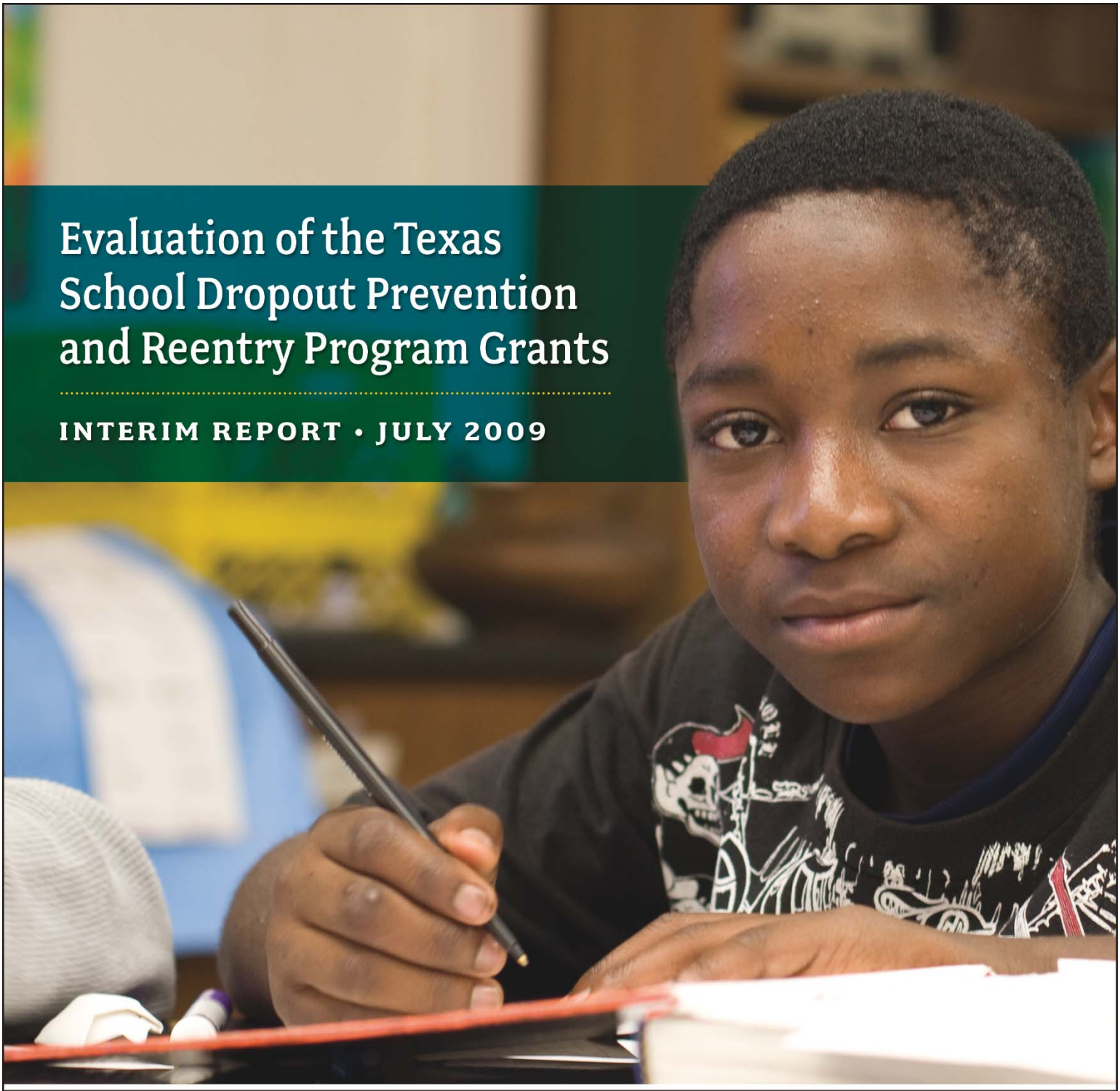

Evaluation of the Texas School Dropout Prevention and Reentry Program Grants

INTERIM REPORT • JULY 2009

SUBMITTED TO:

Texas Education Agency

SUBMITTED BY:

WestEd

4665 Lampson Ave. • Los Alamitos, CA • 90720

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WestEd is a nonprofit research, development, and service agency that works with education and other communities to promote excellence, achieve equity, and improve learning for children, youth, and adults.

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Decision Information Resources, Inc. (DIR)

The DIR mission is to provide the research, evaluation, technical assistance, and training that will help their clients make action-oriented decisions that result in improved performance and efficiency of programs, processes, and procedures. DIR researchers conducted the on-site data collection for this evaluation.

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EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

This Interim Report covers the first of two years of the evaluation of the Texas School Dropout Prevention and Reentry Program (TSDPRP) Grants. TSDPRP is a statewide effort to reduce the dropout rate and improve student outcomes. Three tasks comprise TSDPRP: 1) Task A–Analysis of the impact of the Communities In Schools (CIS) model; 2) Task B–Assessment/content review of the *Dropout Recovery Resource Guide*; and 3) Task C–Examination of the impact of the statewide training of education professionals. The Executive Overview presents the project background, the evaluation plan, the methods for addressing each of the evaluation's three objectives, and the findings as they relate to each objective.

Project Background

In today's increasingly competitive "knowledge economy," prospects are bleaker than ever for those without a high school diploma. Dropouts are more likely than high school or college graduates to experience unemployment, underemployment, poverty, health problems, and incarceration (Lehr, Clapper, & Thurlow, 2005). Because high school completion is so crucial to students' future success, pressure is mounting to improve graduation rates.

At the federal level, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (U.S. Department of Education, 2002) has spurred high school reform by holding schools accountable for student progress using indicators of adequate yearly progress (AYP), including measures of academic performance and rates of school completion set by individual states. In Texas as well, keeping students on track to graduate and getting them back on track when they have fallen behind has become an urgent task—the statewide graduation rate for the class of 2007 was 78% (Texas Education Agency, 2008)[1].

As part of its effort to assist states in developing effective programs to address these challenges, in the fall of 2005, the U.S. Department of Education awarded the Texas Education Agency (TEA) a $2.5 million School Dropout Prevention Program grant to fund the TSDPRP. This program was a statewide effort that spanned from the 2006-07 to the 2007-08 school years to create an effective, sustainable, and coordinated program to serve the needs of students at risk for not completing high school and those who dropped out of high school and reentered. TSDPRP was focused on four primary objectives that in turn were based on the priorities of the federal School Dropout Prevention Program grant:

[1] As reported by the TEA Department of Assessment, Accountability, and Data Quality, Division of Accountability Research, the graduation rate (i.e., the longitudinal completion rate) reflects the percentage of students from a class of beginning ninth graders who complete their high school education by their anticipated graduation date.

1) Expand personal graduation plans (PGPs) currently in use for at-risk, incoming ninth graders by replicating models that utilize eighth-grade assessment data and include both academic interventions and social supports.

2) Increase partnerships between high schools and government agencies, community-based organizations, and private entities to leverage resources for dropout prevention and reentering students.

3) Develop statewide capacity for implementing specific intervention strategies that address the needs of students most at risk of dropping out of high school and students who are reentering high school.

4) Evaluate the effectiveness of TSDPRP and continually improve its services and activities.

Addressing dropout prevention and recovery with a variety of strategies, one of the primary interventions of TSDPRP is the establishment of Communities In Schools (CIS) campus programs on selected high school campuses. CIS is a stay-in-school program administered by TEA that utilizes a case management, multidisciplinary approach to help students continue their education and improve academically. The CIS mission is to help young people stay in school, successfully learn, and prepare for life. CIS staff provides case management services to students through a number of campus-based programs that take place before, during (i.e., lunch time and during non-core classes), and after school. These various programs fall under the six CIS components – (1) supportive guidance and counseling, (2) health and human services, (3) parental and family involvement, (4) career awareness and employment, (5) enrichment, and (6) educational enhancement.

With TSDPRP funds, TEA contracted with local CIS programs to work with 10 high schools, with some of the highest annual dropout rates in the state, to develop and establish CIS campus programs. These local CIS programs contacted independent school districts and selected appropriate sites among the eligible high schools for the establishment of CIS campus programs. After finalizing the selection of high school campuses, the local CIS programs established the 10 CIS campus programs on the selected high school campuses. The newly established CIS campus programs used their allocated funds to support the delivery of CIS case management services to students. As part of TSDPRP, the focus of these 10 CIS campus programs was on the assessment of needs and the subsequent delivery of services to at-risk, incoming ninth-grade students, including expanding the development of comprehensive, personalized service plans and PGPs using eighth-grade assessment data–one of TSDPRP's objectives.

Dropout prevention studies recommend wrap-around strategies (i.e., individualized case management) that address student problems in and outside of school. The CIS case management

model emphasizes both the direct delivery of services to students by CIS staff and the referral of students to other school-based service delivery systems. To accomplish the latter, CIS encourages the development of working relations with a wide variety of entities outside of the school (e.g., health services, employment services, drug prevention strategies, services to teen parents, mental health services). Thus, CIS campus staff effort involve both delivering direct services to students and brokering needed services through community agencies to provide services that campus-based CIS staff are not able to address directly. This coordination of connections between student needs and community resources is one of the hallmarks of the CIS model. As a result, the TSDPRP funding provides a means to address TSDPRP's second objective–increasing partnerships through CIS's coordinated community-based approach to case management services for at-risk students.

Recognizing the importance of such partnerships, the importance of mentoring relationships to at-risk students, and the recognized expertise of Big Brothers Big Sisters, TEA drew on TSDPRP funds to contract with Big Brothers Big Sisters of North Texas (BBBSNT) to provide mentoring services at six of the participating high schools in the North Dallas region. BBBSNT worked with the CIS campus programs to identify at-risk, ninth-grade students enrolled in CIS services at the participating high schools and match these students with mentors. CIS Dallas Region, Inc., had previously established CIS campus programs at these six high schools.

To fulfill the third TSDPRP objective–developing statewide capacity–the grant funding supported the development of a resource guide in dropout recovery strategies. For this, TEA contracted with an outside vendor to develop a resource guide to help educators interested in implementing dropout reentry strategies. The vendor worked to develop the *Dropout Recovery Resource Guide* to provide detailed information about effective dropout recovery programs, with materials, references, and resources to help institutions implement best practices in dropout recovery.

In another area of capacity building, the grant funding also supported an all-day training of professional educators in CIS's case management model; accessing, coordinating, and maintaining sustainable partnerships with community resources; and creating effective school-based mentoring initiatives and training mentors. In August 2007, a statewide CIS training took place to train education professionals on the CIS model and strategies, including the importance of school and community partnerships in dropout prevention and how to establish such partnerships.

In this report, all student-level CIS data and corresponding findings are related solely to the CIS programs on the 10 high school campuses participating in TSDPRP. As a result of TEA's grant from the U.S. Department of Education (i.e., TSDPRP), these 10 CIS campus programs are

implemented somewhat differently than other CIS campus programs in Texas. First, these 10 CIS campus programs are required to focus their service delivery on incoming ninth graders. Second, these CIS campus programs are required to work closely with their respective campus staff in developing PGPs for CIS case-managed students, using eighth-grade assessment data.

The Evaluation Plan

To effectively evaluate the impact of the TSDPRP activities on at-risk students at the 10 participating high schools, WestEd developed the following evaluation plan. The evaluation activities addressed the following three aspects of the TSDPRP:

A) Analysis of the impact of the CIS case management model on student outcomes at the 10 campuses receiving CIS services, focusing on the degree to which: 1) eighth-grade assessment data were used in the development of PGPs for participating students; 2) the impact of BBBSNT mentoring services on students served; and 3) the effectiveness of the above and other academic and support services administered through CIS on student outcomes;

B) Expert assessment/content review of the *Dropout Recovery Resource Guide* developed with grant funds; and

C) Examination of the impact of statewide training on education professionals' perceptions of and attitudes toward the establishment of partnerships with community-based organizations.

Using a quasi-experimental design with multiple methods and sources to triangulate findings, WestEd and its subcontractor, Decision Information Resources, Inc. (DIR) planned to evaluate the impact of TSDPRP on student outcomes. To assess the various aspects of TSDPRP, WestEd developed related evaluation questions, which are juxtaposed with TSDPRP's central tasks in the following table:

Study Tasks and Corresponding Evaluation Questions

Study Tasks	***Evaluation Question***
A) Analysis of the impact of the CIS model	1. How does the expansion of the CIS case management model affect student outcomes?
B) Assessment/content review of the *Dropout Recovery Resource Guide*	2. Does the *Dropout Recovery Resource Guide* include research-based practices and a comprehensive range of services? 3. How are leaders from diverse campuses using the *Dropout Recovery Resource Guide* to improve student outcomes?
C) Examination of the impact of the statewide training	4. How is the statewide training changing education professionals' understanding of the value and process of community-based partnerships? 5. How are education professionals cultivating existing and new partnerships?

Since the campus programs were established along a timeline ranging from October 2006 through February 2008, it is premature at this juncture to conduct outcomes analyses associated with TSDPRP. The 10 CIS campus programs were in various stages of implementation during the time this report was being prepared. Chen (2005) noted the importance of allowing time for full program implementation, as conducting performance assessments too early in a program's growth can produce unreliable results. As a result, the first round of data collection and analyses, conducted in year one of the evaluation, sought to develop insight into program implementation and describe student demographic information at the 10 CIS campus programs.

These formative data are presented in this report to inform program development and implementation. Presentation of the summative data and outcome analyses are planned for inclusion in the Final Report to be published in July 2009.

Task A: Impact of the Expansion of the CIS Case Management Model

This section begins with a presentation of the evaluation questions for Task A–Analysis of the impact of the CIS case management model, and a brief description of the methods used to answer the research questions. Following this is background information on the 10 participating CIS high school campuses and the findings of the evaluation activities.

The evaluation plan involved assessing the impact during the grant period of the expansion of the CIS case management model with the use of site visit data and secondary student-level data. To address Task A, the following central evaluation questions and sub-questions were developed:[2]

[2] Due to implementation delays and data availability (as discussed in more detail further in the report), evaluation question 1 and sub-question 1.4 will be addressed in the Final Report to be published in July 2009.

1. How does the expansion of the CIS case management model affect student outcomes?

   1.1 What aspects of the CIS model are the schools implementing? How?

   1.2 How are campuses using the 8th grade assessment data in PGPs?

4. What students are participating in the CIS program? What students are participating in the BBBSNT mentoring program?

5. How does the level of implementation of the expansion affect student outcomes?

TEA supplied student-level data for this evaluation from the Communities In Schools Tracking Management System (CISTMS), the CIS data collection and management system. However, delays in establishing the CIS program on three campuses resulted in delays in data entry. As a result, CISTMS data were available for only 7 of the 10 CIS campuses included in this evaluation. Therefore, any analyses conducted on CISTMS data included only the seven campuses for which data were available.[3] The site visit data to address these questions derived from interviews, focus groups and document reviews conducted at the 10 CIS campus sites. Each site visit contained interviews with CIS executive directors, school administration or leadership most knowledgeable about CIS (i.e., school principal, guidance counselor, disciplinary dean), school-level CIS staff, teachers, and students. In addition, the data collection plan included a document review of 10 randomly selected PGPs at each high school campus.

School Background Information

As previously noted, TEA contracted with local CIS programs to work with independent school districts to develop CIS campus programs on eligible high school campuses that had some of the highest annual dropout rates in the state. Eligible high schools were required to meet two main criteria: 1) the high schools could not be currently receiving CIS services, and 2) the high schools had to fulfill the requirements of the federal grant (e.g., making a commitment to secure additional funding to sustain the program after grant funding ceased). In addition to high schools needing to meet the specified criteria, school selection was also dependent on the campus being willing to collaborate with local CIS programs. Based on eligibility and willingness to participate, local CIS programs narrowed the list to 10 specific campuses to receive the funding, which began in September 2006 and extended through August 2008.

[3] CISTMS data for the 2007-08 school year were not available at the time of this report but will be available for the Final Report (July 2009).

The majority of the schools (n = 6) are located in Dallas. The remaining schools are located in Houston, Texas City, San Antonio, and Corpus Christi. According to the TEA's Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS)[4], the number of students the schools enrolled ranged from 536 to 2,228 students, with an average of 1,624 students. Among the 10 high schools, the percentage of students at risk of dropping out ranged from approximately 60% to 87%. The dropout rate reported for these schools ranged from 1.7% to 12.2%. The ethnicity of students at all 10 schools was predominantly Hispanic or Hispanic and African American. Finally, at the start of the intervention, 4 of the 10 schools were considered academically unacceptable based on the AEIS rating scale.[5]

Evaluation Question #1: How does the expansion of the CIS case management model affect student outcomes?

To answer the first evaluation question, a comparison will be made between students in the CIS campus programs with students at the same school who are not enrolled in CIS, but who have been matched on other variables, to assess the effects of the CIS program expansion on student outcomes. Due to the implementation timeline, it is premature at this point to try to determine impact of the CIS program on student outcomes, as delays in the implementation of a number of the 10 participating CIS campus programs limit any potential impact of the program activities and the ability to detect differences between students in the program and those not enrolled in the program.

Sub-question #1.1: What aspects of the CIS model are the schools implementing? How?

This section sets the stage by describing implementation at the 10 CIS campus sites. Specifically, this section begins by describing the student issues identified by CIS campus program staff and how these issues are addressed in student service plans. Following this is a discussion of the implementation of CIS services (the six CIS components) based on the qualitative findings from the site visits to the 10 CIS campuses.

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[4] The AEIS presents information on the performance of students in each school and district in Texas every year. The information is put into the annual AEIS reports, available each year in the fall.

[5] For definitions of *at-risk*, *dropout*, and *academically unacceptable*, see the footnotes corresponding to this section in the main body of the report.

Student Issues and Service Plan Development

CIS campus program staff identified barriers to student success in the students' service delivery plans (i.e., lack of college readiness, need for academic support, delinquent conduct, low self esteem, need for employment, and lack of basic needs). These barriers fell into four main categories of concern: (a) academic, (b) behavioral, (c) mental health, and (d) social service. Barriers that were categorized into behavioral concerns (n = 556) represented the most frequently identified area of concern, with academic (n = 410) and mental health (n = 380) concerns also being identified at high frequencies. A smaller number of issues were classified as social service concerns (n = 53).

The behavioral concerns category included a range of student issues both inside and outside the classroom. Of the behavioral concerns, social skills (31%) and absences (26%) represented the largest proportions. These two concerns were considered especially significant because, according to the dropout literature, reduced social competence and high absenteeism are considered to be key indicators that a student is at risk of dropping out (Jimerson et al., 2006; Suh & Suh, 2007). Classroom conduct (14%) and tardiness (14%) were also frequently reported concerns.

Student grades (51%) and scores on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) (23%) are the primary academic concerns; other barriers include homework completion (7%), the need for more academic support (7%), college readiness (7%), and English language proficiency (5%). Mental health concerns include a variety of barriers, with the highest proportions of barriers being concerns about self-esteem (36%), students' overall mental health (22%), and family conflict (17%). Socio-emotional problems and disabilities, including reduced confidence and mental health issues, are included in the assortment of status variables that are often difficult to change through prevention and intervention efforts (Jimerson et al., 2006; Lehr, Clapper, & Thurlow, 2005). However, CIS attempts to mitigate these challenges by coordinating and specializing resources for each student.

Among the social service concerns, students' employment needs and career planning (74%) overwhelmingly represented the largest proportion. Other social service concerns included basic needs (20%), health needs (4%), and housing (2%).

Once CIS campus staff assessed referred students and identified their barriers to success, they made a decision about whether or not to target each issue for services. If an issue was to be targeted for services, CIS staff then decided if the student's issue would be addressed directly by CIS campus program staff or referred to another service provider on campus or in the community. CIS campus staff provided services for over 90% of the behavioral, mental health,

and social service issues students experienced. However, they directly provided a smaller percentage (63%) of services for academic issues, as CIS campus program staff determined that for some students, these issues were best targeted by others. As a result, CIS campus staff coordinated the delivery of these services to the students by tutors or other available educational providers.

Descriptive analyses of service plan data illustrated that CIS campus staff selected the services students received based on the targeted issues. Because most student issues were categorized as behavioral (40%) or academic (29%), the majority of service plans (65%) provided supportive guidance and counseling and/or educational enhancement activities. In most cases, students received services in multiple categories.

CIS Services

To provide the necessary services for the students, the 10 CIS campus programs implement all six CIS components – (1) supportive guidance and counseling, (2) educational enhancement, (3) health and human services, (4) parental and family involvement, (5) career awareness and employment, and (6) enrichment. This section describes the various types of activities (i.e., outreach activity, event, etc.) that the site visit data indicate the CIS campus programs implement for each of the six CIS components.

- Supportive Guidance and Counseling Component: 10 CIS campus programs implemented seven primary types of activities (i.e., seven campuses implementing each)—scheduled support groups, individual assistance, on-campus presence, student monitoring, mentoring, student referrals, and childcare support.

- Educational Enhancement Component: Types of activities among the 10 CIS campus programs spanned four main areas—academic support, academic monitoring, college preparation, and advocacy.

- Health and Human Service Component: Among the 10 CIS campus programs, 13 different types of activities were employed to provide services—physical health, mental health, academic needs, basic needs, prenatal/parenting, substance abuse treatment, guest speakers, female-specific, financial support, holiday support, mentoring, nutrition, and social interaction.

- Parental and Family Involvement Component: Seven types of activities emerged among the 10 CIS campus programs for services provided—direct communication, mailings, events, parent-initiated communication, advertising, CIS-school collaboration, and parent services.

- Career Awareness and Employment Component: Among the 10 CIS campus programs, two primary types of activities (i.e., seven schools implementing each)—employment readiness and finding employment; and three secondary types of activities (i.e., 1-2 schools implementing each)—advocacy, special programming, and internships/externships, were employed.

- Enrichment Component: Six types of activities were employed by the 10 CIS campus programs—field trips, social activities, summer programming, community services, student support, and mentoring.

The following bullets are the key findings from the site visits involving the implementation of the six CIS components. Further details regarding these findings are presented in the main report.

- The difference in start date had a major impact on implementation. CIS campus programs were more established for those schools that started in the 2006-07 academic year compared with those that began during the 2007-08 academic year (see Table 3). Differences included the experience level of CIS personnel, the level of familiarity of campus staff and students with the CIS campus program and staff, the number of partnerships established with external service providers, and the number of activities initiated, as well as other programming efforts.

- A major finding of the site visits was the discrepancy between the responsibility of CIS campus program staff to achieve their stated goals (i.e., keeping students in school and helping them improve academically) and their lack of authority on campus. As described in more depth in the full report, CIS campus program staff reported several barriers to their work. Many of these barriers were school-based issues that CIS program staff lacked influence to change, including need for space and facilities, difficulty accessing student data, and teacher reluctance to refer at-risk students to the CIS program. These school-based barriers directly interfered with CIS campus program staff's work in achieving the expectations of the CIS program.

- When CIS campus staff were not fluent in Spanish, it was difficult for them to aid certain students or communicate with parents who only spoke Spanish. While CIS campus staff reported that there were Spanish-speaking staff members on the Mobile Services Teams (a team of two or more bilingual staff members who assisted with recruiting, providing services, conducting home visits, making referrals to community agencies, and working with students on drug-abuse prevention and treatment), these CIS campus staff members were not always on campus. Schools with bilingual CIS staff on campus full-time reported that communication with non-English speaking students and parents was not a problem.

- Only one of the six Dallas-based CIS campus programs mentioned BBBSNT during the interviews. In addition, only one of the four other (non-Dallas-based) schools reported mentoring activities had been established (i.e., through a school-based program) by the time of the visit.

- Many of the CIS campus staff reported delays in matching their students with BBBSNT mentors. A number of interviewees thought that it would take several months for their students to be matched.

- A total of 28 types of services (e.g., food, clothing, shelter; mentors; employment/job readiness assistance) were reported being provided by 97 different partner organizations among the 10 CIS campus programs.

- Of the 97 different organizations working with the 10 CIS campus programs, there were: 41 non-profit organizations, 15 government agencies or programs, 15 medical and mental health clinics, 10 colleges and universities, 10 social service agencies, and 6 local businesses/corporations.

- On an anecdotal basis, school administrators, teachers, and students at all 10 high school campuses with CIS programs reported that they generally believed that CIS campus program effectiveness was strong.

In summary, common barriers to student success were identified and categorized into four main areas of concern: (a) academic, (b) behavioral, (c) mental health, and (d) social service. The majority of the student issues were classified as behavioral concerns. In response to these identified issues, CIS campus staff developed service plans to target each student's identified needs. To provide the necessary services for the students, the CIS staff at all 10 campus programs implemented the six CIS components: (1) supportive guidance and counseling, (2) educational enhancement, (3) health and human services, (4) parental and family involvement, (5) career awareness and employment, and (6) enrichment. Data collected indicated that the level of implementation of each CIS campus program varied according to the CIS campus program's start date, in addition to other contextual factors. One of these contextual factors was the lack of authority on campus by CIS staff that, in some cases, prevented them from achieving the expectations of the CIS program.

Sub-question #1.2: How are campuses using the 8th grade assessment data in Personal Graduation Plans (PGPs)?

One of the primary objectives of the TSDPRP was for CIS campus program staff on the 10 participating high school campuses to work with their respective school personnel to expand the use of PGPs for at-risk, incoming ninth-grade students by using eighth-grade assessment data

and including both academic interventions and social supports. While it was noted that it was the responsibility of school personnel for the development and maintenance of the PGPs, this aspect of TSDPRP was an attempt to improve the PGP development process. It was originally thought that the collaboration of the CIS campus program staff with school personnel in the development of the PGPs, including the use of eighth-grade assessment data, would result in improvements in the development and use of PGPs (i.e., quantity and quality of PGPs).[6]

For those students who have PGPs, the district designs and places students in an intensive instruction program that is intended to enable the student to be able to perform at grade level by the end of the next academic term or to attain a standard of annual growth specified by the district. The district then tracks improvements in the student's performance. The staff member designated to develop the PGPs is expected to also create a timeframe for monitoring and providing intervention activities and other evaluation strategies for each student. In addition, the PGP must address parent/guardian participation, including the parent/guardian's educational expectations for the student. To ensure the overall agreement of all stakeholders, each person involved in the process must sign the PGP.

During the site visits, the evaluation team found that overall the use of eighth-grade assessment data in the development of PGPs was minimal. When interviewing the CIS campus program staff, the on-site evaluation team discovered that only 2 of the 10 CIS campus programs completed PGPs. When the CIS campus program staff were asked by the evaluation team about the use of eighth-grade assessment data in developing PGPs, none of the CIS campus program staff at the 10 participating high school campuses indicated any familiarity with or use of eighth-grade assessment data in the development of the PGPs. Note that there may have been some confusion among CIS campus staff regarding what constitutes eighth-grade assessment data (i.e., TAKS results, course grades/credit accrual, benchmark assessment and other assessment or student data).[7]

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[6] PGP development will be explored further in the second year of the evaluation.

[7] Some of the CIS campus staff indicated that eighth-grade assessment data were not available to them. However, when TEA was informed about reports from CIS campus staff that eighth-grade assessment data were not available to them, TEA provided WestEd with information about the assessment data that had been entered by CIS campus staff into CISTMS. While not all ten of the participating campuses had entered assessment data into CISTMS, this information seems to support the possibility that when the site visit team asked CIS campus staff about eighth-grade assessment data, there was some confusion about what they were asking.

Sub-question #1.3: What students are participating in the CIS program? What students are participating in the Big Brothers Big Sisters of North Texas (BBBSNT) mentoring program?

There were 400 students (62% female, 38% male) participating in the CIS program across the seven campuses for which data were available. The majority of students participating in the CIS program were either Hispanic (61%) or African American (31%). A small percentage of students were White, not of Hispanic origin (8%) and Asian/Pacific Islander (1%). In addition, most students in the CIS program on these campuses were in ninth-grade (87%), which aligned with the focus on ninth-grade students outlined as a priority of the CIS campus programs under TSDPRP.

The vast majority of CIS students lived at home with members of their immediate family (92%). In smaller numbers, CIS students lived in the homes of other relatives (4%) and non-relatives (2%), or in a motel (1%). For most of these students, the immediate family member they lived with was either their single parent mother (45%) or both biological or adoptive parents (32%), while other CIS students lived with a parent and step-parent (4%), other relatives (4%), grandparents (3%), or a legal guardian (2%). For the majority of CIS students, the language spoken in the home was English (80%). Spanish was the second most commonly spoken language in the home (19%).

The data indicated that 25% of the CIS students did not receive any public assistance services. However, 38% of CIS students received at least one public assistance service, which, for the majority, was free or reduced-price lunch. The remaining 37% of students received two or more public assistance services.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of North Texas

As previously noted, TEA used a portion of TSDPRP funds to contract with BBBSNT to provide mentoring services at six of the participating high schools in the North Dallas region. TEA reported data that provided descriptive information about those CIS students who participated in the BBBSNT mentoring initiative. A total of 35 CIS students participated, at various stages, in mentoring activities among the six Dallas-based CIS campus programs.

According to TEA, the focus of the BBBSNT mentoring program was to be on ninth graders, with the idea of having sufficient time during the life of the contract for student-mentor matches to occur and for the mentorship period to be maintained throughout the student's remaining years in high school. However, the data showed that approximately half of the students ready to be matched were not ninth graders (47.8%). Among the students who had been matched with a mentor, nearly half were tenth or eleventh graders (41.7%). The data also

revealed that only four of the six CIS campus programs participating in the BBBSNT mentoring program had referred students to BBBSNT for matching. In addition, of the total number of students participating in BBBSNT (N = 35), there were almost twice as many students waiting to be matched (n = 23), as there were students who had already been matched (n = 12).

Through the BBBS initiative, a challenge was identified in creating effective lines of communication among different service entities on campuses (i.e., CIS and BBBS). While BBBS was responsible for the low rate of matching the students, CIS was responsible for the low level of referrals to BBBS. CIS staff noted the time it took for a student to be matched, which could have been a reason they were not referring many students to BBBS, becoming a circular argument. It is important to note that no data were collected from BBBS staff to understand their perspective on why CIS was not making the referrals and why the matches were not occurring.

Sub-question #1.4: How does the level of implementation of the expansion affect student outcomes?

To answer this evaluation question, researchers will compare students in the CIS campus programs across participating high school campuses based on level of campus implementation to assess the effects of the program expansion on student outcomes. However, it is premature at this point to try to assess the impact of the CIS program on student outcomes, as delays in implementation limit any potential impact of the program activities and the ability to detect differences between students in the program based on level of implementation.

Task B: Assessment of the Dropout Recovery Resource Guide

An important objective of the TSDPRP was the development of statewide capacity for implementing specific intervention strategies that address the needs of students who are reentering high school. In order to achieve this program objective, TEA contracted with an outside vendor to develop a resource guide to help educators interested in implementing dropout reentry strategies. The vendor worked to develop the *Dropout Recovery Resource Guide* (Guide) to provide detailed information about effective dropout recovery programs, with materials, references, and resources to help institutions implement best practices in dropout recovery.

As part of this evaluation, researchers will conduct an assessment of the Guide to assess its comprehensiveness and the extent to which the Guide includes relevant research. Evaluation questions 2 and 3 address the assessment/content review of the Guide:

2. Does the *Dropout Recovery Resource Guide* include research-based practices and a comprehensive range of services?

3. How are leaders from diverse campuses using the *Dropout Recovery Resource Guide* to improve student outcomes?

The evaluation will rely on an inventory of promising practices developed as a tool to review the Guide to answer these research questions. In addition, interviews with 10 campus leaders will gauge their use of the Guide and any changes in their respective policy and practice afterwards. The campus leaders will be screened prior to their interviews to make sure they have used the Guide sufficiently to respond to interview questions.

TEA plans to launch the Guide in January 2009 and then conduct forums at regional education service centers (ESCs) to gain additional feedback from users that will be used to refine the Guide, as well as to generally promote the use of the Guide among education professionals. The evaluation of the Guide, relying on the approved inventory and interviews with Guide users, will occur after the Guide has been finalized and posted on TEA's website. The Final Report (July 2009) will present the findings from the evaluation of the Guide.

Task C: Impact of the Statewide Training

To fulfill the TSDPRP objective of developing statewide capacity, grant funding supported a statewide training for education professionals. In August 2007, ESC staff participated in the statewide training. The training included information on the CIS model, how to access and coordinate relevant community resources, and how to develop and maintain sustainable partnerships with community organizations.

The establishment of partnerships between public schools and organizations, such as private businesses, state and local government agencies, community-based organizations, and private entities to facilitate the delivery of services to at-risk students is an important aspect of the CIS model. The emphasis of such a community-based approach is to provide comprehensive support (e.g., tutoring programs, drug prevention activities, teen parent services, gang and youth violence prevention activities) for students at risk of dropping out.

The evaluation objective for Task C was to examine the impact of the August 2007 statewide training on education professionals' perceptions of and attitudes toward the establishment of partnerships with community-based organizations. Evaluation questions 4 and 5 addressed this objective:

4. How is the statewide training changing education professionals' understanding of the value and process of community-based partnerships?

5. How are education professionals cultivating existing and new partnerships?

A survey of education professionals (i.e., ESC staff) who participated in the August 2007 statewide training provided the information to address these questions. In writing the original evaluation questions, establishing partnerships was emphasized to address the stated needs of TEA. However, the agenda and materials for the training from TEA made clear that the topic of establishing partnerships was only a portion of the training content. Therefore, the survey questionnaires were aligned with the topics relative to the entire content of the training.

Findings

The survey respondents included 30 ESC staff (6 males, 24 females) with various titles, such as education specialists, consultants, and directors. With regard to their overall opinion of the training, participants rated the quality, comprehensiveness, and usefulness of the information presented at the training on the following five-point scale: 1 = very poor, 2 = poor, 3 = fair, 4 = good, and 5 = excellent. In general, participants gave the training good to excellent ratings for quality (M = 4.4), comprehensiveness (M = 4.4), and usefulness (M = 4.1) of the information presented.

Overwhelmingly, participants noted that the most essential information from the training were the statistics regarding the dropout problem and impact on society. One participant noted, "The statistics provided by the presenters regarding number of dropouts per school year, the cost to society, the impact on society, etc., were profound. This demands the attention of all school personnel, parents, and most importantly, the community." Several respondents were planning to use the statistics from the training to inform teachers and administration of the significance of the dropout problem. Other participants thought that the most essential information presented was the various features of the CIS model, specifically the campus needs assessment and the campus service delivery plan. All of the respondents indicated that they would recommend two of the CIS strategies to district and campus leaders, i.e., conducting a needs assessment for campus dropout prevention services and developing a campus service delivery plan to meet the identified needs of students at risk of dropping out.

A total of 11 of the 30 participants reported that they had conducted training on dropout prevention strategies in their ESC region prior to attending the August 2007 training. Of these participants, eight (73%) indicated that they have altered (or plan to alter) their training sessions on dropout prevention strategies as a result of what they learned at the statewide training on the CIS model. Generally, training participants reported that they planned to train others in their ESC region on the various aspects of the CIS model, including how to recognize potential dropouts, how to conduct a needs assessment, and how to implement a case management model for dropout prevention. Participants reported that they would use the training modules and manual

that were provided at the statewide training in future training activities they conduct in their regions. Participants also indicated that they included (or planned to include) more information about (1) meeting the needs of the whole person (i.e., the student), not just the student's academic needs; (2) strategies for working with at-risk students; and (3) practical strategies for campuses to use to enhance their dropout prevention efforts.

With regard to the information on establishing school and community partnerships, training participants rated the quality, comprehensiveness, and usefulness of the information presented at the training on the following five-point scale: 1 = very poor, 2 = poor, 3 = fair, 4 = good, and 5 = excellent. Participants generally rated the quality (M = 4.0), comprehensiveness (M = 4.0), and usefulness (M = 4.1) of the information on establishing school and community partnerships to provide dropout prevention services as good. Participants noted that the most important element in the training concerning establishing partnerships was the knowledge that support from the community is a valuable resource for schools and that establishing partnerships with community organizations is a key strategy in assisting districts and campuses with dropout prevention. All respondents noted that they would recommend to district and campus leaders that they establish school and community partnerships as a dropout prevention strategy. One respondent noted, "The dropout problem is not a school problem, it's a community problem, therefore, it is vital that we work systemically to get the community involved with the school to connect them to kids."

Some participants thought the information on establishing partnerships was interesting but not necessarily applicable to their region's circumstances. For example, one respondent wrote, "I already knew the need for partnerships. I've worked in a large district for 15 years. The issue for me now, however, is that almost all of the region's districts are small, rural districts and the community partnerships are very hard to develop because the resources in the community are so limited."

In summary, the August 2007 training seemed to increase participant awareness of the importance of establishing partnerships with entities outside of the school environment and how such partnerships could be a key element in a dropout prevention program. However, participants were not adequately prepared to connect with partners and utilize resources available in their communities and schools or to teach others in their school system how to establish partnerships and then work effectively with their new partners.

Next Steps

The next round of evaluation activities will provide both process and outcome data to inform TSDPRP program services and activities. For Task A–Analysis of the impact of the CIS

model, researchers will build on the data collection and analysis methods employed for the Interim Report, but will also collect more in-depth information about implementation, report on any program changes or developments since the first round of data collection, and conduct longitudinal analyses on student outcome data. For Task B–Assessment/content review of the *Dropout Recovery Resource Guide*, evaluators will assess the Guide using the prepared inventory and telephone interviews with Guide users.[8] The Final Report will be available in July 2009.

[8] The Final Report will only address Tasks A and B, as work on Task C is complete.