

## Executive Summary

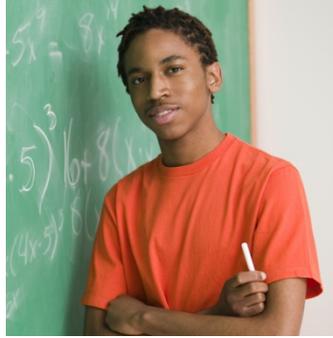
# Evaluation of the Collaborative Dropout Reduction Pilot Program: A High School Success Pilot Program

February 2011 Report

**Submitted to:**

Texas Education Agency





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**Submitted By:**

ICF International



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# Executive Summary

## Highlights:

- Collaborative Dropout Reduction pilot program (CDR) grantees were successful at fostering collaborations with local businesses, local governments, law enforcement agencies, nonprofit organizations, faith-based organizations, and institutions of higher education.
- 22 CDR grantees were awarded a total of \$6.6 million and served 5,432 students in the 2008–09 and 2009–10 school years. Grantees delivered services to students in four areas: workforce skill development, academic support, attendance improvement, and student/family support services.
- Although Cycle 1 CDR schools had lower dropout rates, higher graduation rates, and higher completion rates relative to their comparison group between the year prior and the end of the first year implementing the program, these results were not statistically significant. Because only 11 CDR schools were part of this analysis, statistically significant school-level results would be difficult to demonstrate.
- CDR students demonstrated strong gains in meeting or exceeding TAKS-Math, TAKS-Reading, and TAKS-Science passing standards. These gains outpaced state averages, and the gains demonstrated by at-risk CDR students in TAKS-Math and TAKS-Science outpaced gains for at-risk students in Texas.
- CDR students who remained in the program for two years had lower TAKS-Reading and TAKS-Math proficiency rates after one year in the program, but demonstrated significantly higher rates of proficiency in the second year.

This evaluation report presents findings from the first and second year of the evaluation of the Collaborative Dropout Reduction pilot program (CDR), which correspond to the 2008–09 and 2009–10 school years. CDR is one of three grant programs grouped together as the High School Success Pilot Programs (HSSPP). The other two programs are the Intensive Summer Programs pilot program (ISP) and the Mathematics Instructional Coaches pilot program (MIC). Collectively, these three grant programs were authorized and funded by the Texas Legislature in 2007<sup>1</sup> so awarded districts could develop and implement projects to prevent and reduce dropout, increase high school success, and improve college and career readiness in public schools.

The consequences of a student's decision to drop out of school can have serious and negative ramifications for both the individual and society as a whole. Texas has taken a number of steps to reduce the dropout rate, increase both graduation rates and college and career readiness, and involve multiple stakeholders in these efforts. Just as the decision to drop out is influenced by multiple and interrelated personal, demographic, social, and school-based factors, CDR is designed to be multi-faceted and involve cooperation among schools, individuals, and organizations from outside of the traditional school community to provide effective interventions and services to students at risk of dropping out of school.

***"[CDR staff member] was my mom because my mom wasn't."***

-CDR Student

<sup>1</sup> All three HSSPP programs were authorized by House Bill 2237 (80<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature). Specifically, CDR was authorized as Texas Education Code §29.096. All three programs were funded by Rider 53 (General Appropriations Act [GAA], Article III, 80<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature); further funded by Rider 51 (GAA, Article III, 81<sup>st</sup> Texas Legislature). The evaluation is required by Rider 79 (GAA, Article III, 80<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature); further required by Rider 69 (GAA, Article III, 81<sup>st</sup> Texas Legislature). A final report will be due to the Texas Legislature in January 2013, pending further funding.

## Program Goals

CDR was designed to provide grantees opportunities to create a new local dropout reduction program or to expand/enhance an existing program.<sup>2</sup> The purpose of CDR is to foster collaborations with local businesses, local governments, law enforcement agencies, nonprofit organizations, faith-based organizations, and institutions of higher education to deliver proven, research-based dropout intervention services. Specifically, CDR seeks to increase the number of students graduating from high school through the following:

- Reducing the number of students who drop out of school in the community
- Increasing students' job skills
- Increasing students' employment opportunities
- Providing continuing education opportunities for students who might otherwise have dropped out of school, including dropout recovery and re-entry programs
- Preparing students to graduate college-ready
- Sustaining dropout reduction and recovery strategies beyond the grant program
- Providing models of effective community-based dropout prevention and recovery efforts to serve as guides in developing future program and policy initiatives in the areas of dropout prevention and serving at-risk students

## Program Evaluation

TEA contracted with ICF International to conduct an evaluation of CDR. The comprehensive evaluation approach was designed to address the following objectives:

- Evaluate the implementation of CDR instructional strategies and programs
- Evaluate the impact of CDR on student outcomes (e.g., academic achievement, dropout, graduation)
- Evaluate the impact of CDR on students' career readiness skills (e.g., ethical workplace behaviors)
- Assess the cost-effectiveness and sustainability of CDR

The evaluation of CDR began in September 2008. Per Rider 69 (GAA, Article III, 81<sup>st</sup> Texas Legislature), a final evaluation report is due to the Texas legislature in January 2013, pending further funding. A CDR Interim Report (December 2010) focused primarily on CDR Cycle 1 grantees and their activities during the 2008–09 school year.<sup>3</sup>

This evaluation report is designed to provide a detailed accounting of evaluation findings during the 2008–09 and 2009–10 school years for Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 CDR grantees. Although some outcome data were not available at the time of this writing (e.g., dropout, graduation, and promotion for the 2009–10 school year), the report nonetheless provides a full picture of CDR implementation, and a partial picture of the associated outcomes and cost-effectiveness/sustainability of CDR.

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<sup>2</sup> More information about CDR can be found online at TEA's website [here](#).

<sup>3</sup> The December 2010 CDR Interim Report can be found online [here](#).

## Grantees

Six CDR grantees were funded in Cycle 1 for implementation on 15 campuses.<sup>4</sup> In addition, there are 16 Cycle 2 grantees that began implementing CDR in 2009–10 on 26 campuses. Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 grantees were required to address four service areas in providing services to students:

- *Workforce skill development*, which included paid employment, internship opportunities, and advanced career and vocational training for participating students
- *Academic support*, which included tutoring programs, credit recovery, academic acceleration, active learning strategies, career and technical education, and software to enhance student learning
- *Attendance improvement*, which included truancy and attendance intervention and incentive programs, school attachment, and positive behavior support
- *Student and family support*, which included addressing the social, emotional, and personal needs of students and their families

## CDR Implementation Findings

CDR grantees served 5,432 students in the first two years of the program. Six Cycle 1 grantees served 1,924 students: 414 students were served in the 2008–09 school year only, 969 students entered the program in the 2009–10 school year, and 541 students participated in the CDR program in both school years. Importantly, CDR Cycle 1 grantees had served about 42% more students than they had planned to serve (1,355) by the end of the grant period. The 16 Cycle 2 grantees served 3,508 students during the 2009–10 school year.<sup>5</sup>

CDR is reaching schools with a large population of students at high risk of dropping out. The majority of the student population at the 15 campuses implementing Cycle 1 projects and the 26 campuses implementing Cycle 2 projects was identified as at risk of dropping out (73%) and economically disadvantaged (88%).<sup>6</sup> Compared to statewide averages, most CDR schools had higher mobility and dropout rates, as well as a larger proportion of students enrolled in special education.

“This is a very good program because it’s a second opportunity for students.”

-CDR Student

CDR grantees made significant accomplishments and faced a number of challenges in the implementation of their programs. Key facilitators and barriers to program implementation were identified, based on interviews with CDR program staff and partners during site visits. Facilitators to implementation included:

- *Diversity in programming*: Both Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 grantees provided a wide range of services and opportunities in recognition of their students’ interrelated problems and needs. Programming included not only credit recovery, tutorials for TAKS and academic subjects, and training in workforce skills, but also extracurricular clubs and home visits.

<sup>4</sup> Hurricane Ike made landfall on September 13, 2008 and forced the closure of one CDR grantee’s school system for an extended period of time. The grantee was able to implement their CDR program in the spring of 2009, and continued services in the 2009–10 school year. Additional information on Cycle 1 grantees can be found in the 2010 CDR Interim Report, available online [here](#).

<sup>5</sup> All six CDR Cycle 1 grantees were awarded a continuation grant with a grant period from August 2010 to February 2012. CDR Cycle 2 grants end February 2011.

<sup>6</sup> In order to be classified by TEA as at-risk for dropping out, a student must meet one of 13 criteria (e.g., homeless, pregnant). A full definition of at-risk can be found online [here](#).

- *Cultural competence:* Many grantees were located in diverse areas with high-risk populations. Grantee applications, progress reports, and interviews highlighted grantee recognition of the importance of cultural competence,<sup>7</sup> particularly as it related to student and family engagement in dropout prevention efforts. One campus had a teacher who helped translate for Spanish-speaking parents during home visits to explain the importance of CDR, while other campuses had counselors who worked primarily with Hispanic students to provide support and encouragement.
- *Good communication:* Findings from progress report responses and case studies indicated that strong relationships and clear communication between CDR partners, school staff, and district staff served to facilitate program implementation. CDR grantees noted that frequent communication with partners about their needs, expectations, and the successes and challenges they faced were particularly critical to successful implementation. All Cycle 1 grantees mentioned that clear and effective communication strategies were established and maintained during the two years of programming.
- *Relationship of CDR staff with students:* Findings from the case studies indicated that the CDR program provided students the opportunity to build positive relationships with adults. Case study grantees reported that the development of strong relationships between CDR staff and participating students facilitated implementation by laying a foundation for the program that fostered communication and student engagement.
- *Community support:* Some Cycle 2 grantees felt that broad community support and partnerships were key to the implementation of their programs. These partnerships yielded workshops, trainings, and a variety of other experiences that helped students develop critical workforce skills and understand the importance of completing their education.

Barriers to implementation included:

- *Coordination of a large number of partners:* Given that the average Cycle 1 CDR grantee had more than five partners and the average Cycle 2 grantee had more than six partners, tracking those partnerships and coordinating services proved to be a challenge in some cases. For example, one grant coordinator reported feeling stretched thin in providing services from a number of partners across a number of sites. To address this issue, one grantee added “honorary partners” for job shadowing during the second year of implementation that were available only if there was student interest.
- *Parent participation:* Several CDR grantees reported that parents of prospective and participating students were not supportive of CDR. In multiple grantee locations, parents were reported to lack understanding of how specific CDR initiatives would help their children (e.g., providing students with the opportunity to attend college), or were hesitant to have their children be labeled as “dropouts” (a resistance shared by students as well). To overcome this barrier, grantees invited parents to attend workshops, college and/or career fairs, parent-teacher conferences, and sometimes conducted home visits on weekends; however, during the second year of implementation, (CDR Cycle 1) grantees still reported difficulty engaging parents.
- *Limited funding and resources:* Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 CDR grantees had to re-assess what services and opportunities they could provide to their students due to poor economic conditions affecting their CDR partners, as well as limitations on how funding could be used. One grantee noted that economic hardship had limited CDR partners from contributing to activities such as mentoring and employment opportunities.

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<sup>7</sup> Cultural competence refers to the ability to effectively interact with people of different cultures.

- *Natural disasters:* Houston ISD and Port Arthur ISD were impacted by Hurricane Ike (September 2008). Both districts got off to a slower start than anticipated because schools were closed for two weeks in Houston and four weeks in Port Arthur at the beginning of the 2008–09 school year. Houston ISD was able to begin implementation shortly after schools were open, while Port Arthur experienced a much longer delay in program implementation. Port Arthur ISD began full implementation of CDR in the 2009–10 school year.
- *Scheduling difficulties:* Cycle 2 grantees cited the difficulty of scheduling program activities and meetings to accommodate the conflicting schedules of school and district staff, students, parents, and CDR partners. Students often had prior work, extracurricular, or familial obligations that prevented them from being able to participate in CDR activities after school. Parents of students often could not attend events scheduled to highlight the importance of CDR due to work obligations – a difficulty that one grantee attempted to address by holding parent-teacher conferences at the parents’ worksites. Additionally, CDR partners were limited by school schedules, especially given TAKS preparation activities that could not be interrupted. School staff also had their own prior responsibilities (e.g., as teachers who had to juggle classwork with additional work from being involved in CDR) and attempted to accommodate students as much as possible – sometimes even providing weekend tutorials.
- *Program name:* The program name itself (Collaborative Dropout Reduction Program) posed a barrier to recruitment and participation of students, with its perceived identification of students as “dropouts.” Parents were reticent to label their children as such, and children did not want to be identified as dropouts either. A few grantees addressed this issue by re-naming the program and putting an emphasis on academic achievement, rather than dropout reduction.

*“I am very thankful about having joined Collaborative. It has given me a lot of helpful information about what to do for myself and get ready for college.”*

-CDR Student

## **Findings from Student-Level and School-Level Outcome Analyses**

Student participants’ passing rates (i.e., proficiency rates) from the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) from the baseline year (2007–08 for Cycle 1, Year 1 students; 2008–09 for all others) were compared to passing rates from the end of the first year in which students were enrolled in CDR. Needed data were available for 2,797 CDR students (51%) on TAKS-Math, 2,868 students (53%) on TAKS-Reading, and 863 students (16%) on TAKS-Science.<sup>8</sup> Key findings, which are mainly based on the first administration of TAKS<sup>9</sup>, include:

- ***CDR students' proficiency in TAKS-Math improved between the year before and the year after they entered the program.*** The percentage of CDR students who met standards in TAKS-Math increased 9 percentage points, from 46% at baseline to 55% at the end of the first year. These results were compared to state averages, which were weighted by year, grade level, and subject to reflect the composition of CDR students. CDR students had stronger gains in TAKS-Math proficiency (+9

<sup>8</sup> Altogether, 5,432 students were served by CDR, so the findings for TAKS-Math and TAKS-Reading represent slightly more than half of the students served. Valid data were not available in many cases because (a) students took an alternative form of the TAKS, or (b) students did not have valid data for both time points, which may be due to a variety of factors such as being absent on test day, exempt due to LEP status, or if the student moved in or out of state.

<sup>9</sup> All Cycle 2 TAKS results are based on the first administration of the exam. In the first year of the evaluation, the evaluation team tried to address missing data among Cycle 1 students by including second administration data as well. Given that this effort added data for less than 100 students to the analysis, it did not affect the results of the analyses. In order to maintain consistency in the results presented between the Interim Report and this report, second administration data for a small number of CDR Cycle 1 students is included in the analysis.

percentage points) than gains that would be expected from state averages (+6 percentage points). Moreover, the percentage of at-risk CDR students who met TAKS-Math standards increased 12 percentage points, which compared favorably to a 10 percentage point increase that could be expected from at-risk students in Texas.

- **CDR students' proficiency on TAKS-Reading was slightly higher between the year before and the year after entry into the program.** The percentage of CDR students who met standards in TAKS-Reading increased from 79% at baseline to 82% in the year following entry into the program. This increase of 3 percentage points was slightly higher than the expected change based on state averages (+2 percentage points). However, CDR students who were at risk did not experience gains in proficiency that were stronger than the state averages for at-risk students. CDR students who were at risk had a 3 percentage point improvement in TAKS-Reading while at-risk students in the state gained an average of 4 percentage points.
- **CDR students' proficiency in TAKS-Science increased markedly between the year before and the year after entry into the program.** The percentage of CDR students who met standards in TAKS-Science increased from 43% at baseline to 78% in the year following entry into the program. This 35 percentage point increase compared favorably to the state average (+23 percentage points). Moreover, CDR students who were at risk had a 41 percentage point increase in TAKS-Science proficiency, which outpaced the state average for at-risk students (+39 percentage points). The sample size for TAKS-Science analyses is relatively small because there is no Grade 9 TAKS-Science exam, and as a result, the only students who have two consecutive years of TAKS-Science data were Grade 11 students who took the TAKS Exit Level exam. The general state trend for TAKS-Science indicated a much higher passing rate for the TAKS Exit Level exam than the Grade 10 TAKS-Science exam that was used as a baseline measure.

The evaluation team also investigated the effect of sustained engagement in CDR among a subset of Cycle 1 students ( $n=192$ ) who had remained in the program for two consecutive years. CDR students who remained in the program for two years were found to have lower TAKS-Reading and TAKS-Math proficiency rates after one year in the program, but demonstrated significantly higher rates of proficiency in the second year. This indicates the need for sustained engagement of CDR students – and the need for patience given that it takes time to turn a child's life around.

Results from a school-level quasi-experimental study between CDR schools and matched comparison schools indicated no statistically significant differences between CDR and comparison schools on TAKS-Reading and TAKS-Math proficiency rates. The small sample size of schools in this analysis ( $n=11$  Cycle 1 schools and 26 Cycle 2 CDR schools) provided little statistical power to demonstrate significant results.

Although the research methods used cannot definitively attribute improvements in academic performance to CDR initiatives, there is both qualitative and quantitative support for this finding. Quantitative TAKS results were consistently positive for CDR students and CDR staff interviewed during site visits confirmed that they have seen noticeable improvements in students' academic performance. Through a number of initiatives designed to improve academic achievement, including cross-age tutoring programs, dual-credit courses, flexible scheduling, tutoring, and academic advisory services, CDR grantees may have been responsible for these improvements. Grantees attributed the following to their initiatives: improvements in students' grades, more time-on-task as a result of fewer behavioral problems, and exposure to new ways of learning. In particular, grantees' focus on technical education may in part explain the significant improvements in science proficiency. Sustained engagement of students also appears to be a contributor to academic success.

Other outcomes beyond TAKS proficiency rates were investigated that also provide an indication of the college and career readiness of CDR students:

- **Completion Rates:** 160 of the 210 high school seniors served by CDR in the 2008–09 school year graduated, which represents a graduation rate of 76%. Of the remaining 50 high school seniors served, 23 students dropped out and 27 were retained. This graduation rate is slightly above district-wide averages (class of 2008) for five of the six Cycle 1 CDR grantees. An additional 60 Cycle 1 students in Grades 10 and 11 graduated with the assistance of credit recovery programs. The school-level quasi-experimental study indicated that Cycle 1 CDR schools had stronger gains in graduation rates than their comparison schools between baseline and one year following implementation of CDR. CDR schools had a 5% increase in graduation rates, compared to a 1% gain among comparison schools. However, this result was not statistically significant.
- **Dropout Rates:** The annual dropout rate among CDR students was 7.9% for the 2008–09 school year, which was above district-wide averages for all six Cycle 1 CDR grantees (district-wide annual dropout rates among these grantees ranged from 2% to 5% in the 2007-08 school year and 1% to 6% in the 2008-09 school year). It is unclear why CDR students had such a high dropout rate, but certainly one possibility is that CDR grantees targeted the most at-risk students within a given school, so they would naturally be expected to have higher dropout rates than the general student population. The school-level quasi-experimental study indicated that CDR schools had stronger reductions in both annual (-1%) and longitudinal (-3%) dropout rates than their comparison schools, which had a 0.3% increase in annual dropout rates and a 1% decline in longitudinal dropout rates over the same period. This result, like all school-level quasi-experimental study results for this evaluation, was not statistically significant due in part to the small sample size in the analysis.
- **Course Completion:** A higher percentage of students served by Cycle 1 CDR grantees passed Algebra I (+3%), Algebra II (+14%), Geometry (+2%), English I (+8%), English II (+12%), and English III (+4%) in the first year of the program (2008–09), compared to the year prior to entering the program (2007–08). These findings suggest that CDR may be helping students progress in school at a faster rate and provide an indication of college readiness among CDR students.
- **Perceptions of College and Career Readiness:** Both CDR staff and students perceived student gains in course completion, technical knowledge, oral and written communications skills, ethical behaviors, and leadership skills.

***“It has helped me develop a business like behavior which helped me stay professional during school hours.”***  
-CDR student

## ***Promising Practices for Service Provision***

Findings from the case studies revealed promising practices that may contribute to the overall success of the CDR case study sites. The promising practices identified below were identified by CDR grantees as contributors to their success in attaining positive outcomes for students. These practices could be adopted and modified by future CDR grantees to meet their unique needs.

- **Attendance incentives:** Both monetary and non-monetary attendance incentives were utilized by case study grantees to improve attendance rates among students. One incentive strategy grantees used was an attendance contract; the attendance contracts were monitored closely by CDR staff and were signed by students, CDR staff, and, oftentimes, parents. Another attendance incentive strategy used by grantees was the provision of a monetary reward, prize, or early dismissal for participating students with good attendance. Additionally, at one grantee school, students with excellent attendance were invited, along with their families, to an awards ceremony where they were recognized for their attendance records.

- *Other incentives:* In addition to attendance incentives, case study grantees also sought other ways to provide incentives for students and families. For example, one grantee offered a \$50 incentive for CDR seniors who attended TAKS tutoring. The students were required to attend at least 10 hours of TAKS tutoring to qualify for the stipend. Another grantee encouraged parents to give permission for their children to participate in the CDR program by hosting a dinner for students and their families that “made it like an honor” to be selected for the program. An additional incentive for some students was access to dual-credit courses<sup>10</sup> that would have been out of reach due to financial limitations.
- *Opportunities for paid employment:* CDR grantees provided workforce skills development services to 1,436 students in the 2009–10 school year. Of these students, 330 CDR students were employed, including 208 students (63%) in paid jobs or internships. Participating CDR students were provided opportunities such as tutoring elementary students or working in fields that aligned with their career interests. One barrier to paid employment was the age of students in the program, as many jobs required students to be at least 16 years old. An additional barrier identified was immigration status; students who did not possess proof of citizenship could be denied jobs.
- *Communication:* Good communication among district staff, school staff and community partners, as well as with students was essential to the success of the CDR programs. One grantee promoted good communication by convening all CDR district and school staff once a week; additionally, the external community partners met with CDR district and school staff once per month. This ongoing communication allowed the community partners to provide feedback to district/school personnel. Another grantee developed a computer-based system that sent alerts to counselors and assistant principals when participating students were absent or when their grades fell below a certain point, thereby enabling the counselor to immediately intervene and speak with students. Similarly, another grantee faced with the challenge of high student mobility implemented monthly CDR staff meetings to promote networking among campuses and to update student lists and track participating students.
- *Virtual learning:* One grantee successfully utilized virtual learning technology as a component of the CDR program. Through NovaNET, a comprehensive online courseware program, the grantee implemented virtual learning programs, such as Diversified Education through Leadership, Technology, and Academics (DELTA) and Virtual School Programs (VSP), that regularly monitored student progress towards high school completion. NovaNET allowed teachers to check their students’ progress virtually through usage logs maintained by the software program. These usage logs allowed the students’ teachers to see how much time each student spent in their courses and what activities the students were working on within each course. Each student’s work could be seen in real time, so support could be focused for each student’s needs as they arose. VSP student/teacher meetings were held twice per week to ensure that any barriers, whether academic or personal, were resolved quickly. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected through pre- and post-program student participant surveys that assessed changes in knowledge, skills, and attitudes regarding school completion and job attainment.
- *Removing “dropout” from the program title:* One grantee acknowledged that the word “dropout” had negative connotations for students and parents. In order to combat the stigma attached to “dropout,” the grantee renamed their CDR program to the High School Success Program (HSSP).

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<sup>10</sup> Dual-credit courses are college courses taken by high school students for which students earn both high school credits and college credits at the same time.

## Findings from Cost Analyses

Budgets and expenditures reported for both Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 grantees show that, while grantees were able to spend CDR grant funds on a variety of activities, the majority (90%) of funds were spent on organizational expenses, such as payroll costs for program staff and contracted services to work with community organizations. There was particular interest in understanding the use of student incentives, including food service during after-school and weekend activities. Only one CDR Cycle 1 grantee budgeted funds for food service (but did not spend any funds for food service) and none of the CDR Cycle 1 grantees budgeted funds for student incentives, which falls under other operating costs. None of the CDR Cycle 2 grantees budgeted funds for food service, and two of the CDR Cycle 2 grantees budgeted funds for student incentives and spent part of these funds during the first year of the grant period.

***"I learned to accept some of the decision my teachers made and listen more closely and pay more attention to what I do in class."***

-CDR student

Cycle 1 grantees were awarded an average of \$226,578 in grant funds, whereas average actual expenditures were \$168,936, or 75% of budgeted amounts, indicating that Cycle 1 grantees spent fewer TEA funds than they planned for in their budgets. On the other hand, these grantees spent more matching funds (\$10,955) than originally planned (\$6,747), which indicates that CDR Cycle 1 grantees leveraged matching funds during the grant program period, which may lead to more sustainable programs over the long run.

For Cycle 1 grantees, the budgeted amounts and total expenditures in broad categories across the entire grant period were available. The six Cycle 1 grantees served a total of 1,924 students during the two years of the grant award period (through April 30, 2010) and spent an average cost per student of \$527. Because Cycle 1 grantees originally projected to serve 1,355 students, the program proved to be more cost-effective than the original expectation of \$834 per student. Given that CDR Cycle 1 grantees implemented programs that cost less than similar well-known dropout prevention programs, the investment in CDR appears to be cost-effective for Cycle 1 grantees.

Only one year of expenditure data was available for Cycle 2 grantees at the time of this report, so interpretation of this data is limited. The data from only one year are even more limited because grantees are not required to draw down funds as they spend what was awarded. In other words, grantees make decisions about when to draw down awarded funds as long as they draw down all funds by the final deadline established by TEA. Because of these limitations, the "cost per student" value was only reported for the first year of the Cycle 2 grant project period. Thus far, Cycle 2 CDR grantees have served 3,508 students at an average cost of \$399 per student. Continued tracking of the number of students served, outcomes achieved, and funds spent on the CDR program by Cycle 2 grantees will lead to a better understanding of the cost-effectiveness of CDR Cycle 2 grants.

## Conclusions

Preliminary findings indicate that CDR students experienced statistically significant improvements in TAKS-Math, TAKS-Reading, and TAKS-Science. Moreover, these improvements in TAKS proficiency outpaced state averages and gains in TAKS-Math and TAKS-Science among at-risk CDR students outpaced state averages for at-risk students. Qualitative findings from CDR stakeholders generally support the presence of positive effects in academic achievement. CDR students also experienced improvements in course completion rates, and the program's first year graduation rate of 76% among high school seniors is above the average for five of the six CDR Cycle 1 districts.

The results for CDR on both student-level and school-level outcomes were striking in their consistency. Nearly every outcome studied demonstrated either positive movement among CDR students, or positive change relative to a comparison group. While the positive findings from the school-level quasi-experimental study were not statistically significant in part due to small sample sizes in the analysis, the range of positive outcomes appeared to indicate that CDR is having beneficial effects on the college and career readiness of the 5,432 CDR students who were served by the program.