 2005: Measurable Goals and Benchmarks, Professional Development, Coordination of Resources and Student Achievement;
- CSR campuses implementing the Coordination of Resources component at a high level were found to outperform low-implementing campuses in the percentage of students meeting 2005 TAKS math passing standards;
- Across each of the 11 CSR components, no significant differences were found between high-implementing and low-implementing CSR campuses in the percentage of students meeting 2005 TAKS reading passing standards;
- No significant differences were found between CSR campuses and non-CSR campuses in the percentage of students meeting 2005 TAKS reading and math assessments.

These results show some evidence for concluding that the implementation of CSR reforms are related to improved student performance over time. Overall, these findings are somewhat encouraging and suggest that CSR reforms may be having the intended effect, at least as measured by results for Cycle 2.

One area of concern that emerges from the analysis is the comparatively low implementation levels for parental involvement activities among CSR – HS and CSR – ITL Cycle 3 campuses. Given difficulties reported regarding parent participation, this result suggests the importance of taking steps to establish more parent participation and outreach activities at CSR campuses, particularly at CSR – HS high schools. It is early enough in that grant program's implementation period that such steps may have a positive effect on the success of CSR programs.