

# **Texas Ninth Grade Transition and Intervention (TNGTI) Grant Program: Eight Campus Case Studies**



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## Overview

As part of a statewide evaluation of the Texas Ninth Grade Transition and Intervention (TNGTI) Program, researchers from Learning Point Associates, an affiliate of American Institutes for Research, and Gibson Consulting Group visited eight campuses that implemented this grant program during the 2009–10 school year. The purpose of this report is to publicly share the findings from each of these case study campuses, which can assist other campuses in developing and implementing their own successful ninth-grade transition programs. These eight campuses agreed to be part of this case study report to help provide insight into successful grant strategies and to highlight how they dealt with some of the challenges they faced during implementation. The names of the campuses described in these case studies have voluntarily been provided by the schools so that other campuses interested in learning more about their experiences may contact them directly to continue the discussion of these issues.

During these school visits, conducted in the summer and fall of 2010, researchers spoke with program coordinators, administrators, teachers, counselors, and students to learn about the summer component of the program and obtain feedback from these stakeholders. All individuals who agreed to provide information during these site visits were guaranteed anonymity for their responses, and emphasis was placed on the case studies being part of an evaluation of the TNGTI program, not an evaluation of the individual or the school. The interview and focus group data from these visits were able to provide a picture of the best practices employed by particularly successful programs and the challenges they overcame.

## The TNGTI Grant Program

The purpose of the TNGTI program, as noted in the program guidelines, “is to support eligible campuses in the development and implementation of effective, research-based summer transition and intervention programs aimed at increasing the successful transition of middle school students to the high school environment” (Texas Education Agency, 2009, p. 3). The program targets ninth-grade students at risk for dropping out of school.

### Program Components

All grantees are required to implement the following program components: (1) a summer transition program, (2) an early warning data system (EWDS) to identify student program participants at risk of retention or dropout, and (3) fall and spring interventions for students identified through the EWDS. Requirements for each of these components are described below.

*Summer Transition Programs.* Campuses funded through the TNGTI grant program were required to develop a summer transition program for entering ninth-grade students who have been identified as at risk for dropping out of school. Grantees could use any of the following indicators specified in the Texas Education Code (TEC) §29.081(d) to identify at-risk students: (1) low attendance in middle school, (2) course failures, particularly in core subject areas, (3) failing to meet standard scores on the Texas

Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), (4) behavior or disciplinary problems, or (5) other risk factors identified by local program staff.

*Ninth-Grade Early Warning Data Systems.* Districts or open-enrollment charter schools funded by the TNGTI grant program are required to monitor student participants' progress during the ninth-grade year using a computer-based system of early warning indicators. Students who are identified as being at risk for retention or dropout by these indicators are to receive intervention services. Grantees are responsible for selecting a minimum of three indicators and defining a minimum of two measures for each indicator. These indicators and measures should fall under the categories of attendance, behavior, or academic progress such as semester grades or course failures.

*Fall and Spring Interventions.* Fall and spring intervention services must be provided to program participants who are identified as being at risk for retention or dropout. Grantees are required to identify a minimum of three interventions to be used for each indicator, establish methods for delivering intervention services, and determine whether these services are achieving the desired outcomes.

## **Case Study Campus Selection**

Case study selection was done in two phases to collect information from schools conducting their programs in late summer, and from schools that were identified as having demonstrated high levels of program effectiveness in the impact analysis conducted for the TNGTI January 2011 Evaluation Report (Hoogstra et al., 2011).<sup>1</sup> Eight campuses participating in the TNGTI program were selected for in-depth case studies of their program activities and impacts on students.

For summer 2010, site visits were conducted at Moises E. Molina High School, Porter High School, and Lopez High School to observe summer program activities in action. These three schools offered their two-week programs in late July or early August and were considered a sample of convenience. Other factors that influenced the selection were data collected from campus progress reports and responses on the teacher surveys related to the self-reported effectiveness of each program. The rationale for choosing these three campuses for summer site visits was for researchers to observe firsthand the activities occurring in the second year of implementation (2010–11). Interviews were conducted with program staff at the high school, with an emphasis on staff that had also participated in the first year of implementation (2009–10). District staff and middle school staff also were interviewed, when available. Site visitors came to the campus for one day during the summer program to observe a variety of student activities and take notes related to four categories: academic, social/behavioral, transition to high school and beyond, and parent activities. The level of student engagement, overall student behavior, and organization and flow of activities also were noted.

For fall 2010, site visits were conducted at Aldine Ninth Grade School, Pharr-San Juan-Alamo (PSJA) High School, Valley View High School, Westbury High School, and Worthing High School six weeks after the beginning of the fall semester. The selection of schools for the fall site visits was more purposeful and

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<sup>1</sup> The *Texas Ninth Grade Transition and Intervention (TNGTI) Grant Program: January 2011 Evaluation Report* is available for download from [http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=2898&menu\\_id=949](http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=2898&menu_id=949).

included data from the impact analysis of the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) student data from the first year of implementation (2009–10). Propensity score matching and hierarchical linear modeling were used to examine the effect of the TNGTI program on 2010 TAKS Reading and TAKS Mathematics scores. Students who participated in the TNGTI summer program were compared with similar students who did not participate, matching them on such student-level variables as gender, ethnicity, English proficiency status, special education status, and previous TAKS scores. (For full details on propensity score matching and the impact analysis, see the January 2011 Evaluation Report.) An effectiveness scale score for the TAKS Reading and TAKS Mathematics was assigned to each campus, taking into account such school-level factors as percentage of limited English proficiency, percentage of special education, percentage of economic disadvantage, and number of students. All 62 participating campuses were ranked by this calculated effectiveness scale score to demonstrate the impact of the program on the TAKS scores of students who participated at each school.

From the effectiveness scale score, five more fall 2010 case study sites were selected from the top ten schools to add to the three convenience case studies conducted in summer 2010. Additional criteria were taken into consideration for the final selection of the fall sites, including self-reported data from the campus progress reports, teacher survey responses, the number of TNGTI campuses in the district, and campus locale (i.e., rural, suburban, urban). See Table 1 for the selected case study schools, their locale, their effectiveness ranking on the TAKS Reading and TAKS Mathematics, and when the site visits occurred at the campuses.

**Table 1. Case Study School Information**

| Site Visits | District/Campus                      | Locale         | TAKS Reading Effectiveness Rank | TAKS Mathematics Effectiveness Rank |
|-------------|--------------------------------------|----------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Fall 2010   | Houston ISD—Worthing HS              | City: Large    | 1                               | 1                                   |
| Fall 2010   | Aldine ISD—Aldine Ninth Grade School | Suburb: Large  | 2                               | 2                                   |
| Fall 2010   | Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD—PSJA HS     | Suburb: Large  | 4                               | 3                                   |
| Fall 2010   | Houston ISD—Westbury HS              | City: Large    | 6                               | 6                                   |
| Fall 2010   | Valley View ISD—Valley View HS       | Rural: Fringe  | 8                               | 8                                   |
| Summer 2010 | Dallas ISD—Moises E. Molina HS       | City: Large    | 14                              | 15                                  |
| Summer 2010 | Brownsville ISD—Porter HS            | City: Mid-size | 26                              | 27                                  |
| Summer 2010 | Brownsville ISD—Lopez HS             | City: Mid-size | 37                              | 45                                  |

*Source: Texas Ninth Grade Transition and Intervention Grant Program: January 2011 Evaluation Report (Hoogstra et al., 2011)*

*Note:* The TAKS Reading and TAKS Mathematics effectiveness ranks are based on all 62 campuses that participated in the TNGTI program in 2009–10.

During the fall site visits, interviews were conducted with program staff at the high school similar to the summer site visits, with an emphasis on staff that had participated in both years of implementation. District staff and middle school staff were also interviewed, when available. For the fall site visits, researchers were also able to conduct student focus groups with available students who had either been

involved in the first year of implementation (2009–10) or the second year of implementation (2010–11) of the TNGTI program. This offered the opportunity to collect direct feedback from student participants as well as some of their peer mentors.

In addition to the site visits, program documents were requested from all case study schools to facilitate the evaluation. Examples of possible program documents are the summer schedule of program activities, the program mission statement, samples of student instructions/worksheets, samples of teacher instructions/lesson plans, parent communications, and samples of printed advertisements for the summer program.

## Summary of Findings

The eight campuses selected for this report used their transition program resources in widely different ways, which are summarized in the individual case studies in this report. Perhaps the most important lesson from the case study analysis is that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to designing and implementing a ninth-grade transition program. Program components such as a mentoring program or curriculum structure can work at one campus but may not meet the needs of another. There are some common approaches, however, that these campuses took that may contribute to their success. Some of the approaches are highlighted in Table 2. Table 2 also includes examples of campuses where these strategies were found. By reviewing these strategies and the appropriate case studies, other campuses may be able to learn from these approaches and tailor them to the needs of their students.

**Table 2. Successful Strategies Used by Case Study Campuses for Summer Transition Programs**

| Strategy                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Case Study Examples                                                                                              |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>1. Design the program to meet the specific needs of the students.</b></p> <p>Some of the successful case study schools made a concerted effort to understand the types of students they were targeting for their program. Usually through a careful analysis of student data, school staff designed the program to meet the needs of those students who participated. For example, some schools chose to focus on overage incoming ninth-grade students—i.e., those who had previously failed one or more grades. The programs then included components that both appealed to and supported the needs of these older students. In this particular case, the summer program took place at the high school campus instead of at the middle school, which provided the opportunity for the older students to be in a more developmentally appropriate environment. Programs may also provide the opportunity to earn high school credits, shortening students' paths to graduation. By understanding their students' needs and motivations, program staff members were better able to support and engage students, increasing their chances of success.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Valley View HS</li> <li>➤ Westbury HS</li> <li>➤ Worthing HS</li> </ul> |

| Strategy                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Case Study Examples                                                                                                                                                        |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>2. Coordinate the summer transition component to accommodate other summer programs.</b></p> <p>One major barrier that many summer transition programs faced was having to compete with other summer programs offered at the same time as the transition program. Summer school at the middle schools was most often the problem, in that many of the struggling students targeted by the summer transition program were required to attend summer remediation classes. As a result, many campuses struggled to serve as many high-need students as they wanted. Successful case study campuses eliminated this barrier by successfully coordinating the transition program with the summer school schedule. For example, one high school campus collaborated with the middle school principal to arrange for the summer school classes to be held in the same building as the summer transition program for those students willing to participate in both. Students were then able to attend the transition program for part of the day and summer school classes for the rest of the day. Other programs were able to work with the district and use the transition program as an alternative to the summer school requirement.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Aldine Ninth Grade School</li> <li>➤ Westbury HS</li> <li>➤ Worthing HS</li> </ul>                                                |
| <p><b>3. Create an enrichment program beyond typical summer school classes.</b></p> <p>Case study schools went beyond a traditional summer school program to include enrichment courses and activities that were engaging for students. Successful programs offered elective courses (e.g., art, band) or courses that provided opportunities for hands-on and collaborative learning activities (e.g., science experiments completed by teams of students). By broadening the program to include more interactive and fun activities, school staff were able to keep students engaged in the summer transition program. During student focus groups at one campus, students reported they loved the program so much that they wanted the days to be longer and expressed interest in participating again as mentors next summer. In these programs, students were having so much fun that learning became less of a chore and more of a preferred activity.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ PSJA HS</li> <li>➤ Valley View HS</li> <li>➤ Westbury HS</li> </ul>                                                               |
| <p><b>4. Recruit supportive and enthusiastic teachers and staff members.</b></p> <p>Program staff at case study campuses consistently mentioned that supportive staff were the main reasons for a successful transition program. Staff who were invested in the program worked hard to ensure its success, going the extra mile to meet their students' needs. In particular, teachers can have a strong impact on student participation, inasmuch as their enthusiasm and support increases their engagement with program activities. The student-teacher relationships built during the summer can also lead to continuation of support during the school year. For those students who participated in the summer, if problems arise during the ninth-grade year, they have faculty members they can turn to for support.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Aldine Ninth Grade School</li> <li>➤ Moises Molina HS</li> <li>➤ PSJA HS</li> <li>➤ Westbury HS</li> <li>➤ Worthing HS</li> </ul> |

| Strategy                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Case Study Examples                                                                                                                                                                          |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>5. Provide the opportunity for students to earn high school credit.</b></p> <p>Students were highly motivated by the opportunity to earn high school credit through the summer transition program. The type of credit offered during these programs varied; some offered full credit for all courses, and others offered half a credit in an elective such as health. This additional credit could play an important role in giving students' high school careers a boost. A traditional 4 x 4 curriculum does not provide a lot of leeway in scheduling, and students have to meet certain course requirements in a limited time period. If they fail a course, it may be difficult to find time in their schedules to retake the course. Further, making up a course takes up any free blocks that could be used for elective courses, such as music or art. By completing some of their credits in the summer, students may have more opportunities to earn the credits they need to graduate in four years. Earning credit during the summer also assisted students who might have already fallen behind, allowing them to possibly graduate on time with their peers rather than lose motivation and drop out of school.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Aldine Ninth Grade School</li> <li>➤ Lopez HS</li> <li>➤ Worthing HS</li> </ul>                                                                     |
| <p><b>6. Emphasize high school and college planning during the summer program.</b></p> <p>Finally, case study campuses incorporated planning for high school and college into the transition program. This program element encouraged students not to only focus on the immediate future, but to think about their later high school and college years as well. By discussing their future plans, students were able to connect how they performed in the present to their potential for success in the future. For example, by understanding how the credit system works and how they advance from grade to grade, students could understand the importance of passing their courses each year, and how the repeated failure of courses put their chances of graduation in jeopardy. This program element also required students to think about their college plans, again linking their performance in high school to their future careers. By focusing on the future, case study campuses were able to impart to students the lasting impact of their choices made in high school, improving their chances for academic, social, and behavioral success.</p>                                                                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Aldine Ninth Grade School</li> <li>➤ Lopez HS</li> <li>➤ PSJA HS</li> <li>➤ Valley View HS</li> <li>➤ Westbury HS</li> <li>➤ Worthing HS</li> </ul> |

*Source:* Interviews conducted with TNGTI program staff and focus groups conducted with student participants at case study campuses in summer and fall 2010.

## Aldine ISD—Aldine Ninth Grade School

### The Program

**Demographics:** Aldine ISD, which has five campuses participating in the TNGTI grant, is a large suburban district on the northern outskirts of Houston. Aldine Ninth Grade School serves ninth-grade students only and feeds into the Aldine High School campus. In the 2009–10 school year, Aldine Ninth Grade School had 865 students enrolled; 78% Hispanic, 17% African American, and 5% white or other. The majority (86%) of students at Aldine Ninth Grade School were classified as economically disadvantaged.

**TAKS Performance:** On the 2009 TAKS Reading, the percentage of ninth-grade students at this campus who met the standard (91%) was **similar to** the state average (91%) and was **higher than** the district average (88%). For the 2009 TAKS Mathematics, the percentage of ninth-grade students who met the standard (80%) was **higher than** both the state average (71%) and the district average (70%).

**Campus Funding:** For the initial year of the TNGTI grant (2009–10), Aldine Ninth Grade School was allocated \$80,750 to provide ninth-grade transition and intervention support services to approximately 100 students, resulting in a targeted \$807 per-student allocation. For Year 2 of the TNGTI grant program (2010–11), the campus received \$50,181 in continuation grant funds.

**Student Attendance in Summer Transition Program:** Aldine Ninth Grade School targeted at-risk students for the summer transition program, who had issues on three or four of the following selection indicators: TAKS results, grades, attendance, behavior. A total of 100 students were targeted for the program and 99 students actually attended the summer program in 2009; approximately 100 students attended the 2010 summer program.

**Impact of the 2009–10 TNGTI Program:** For the impact analysis, the program effect on students who participated in the summer transition program in 2009 was compared with similar students who did not participate.<sup>2</sup> In terms of program impact on students, the performance of Aldine Ninth Grade School was **substantially positive**. Aldine Ninth Grade School was ranked **2nd** for improving TAKS Reading scores and **2nd** for improving TAKS Mathematics scores out of the 62 campuses that participated in the TNGTI program.

**Perceived Effectiveness of the 2009–10 TNGTI Program:** On the staff survey administered in March 2010, teachers who had TNGTI students in their classrooms were asked to rate how effective the summer transition program was in preparing ninth-grade students for high school. Only one teacher from Aldine Ninth Grade School responded to this question, so results are not reported.

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<sup>2</sup> For more details, see *Texas Ninth Grade Transition and Intervention (TNGTI) Grant Program: January 2011 Evaluation Report*, which is available for download from [http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=2898&menu\\_id=949](http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=2898&menu_id=949).

## Summer Transition Program Activities

Aldine Ninth Grade School held their 2010 summer program from June 15 to June 26 at the senior high school campus building. The program ran Monday through Thursday from 7:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. with breakfast and lunch provided, and included afternoon activities on Fridays. This schedule was changed from the earlier Monday-through-Friday full-day 2009 summer transition program because the program staff recognized the importance of accommodating the students who were required to take summer school courses during the afternoons to advance to the ninth grade.

### **Program Highlights**

***We worked out a deal with [the middle schools] where those kids that were required to go to summer school would come to us in the morning, get their credit for us, and then they would stay in the afternoon and do their summer school. That helped us tremendously to get more of the students that previously were not able to come.***

***—Staff Member***

The academic activities at Aldine Ninth Grade School centered on a preview of ninth-grade algebra, a health credit-earning course, a reading course, and a personal habits and study skills course based on discussions of the book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens*. Each student rotated through all components. The algebra class was taught by eighth-grade mathematics teachers whom the students were familiar with from their former middle schools, and the activities focused on reinforcing mathematics skills learned during middle school that were required to succeed in ninth grade. The health class was a condensed version of the semester-long health course offered at Aldine Ninth Grade School during the year. Students spent twice as much time in the health class as they did in each of the other classes in order to complete the number of hours necessary to earn the credit. The reading course offered during the transition program did not yield high school credits but was designed to help students improve in synthesizing information while reading. One staff member emphasized the importance of the reading component: ***“They do take a TAKS Reading test in ninth grade, and so it is essential that they are able to gather information and then not just regurgitate it back, but to actually synthesize it in their head and present information as to what that meant and how to get a main idea.”***

### **Program Highlights**

***[We] want to make sure they are tenth-grade students for the next school year; we want to make sure that they realize they can graduate in the year 2014; we want to make sure that they realize that they will be ready for college, if they desire to go to college. And not just only passing courses, or meeting expectations; we want them to realize that they can be at that commended level—that they truly have mastered what is being taught in the classroom.—Staff Member***

The social and behavioral activities offered during the 2010 summer transition program were substantially different from those offered at Aldine Ninth Grade School the year before. For the 2009 summer program, the behavioral focus was on health and fitness to combat what was seen as an obesity

problem at the campus. The district administration, however, did not perceive this emphasis as being in line with the intentions of the TNGTI grant, so the focus of the 2010 summer transition program was changed. Health and wellness activities were still slipped in through team-building activities and the health course component.

### **Program Highlights**

***[In 2009, there was] a wellness type program, like a train your mind, train your body, self-confidence.... So if we could get them to feel good about themselves in other areas, with the notion that that would be contagious, they would learn work ethic outside of the classroom and be able to apply it in the classroom. That was what we did last year. And we centered everything on being active and healthy and wanted to see how we could tie all of that into the classroom in some of the gaps that we had noticed with our kids coming in.—Staff Member***

Another social emphasis of the Aldine ninth-grade transition program was to encourage integration of the four feeder middle schools. Participating students were randomly divided into groups of ten, ensuring a mix of students from the different middle schools. Teams attended classes together and each team worked on an ice-breaking activity in the morning. An Aldine transition program staff member observed that the morning activities made them ***“step out of their comfort zone and they are working with kids that they have never met before, they have no choice but to communicate with them. Because at the end of the two weeks, whoever has the most points wins. And so they do get competitive.”*** The student teams from the summer program also worked together on projects and activities after the school year started, and the points competition continued throughout the year based on the students’ grades in their ninth-grade coursework.

The high school preparation activities offered during the 2010 Aldine Ninth Grade School summer transition program were primarily focused on familiarity with the campus administration, procedures, and expectations. Each morning, the students gathered in the cafeteria for breakfast and were addressed by the principal about behavioral expectations before their team-building activity. The regular Aldine Ninth Grade School dress code was enforced during the summer program. Students participating in the summer transition program noted the involved nature of program activities. As one student commented: ***“They were small groups, so that way we had more of the teacher’s attention. So it was pretty hands-on.”*** The goal of these activities was to minimize infractions once the school year began and to give these students at risk of dropping out a leadership role with their peers once the year began.

### **Strategy Spotlights**

***We were able to walk around the school, show them how things work, go over what the rules are, how we sit down in the cafeteria and go through all these things that would make the kids more comfortable the first few weeks of school and give them an advantage over the other kids. And then they are the kids that have the know-how and that helps them socially.—Staff Member***

According to respondents, college readiness was not emphasized as much during the 2010 summer transition program as it had been in other years. Staff members explained that during the 2009 program, they took students on a college field trip to give them a true taste of the college experience, but because the weather was hot and there were no college students around during the summer, the benefits were absent. For the 2010 program, it was decided that college field trips had more impact in the fall, and three field trips were scheduled for the 2010 summer transition cohort during the fall semester.

### **Parent Involvement**

Teachers and administrators involved in the 2010 summer transition program at Aldine Ninth Grade School indicated that the primary forms of communication with parents were letters and phone calls. Parents were required to sign permission slips to allow students to participate in the summer program and to go on the field trips. Administrators would call parents if there were any behavior problems or absences during the summer program. Also, the program staff hosted an ice cream social at the end of the program, which parents could attend. During the 2009 summer program, this event was more successful because it was hosted at the same campus where the program was held. During the second year, because of construction at the campus, the parent social night was held in a different building. Campus staff members at Aldine Ninth Grade School believe that this change of venue contributed to lower attendance at the 2010 parent social.

## **Program Implementation Strategies**

As stated earlier, the main goals of the Aldine Ninth Grade School program were to familiarize incoming at-risk freshmen with campus expectations while scaffolding their middle school knowledge and allowing them to earn a semester credit for health. The program was implemented during the 2010 summer with a few changes from the 2009 summer transition program; namely, emphasis was shifted from health and fitness strategies to high school preparation, and the program was cut from a full-day program to mostly half days to accommodate the summer school requirements of many students.

### **Planning and Collaboration**

Aldine Ninth Grade School collaborated with the feeder middle schools to plan the transition program around the summer school credit recovery programs required for some eighth-grade students to advance to ninth grade. For 2010, the summer transition program was held on a campus adjacent to the summer school program, and the timing of both programs allowed students to attend both if necessary. This scheduling collaboration rectified a major setback from the first summer transition program, when many of the students who most needed the services of the program could not attend because of the conflicting credit recovery summer school program.

Aldine ISD coordinated services between the five participating TNGTI campuses through securing the grant funding, budgeting allotments, and fulfilling grant requirements. The district allowed each campus to plan summer programs specific to the needs and resources at that campus, and served mainly in the role of facilitator between the campus and the state.

## Strategy Spotlights

***We had to get our main feeder school to adjust their entire summer school program, to help us out, so we could meet the requirements for our program. So they were awesome in accommodating us. Their teachers, everything, they switched from one campus to another, it was great for us.—Staff Member***

### Early Warning Data System

Many of the program staff at Aldine Ninth Grade School stated that they were not involved in tracking students through the EWDS because all ninth-grade students are currently tracked through the campus's own data system. During the 2009–10 school year, student-level data were entered manually into the EWDS and distributed every three weeks to the teachers. Staff members found this approach was found to be ***“cumbersome,”*** and data such as attendance and behavioral incidents were not integrated with test scores and grade-level data. Campus staff members realized this to be a gap in the capabilities of the EWDS and are working to automate data entry and integrate these different types of student data so they are easier for teachers to access during the 2010–11 school year.

## Perceived Program Impact

### Program Impact on Students

The benefits to students of being a part of the ninth-grade transition program were numerous, according to interviewed program staff. Among the benefits mentioned were that students gained a sense of belonging, became leaders on the campus, built relationships with ninth-grade staff members, and understood what was required of them to be successful at Aldine Ninth Grade School. One staff member expounded on the program effect of creating student leaders: ***“This group of students...some of them are definitely leaders. They definitely stand out. So I think that has helped them become a lot more successful.”***

## Program Highlights

***[The program] helps them to transition, to get ahead, become familiar with the new campus, the staff, build relationships, also the exposure to field trips of various sorts, going to colleges, it makes them aware that there is more [to high school] than just what they have seen.—Staff Member***

Feedback from student participants was all very positive. One student from the summer transition program noted that ***“It helped prepare us to see how middle school is different from high school.”*** Another student talked about the balance of fun and work in the program: ***“It was not all just games and it was not all just studying. It was like a bit of both, and that was what made it fun.”***

Program staff also mentioned that the summer transition program allowed teachers to work out possible disciplinary and academic problems with a group of students who had been seen as more likely to cause disruptions once the school year started. By confronting issues head-on during the summer,

these students instead were able to become leaders and set positive behavioral examples for other students.

### **Program Highlights**

***When you are in that ninth-grade transition program, you are already a part of something. And that is immensely helpful to increase high school successes—that being a part of something.—Staff Member***

### **Program Impact on Teachers and Staff**

The main benefit to teachers and administration cited by summer transition program staff is the opportunity to build relationships with a demographic of students who had historically been difficult to work with on the campus. Because teachers and administrations had an opportunity to get to know these students before school began, it was easier during the school year to influence the students to follow campus expectations. Participating teachers also mentioned that the summer transition students witnessed how hard the campus staff worked to give them opportunities, and this helped to forge a cooperative bond in the classroom. Finally, several staff members mentioned that the summer program bolstered the relationships between campus staff and the parents of students.

### **Strategy Spotlights**

***It really helped to pull the parents to the school, especially here in this community. A lot of times they are afraid due to language obstacles, and they know us now, they come to the school. Yesterday we had an open house. We had a great turnout.... So it has really had overall a very positive effect on the community and parents.—Staff Member***

## **Sustainability of Program**

### **Facilitators**

One major facilitator of the program during the 2010 year is that it had gained the reputation among students as a ***“special club.”*** This encouraged student participation and made it easier for program staff to recruit eighth-grade participants from the middle schools. One respondent said that students see that ***“there are those perks. I am getting pulled out of class, but I am also learning more about who we are, what I do and it is also about me.”*** Another factor that helped with the successful implementation of the 2010 summer program was the cooperation from the middle school credit recovery summer school programs and the support from the district in securing grant funding.

### **Barriers**

Because there were funding cuts in maintenance and facilities, the summer 2009 transition program was held in the Aldine senior high school campus. Some program staff saw this as a benefit because it engaged students in learning what school would be like in the higher grades, but others saw it as a drawback because the ninth-grade transition program was not in the ninth-grade building. Other

barriers mentioned by program staff were the difficulty of meeting some of the TNGTI grant requirements, such as having highly qualified teachers in every class and recruiting a large number of participating students. The campus staff overcame these restrictions, however, with careful planning and were able to hold all the planned classes with the qualified staff members.

### **Planned Continuation of Program**

The ninth-grade transition program at Aldine Ninth Grade School improved from last year to this year in terms of accommodating more students by coordinating with the required credit recovery summer school program. Several program staff members, however, reported that the shift from health and fitness to career and college readiness was not beneficial for the student demographic served. Staff members mentioned that including sports and physical activities in the program would draw more participants in, if it were allowed within the grant guidelines.

#### **Program Highlights**

***We used to have sport activities. I thought that was actually a great thing.... In a way it does tie in with university because university sports are a big part of university. That really drew a lot of students.... I don't know if we could [integrate] something like that into the program, which would be beneficial.—Staff Member***

Aldine Ninth Grade School program staff felt that the summer program gave students a boost up, and saw that the students who participated in the summer 2009 program were successful in transitioning to the tenth grade. The participating students themselves felt the program was fun and interesting and should be recommended to future ninth-grade students because ***“It is worth it. You get your credits, it is fun, and besides, you get to see other people from the different middle schools.”***

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## Brownsville ISD—Lopez High School

### The Program

**Demographics:** Brownsville ISD is a midsize urban district at the southern tip of Texas that has five campuses participating in the TNGTI grant. Lopez High School is a large school located at the southern edge of Brownsville, less than two miles from the United States–Mexico border. In the 2009–10 school year, Lopez High School had 2,236 students enrolled, of which 764 were ninth-grade students. Almost all students at Lopez High School are Hispanic (99%) and economically disadvantaged (99%). Also of note is the high rate of mobility among the Lopez High School student body. From the 2007–08 school year to the 2008–09 school year, there was a 22.1% mobility rate at Lopez, compared with a district rate of 19.2% and a statewide rate of 19.8%.

**TAKS Performance:** On the 2009 TAKS Reading, the percentage of ninth-grade students at this campus who met the standard (83%) was **lower than** both the state average (91%) and the district average (87%). For the 2009 TAKS Mathematics, the percentage of ninth-grade students who met the standard (69%) was **lower than** the state average (71%) and **higher than** the district average (68%).

**Campus Funding:** For Year 1 of the TNGTI grant (2009–10), Lopez High School was allocated \$49,341 to provide ninth-grade transition and intervention support services to a targeted 120 students, resulting in a targeted \$411 per-student allocation. For Year 2 (2010–11), Lopez High School received approximately \$29,998 in TNGTI grant funds as its portion of the allocation amount for Brownsville ISD divided between five campuses.

**Student Attendance in Summer Transition Program:** Lopez High School originally targeted at-risk students (e.g., students in the Communities in Schools Program, students on juvenile probation, and students who have issues with TAKS, grades, attendance, or behavior) for the summer transition program. Actual attendees included a mix of at-risk students and students who were not at risk but had heard about the program through the district advertisements and wanted to attend. Although 120 students were targeted for the program, 63 students actually attended the summer program in 2009, and an estimated 75 students attended the 2010 summer program.

**Impact of the 2009–10 TNGTI Program:** For the impact analysis, the program effect on students who participated in the summer transition program in 2009 was compared with similar students who did not participate. In terms of program impact on students, the performance of Lopez High School was **slightly negative**. Lopez High School was ranked **37th** for TAKS Reading scores and **45th** for TAKS Mathematics scores out of the 62 campuses that participated in the TNGTI program.

**Perceived Effectiveness of the 2009–10 TNGTI Program:** On a staff survey administered in March 2010, teachers who had TNGTI students in their classrooms were asked to rate how effective the summer

transition program was in preparing ninth-grade students for high school.<sup>3</sup> Three teachers responded to this survey question with an average score of **3.3** (SD = 0.58) on a 4-point scale, reflecting the teachers' opinions that the program was moderately to very effective.

## Summer Transition Program Activities

Lopez High School held their 2010 summer program from July 26 to August 6, and site visitors observed activities and interviewed program staff during the first week of the program. The summer transition program was a full-day program, from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., with four extended class periods scheduled per day. Breakfast and lunch were provided to students.

The academic activities at Lopez High School were divided between the opportunity to earn course credit in noncore high school courses such as Health and Speech, and sample core courses from the school's popular Pathways program, a criminal justice career curriculum. The Pathways program at Lopez High School is a way of connecting academic content to real-world job skill areas. The staff at Lopez designed a summer transition program, which introduced this approach to incoming freshmen. Criminal justice was chosen for the summer program because it has proved to be popular with students, and the instructors from this Pathway were willing to work during the program. Students participating in the summer program spent two class periods per day earning elective course credits and two class periods per day with the criminal justice instructors learning core subject skills in the context of the career pathway.

The work in the credit-earning segments seemed perfunctory during program observations. Students worked from lesson packets silently at their desks and then took unit tests to earn the credits. Students could work at their own pace to earn half and full credits for elective courses (e.g., Health, Speech, and Physical Education) through the workbook model. Each classroom of students working independently was supervised by a core subject teacher who could answer any questions and provide note-taking and test-taking strategies. Student engagement in these sessions seemed mixed, with some taking advantage of the opportunity to gain credit and working well, and others unfocused on their workbooks. One staff member emphasized the importance of offering this opportunity during the summer to get ahead in high school credits, ***"just in case they lose track of something in four years."***

High levels of student engagement were observed in the criminal justice segments. It was a clear contrast to the credit-earning portion of the summer program. These classes focused on topics such as how to conduct a crime scene investigation or perform an intoxication test. The criminal justice instructors related these topics back to core subject skills with activities such as writing case reports and using physics to understand the ballistics of a car crash. These segments were focused on hands-on activities and encouraging student participation. The program culminated with a student-run capital murder mock trial in which each student had a role.

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<sup>3</sup> The following question was presented on the staff survey: "Overall, how effective do think your school's summer transition program was in preparing entering ninth grade students for high school (and beyond)?" Respondents had the choice between the following options: Not at all effective (1), minimally effective (2), moderately effective (3), very effective (4), and don't know (N/A).

### **Program Highlights**

***It is exciting because the kids do hands-on [activities]. They are actually engaged in the participation and that makes it interesting for them. The last two days they are going to have a mock trial and we are going to actually have a real judge come in. So it is a big deal. Their self-esteem is super high. They have been behaving really well.***

***—Staff Member***

The social and behavioral activities offered during the 2010 summer transition program were driven by campuswide goals to promote teamwork and leadership. Classes were constructed deliberately to mix the students from the different feeder middle schools, and partnered and group activities were the main learning structure in the criminal justice classes.

Activities offered for high school preparation primarily focused on leadership and behavioral expectations. Each morning of the program, a different speaker addressed all the participating students. On the first day of the program, the principal addressed the students on etiquette in the school theater, emphasizing that they should show pride for their school and respect for the speakers. On the day of the site visit, the speaker was an officer in the Brownsville Border Patrol. He spoke to the students about the importance of preparing for a career rather than just a series of jobs. He tied education to the ability to have a stable lifestyle. The students paid close attention throughout the presentation and asked questions afterward. Aside from emphasizing the importance of college, the Lopez High School summer program did not focus on providing specific college preparedness activities.

### **Strategy Spotlights**

***The Border Patrol Agent that came in, he talked to them about having good behavior, about striving to go to college and have more education, things like that. All our presenters that come in, yesterday we had the FBI come in and they told them the same thing too. They are going to stress how important an education is and having good behavior in school and how that all transfers to later on in life. —Staff Member***

Another focus of the program was building relationships between the summer student cohort and staff at the high school. Teachers and counselors noted that even if they are not assigned those students during the year, the students could still comfortably seek them out for assistance because they have established a relationship. One staff member talked about the difference between the cluster system in middle school, when students are guaranteed to have a group of teachers that all know them well, and the class system in high school, where this might not be the case. The summer program attempted to bridge that difference in structure to smooth the transition for incoming ninth-grade students.

### **Parent Involvement**

Teachers and administrators at Lopez High School indicated during interviews that the parents of the students at the school are generally involved. Students were required to have parents sign a pledge committing to the importance of the summer program, good behavior, and college readiness. Staff members indicated that parents had shown up on the first day of the program to learn more about what

it had to offer. Parent meetings also were held at the feeder middle schools during the recruitment phase of the program. There were no structured activities during the summer program to involve the parents.

## Program Implementation Strategies

The main goals of the TNGTI summer program at Lopez High School were to smooth the transition from middle school to high school for students who are at the greatest risk of not succeeding in the ninth grade and to help them get a head start on the credit-earning process. Although most of the staff members interviewed had not been involved in the summer program the year before, one of the differences cited in implementation from Year 1 to Year 2 was better communications about the program expectations at the district level and campus level. Student participation also improved in Year 2 because of the early recruitment actions taken by the high school at-risk counselors, who had not been involved in the previous year. One respondent stated, ***“I think the most important thing for them was the criminal justice, law enforcement; they were very interested. We were excited ourselves.... We had a really good turnout.”***

District-level grant staff mentioned the significant effects of program ownership at the campus level. The five Brownsville high schools participating in the TNGTI grant program each designed their own summer transition programs suited to the strengths of that campus. One district staff member said, ***“They are proud of this program”*** and another noted, ***“the ownership really has made a difference.”***

### Program Highlights

***What we wanted to do is entice them with the Criminal Justice Academy and at the same time have them work on trying to earn credits.... We wanted to make it exciting, we wanted to make it fun, because nobody wants to come in the summer.—Staff Member***

## Planning and Collaboration

The Brownsville ISD helped arrange meetings between the feeder middle schools and high schools, organized by a dropout coordinator at the district level. Collaboration pertaining to the transition program at Lopez High School mainly concerned identifying and recruiting at-risk students. The at-risk case manager at the high school worked closely with the middle-school case managers to develop a list of students needing the services of the grant program. For Year 2, this was done in May to ensure a strong recruitment effort. Campus-level directors at the high school and the feeder middle schools met with the district coordinator to clarify expectations for the program as well.

### Strategy Spotlights

***The district grant coordinator has very good relationships with the principals. We have frequent meetings or e-mails or phone conversations. We are in touch pretty much every day, just to make sure that everything is going well. There is a lot of support in this district.... It is an extension of home.—Staff Member***

Concerning the actual curriculum of the summer transition program, there was not much collaboration. One respondent indicated that schools did not collaborate to plan specific activities, “***We pretty much planned out our part.***” There was no direct collaboration between Lopez staff and staffs at other high schools, either within Brownsville ISD or in other districts.

### **Early Warning Data System**

Those interviewed at Lopez High School clarified that although the initial group of students tracked by the EWDS are those who attended the summer transition program, they add other at-risk struggling students into the system as the year progresses. They also tracked students who were flagged for the summer program but never showed up.

Lopez staff members reported that in Year 1 of the grant program, there were technical problems synchronizing the EWDS with PEIMS and with the campus computer system. Data were moved manually from the electronic grade book and from the attendance office, and reports were printed out at teachers’ request. For Year 2, Lopez staff worked to improve the efficiency of the system. Staff noted that they used the EWDS to drive referrals and interventions and to document what has been done with a particular student along the way. Some staff members seemed unsure of which students were tracked in the EWDS or how the system was intended to be used.

## **Perceived Program Impact**

### **Program Impact on Students**

The main program benefit to students at Lopez High School is comfort and familiarity with the school, procedures, staff, and fellow students, as cited by the transition program staff. Respondents indicated that this comfort and familiarity resulted in fewer disciplinary problems, greater excitement about the course offerings, and increases in confidence and self-esteem. In addition, the opportunity to get ahead in elective credits with the health, physical education, and speech credit-earning modules can allow students the flexibility to fulfill all graduation requirements on time.

One staff member explained that the Year 1 grant cohort had maintained high attendance figures, and the majority of participating students finished their course requirements for the year. Interview respondents indicated that they could see a noticeable difference between students who participated in the summer transition program and those who had not.

### **Program Highlights:**

***I have watched kids go from eighth grade to ninth grade and [have] the “deer-in-the-headlights” look when they get there. It is just a sense that they are going to know more than most of their peers because they have been there. They see familiar faces; there is a level of confidence because it is not their first time to walk into the building. They already have a little peer group from maybe not just the middle school they went to, but from another middle school. It is half the battle.—Staff Member***

## Program Impact on Teachers and Staff

Most staff members at Lopez High School cited the benefit of building strong relationships during the summer program as a result of having smaller class sizes. One staff member mentioned that ***“traditionally, discipline problems were always with ninth-grade students because I believe they did not know the rules.”*** The staff member explained that if 100 students out of the 700 in the incoming freshman class learned the rules during the summer program, it could have a substantial impact on the infractions at the beginning of the year.

One administrator noted that teachers can use the summer program as a testing ground for their curriculum for the upcoming year, but none of the teachers mentioned this as a particular benefit. Especially for the core subject teachers, who oversaw credit-earning independent work rather than teaching in their subject area, this did not seem like a program benefit.

Staff also cited the summer program and the TNGTI grant program in general as having an impact on the coordination of resources at the Lopez campus. Teachers and administrators work more concertedly with the caseworker and probation officer to help students who are struggling academically navigate problems they may be having at home. Respondents felt a stronger need during the school year to keep an eye on students who participated in the summer program and encourage them to work toward success.

### Strategy Spotlights

***There is ownership to that group of kids that you had that first summer and then watching them grow and mature and kind of mentoring them....You do not usually get that privilege during the long term with kids.—Staff Member***

## Sustainability of Program

### Facilitators

Coordination at the district level and support at the campus level were mentioned as being the most important facilitators of the TNGTI summer program at Lopez High School. Logistics such as coordinating transportation for the two weeks during the summer were critical to the success of the program because most of the students do not have many transportation options and would not be able to participate without district-provided buses. Teachers mentioned the support of the campus administration in allowing the teachers to develop the unique criminal justice curriculum model was also beneficial.

Another facilitator mentioned was that grant funding became available earlier for Year 2 than it had for the first year of the TNGTI program, which allowed the campus staff to plan the program elements and staffing earlier. This also allowed for earlier recruitment of students at the feeder middle schools. A program staff member stated that the campus administration ***“took the initiative to make sure that we gave [the students] something that they could really bite into, really get comfortable with.”***

## Barriers

One barrier mentioned by Lopez staff was having enough teachers in place for the summer program. The campus administration had originally organized and staffed the program for an earlier date in the summer, but a hurricane delayed the start of the summer school program. As a result, the summer school and the summer transition programs overlapped by three days, and teachers who had been planning to work for both the summer school and the summer transition program had to be replaced. Campus administrators were adamant about having teacher continuity for all ten days of the summer transition program because one of the main goals of the program is building strong relationships between incoming freshmen and school staff. Fortunately, it became possible to fully staff the program before the first day of activities. Another barrier mentioned by staff members was that it was sometimes difficult to find presenters willing to commit to showing up for the program.

## Planned Continuation of Program

For the EWDS to be a sustainable component, the Lopez High School administration stated they would need to have the system automated. Other changes brought up by staff members were increasing the enrollment and possibly reaching out to all incoming freshmen: ***“I know that it has been such a benefit to the kids. We want more of them here to do it, that is all.”*** One staff member also would like some way to entice parents of middle school students to the recruitment meetings to bolster overall enrollment.

### Strategy Spotlights

***I am glad that there are these resources, that they are available for our group. For our area here, it works. We need stuff like this; that is why I wish it was a little bit bigger or maybe we had it in two different little programs.... If it works, why not make it bigger?—Staff Member***

The summer transition staff at Lopez High School was overall very enthusiastic about the summer transition program. Although the components of the grant program did not all fit together as intended in the first or second year—for example, some school staff members were unaware of the existence or uses of the EWDS—staff members agreed that the transition program was good for students. One staff member explained, ***“I would love to see it again next year...because I really think that this is a program that really benefits kids.”*** The buy-in and support for the program is strong at the district and campus administrative levels. The challenges for the future of the TNGTI program at Lopez High School lie in improving the logistics of the program.

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## Brownsville ISD—Porter High School

### The Program

**Demographics:** Brownsville ISD is a midsize urban district at the southern tip of Texas and has five campuses participating in the TNGTI grant. Porter High School is a large school, with 2,447 students enrolled (845 ninth-grade students). Almost all students at Porter High School are Hispanic (99%) and economically disadvantaged (99%).

**TAKS Performance:** On the 2009 TAKS Reading, the percentage of ninth-grade students at this campus who met the standard (82%) was **lower than** both the state average (91%) and the district average (87%). For the 2009 TAKS Mathematics, the percentage of ninth-grade students who met the standard (61%) was also **lower than** both the state average (71%) and the district average (68%).

**Campus Funding:** For Year 1 of the TNGTI grant (2009–10), Porter High School was allocated \$49,341 to provide ninth-grade transition and intervention support services to approximately 120 students, resulting in a targeted \$411 per-student allocation. For Year 2 (2010–11), Porter High School received approximately \$30,398 grant funds as its portion of the allocation amount for Brownsville ISD divided between five campuses.

**Student Attendance in Summer Transition Program:** Porter High School targeted eighth-grade at-risk students for the summer transition program. In 2009, 119 students were identified for the program, and 57 students attended the summer program. More students were added to the TNGTI program during the 2009–10 school year to bring the total up to 100 students. For the 2010 summer program, close to 100 students were targeted, and approximately 58 students were reported to have participated in summer activities.

**Impact of the 2009–10 TNGTI Program:** For the impact analysis, the program effect on students who participated in the summer transition program in 2009 was compared with similar students who did not participate. In terms of program impact on students, the performance of Porter High School was **slightly positive**. Porter High School ranked **26th** for TAKS Reading scores and **27th** for TAKS Mathematics scores out of the 62 campuses that participated in the TNGTI program.

**Perceived Effectiveness of the 2009–10 TNGTI Program:** On the staff survey administered in March 2010, teachers who had TNGTI students in their classrooms were asked to rate how effective the summer transition program was in preparing ninth-grade students for high school.<sup>4</sup> Eight teachers responded to this survey question with an average score of **3.0** (SD = 0.76) on a 4-point scale, reflecting the teachers' opinions that the program was moderately effective.

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<sup>4</sup> The following question was presented on the staff survey, "Overall, how effective do think your school's summer transition program was in preparing entering ninth grade students for high school (and beyond)?" Respondents had the choice between the following options: Not at all effective (1), minimally effective (2), moderately effective (3), very effective (4), and don't know (N/A).

## Summer Transition Program Activities

Porter High School held its 2010 summer program from July 26 to August 6, and site visitors observed activities and interviewed program staff during the first week of the program. The summer transition program was a full-day program, from 8:35 a.m. to 3:45 p.m., with five class periods scheduled per day.

The academic activities offered at Porter High School primarily fell into four core subject areas: English language arts (ELA), mathematics, science, and social studies. Students also had an opportunity to earn up to two high school credits in health/physical education or Spanish through computer-assisted coursework. One of the social studies activities focused on the Bill of Rights and relating various scenarios to the appropriate amendment. The civics teacher used this activity to weave in information about school rules and how, for example, students did not have complete freedom of speech if it interfered with the learning of others. Each activity was related to a TAKS objective, and students related the scenarios back to their own lives and to high school. During site visit observations, overall student engagement was mostly high, and the classroom organization was well structured with objectives and activities written on the board in all classes. Teachers were observed to be working with students in small groups and one-on-one, and they were able to maintain a respectful classroom atmosphere while incorporating fun activities.

The social and behavioral activities offered during the 2010 summer transition program were primarily focused on explaining the code of conduct and behavioral expectations for high school. Staff members stated that a large focus of the program was to encourage teamwork and provide opportunities for students to socialize and develop friendships. One activity observed in an ELA class focused on acting out the Porter High School dress code. Students used props and costumes to demonstrate what was appropriate and inappropriate. This engaged the students in a positive rather than a punitive way in learning about the rules and allowed them to have fun with the expectations. Program staff felt that presenting the information to students in this way would help decrease behavior problems once the school year started.

### **Program Highlights**

***They are going to get to meet the administration and review the student code of conduct with them and talk to them about expectations for behavior. One thing we are going to start this coming year is positive behavioral assistance, so that is something I want to introduce to them at the time that we meet with the kids.—Staff Member***

The activities offered for high school preparation primarily focused on orientation to the building and presentations about the different clubs and groups available at the campus such as athletics, Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC), band, and dance. Teachers stressed that it was important to show students everything the school offered them so they could join extracurricular activities and feel that they are part of the school community. Students were guided through the course schedules during the summer program and developed personal growth plans (PGPs) outlining what they needed to do to graduate from high school. College readiness was discussed during various sessions, and a presenter

from the University of Texas in Brownsville (UTB) came to the school to speak with students about admission information and college life. It was important to program staff to expose incoming ninth-grade students to postsecondary options to help lay the foundation for life beyond high school.

### **Strategy Spotlights**

***We are going to use UTB, but also stress to them that UTB is not the only college, there are many colleges and that each one is unique, but the main components or aspects of a college are the same. If they understand those components and the workings of a college, then I think that will prepare them for higher education. —Staff Member***

### **Parent Activities**

Staff members stated that the involvement of parents was almost exclusively during the recruitment stage prior to the summer transition program. Parent meetings were held at the feeder middle schools to explain the bridge program, and then there were follow-up phone calls and home visits to encourage parents to sign their students up for the activities. Parents were asked to sign a commitment letter stating that they would make sure their child would be ready to attend the summer bridge program every morning and would encourage their child to be respectful of the high school staff and property. A celebration at the end of the summer transition program was planned, and parents were invited to attend that activity. One staff member said that parents were welcome to come and observe the activities at any point during the summer transition program, and that they were interested in learning more about the benefits for their child. It was reported, however, that few parents took advantage of the open door policy during the summer activities at Porter High School.

### **Program Implementation Strategies**

Respondents stated that the main goal of the TNGTI program was for students to start ninth grade with a positive transition into high school. Another primary goal was to track these at-risk students and provide support services throughout the year to those students. The goals for Year 2 were similar to those for Year 1, with staff noting that the second year was more organized and had more of an emphasis on making the behavioral expectations clear to TNGTI students.

### **Program Highlights**

***A lot of the goals have been the same, talking about the orientation into the high school and socializing as far as getting into extracurricular activities to help them evolve socially. [This year] we have emphasized a lot more the code of conduct and the grading policies and all those things, to help them as they are going in. —Staff Member***

### **Planning and Collaboration**

Brownsville ISD helped arrange meetings between the feeder middle schools and high schools, which were organized by a dropout coordinator at the district level. Porter High School had good communication with the two feeder middle schools, and middle school counselors were the primary staff members helping identify at-risk students and promoting the program to get students to sign up.

High school staff said they were satisfied with the collaboration with the middle schools, and that they used similar strategies during Year 1. As a result of their experience from the previous year, staff began planning earlier and held more frequent meetings between the middle and high schools to focus on recruitment.

### **Strategy Spotlights**

***It has changed for the better. We are a little bit more organized, we started earlier this year than we did last year. We have been meeting more with the [middle schools]. In terms of having more meetings, we will call them and ask, "How many students do you have? Do you need any help? We can provide services for you."—Staff Member***

There are five high schools in Brownsville ISD participating in the TNGTI grant program, and each campus decided on its own summer transition activities. All schools have the same goal and follow the same summer schedule, but the activities are tailored to fit the needs and interests of the students at each campus. The dropout specialists from each high school campus met monthly to discuss general district issues, and sometimes they discussed aspects of the TNGTI program. Beyond that, there was little collaboration between the staff at the various high school campuses specifically related to the TNGTI grant.

### **Early Warning Data System**

When asked about the EWDS used last year at Porter High School, respondents stated that they were able to track attendance, grades, and behavior referrals and then use this information to flag at-risk students every week. The EWDS was primarily used to track the group of TNGTI students who were involved in the summer bridge program, but other at-risk students could be added to the group throughout the year. All staff members said the system had been used a great deal in Year 1 to determine the need for interventions for individual students. There had been some difficulty integrating the EWDS software with the existing school software during the first year, but the administration planned to attend more training sessions and work on the compatibility issues to make the system easier for staff members to use in Year 2.

### **Perceived Program Impact**

#### **Program Impact on Students**

The staff at Porter High School reported that they saw a positive impact of the program on students who participated in Year 1 of the summer transition program. As one staff member said, ***"These kids are really getting their feet wet and most of their peers are still asleep at this time. It is good that they are getting this heads-up on everybody else."*** Respondents noted that participating students were more engaged with school life through clubs and activities, were more comfortable with teachers, had formed a personal bond with staff, and were more academically motivated to maintain passing grades and graduate from high school. The principal attributed the higher percentage of students who passed ninth grade last year to the TNGTI program.

### **Program Highlights**

***The data from last year showed that a lot of the kids that came through the summer transition program ended up being promoted to tenth grade, so the retention rate was actually lower because of that.—Staff Member***

Other benefits mentioned were that previous TNGTI students from Year 1 were less afraid of starting high school, were able to make friends during the summer program, and had better attendance and fewer disciplinary incidents than students who did not participate in the program. The summer transition program was seen as a key factor in getting students more involved in Porter High School and strengthening their connection to school life.

### **Strategy Spotlights**

***What I see is these students are taking pride in their school. They are saying ‘I didn’t know my high school offered this; I didn’t know that these people did this for me... Look at what they are doing for me, they actually do care for me.’ So, they have been seeing that already.—Staff Member***

### **Program Impact on Teachers and Staff**

The staff at Porter High School who were involved in the summer transition program were enthusiastic and said they had benefited from having the TNGTI program at their campus. Teachers and counselors stated that they were able to get to know their ninth-grade students before school started and form a personal bond with them. They also said it was beneficial to teachers to help identify student weaknesses during the summer. They were able to begin intervention services earlier for students struggling with specific subject areas. Staff enjoyed the summer activities because they were able to work with smaller groups and they could do fun projects to engage the students. One respondent said, ***“You develop a relationship with these kids right off the bat on a smaller scale. So that helps you for the discipline and the attendance and the grades. That works.”***

## **Sustainability of Program**

### **Facilitators**

The dedication of staff members at the high school, middle school, and district level was frequently mentioned as the most important facilitator to make sure the TNGTI program went smoothly. The support of the principal was specifically mentioned as an important success factor at Porter High School, and the grant coordinators enjoyed the flexibility to plan and schedule the appropriate activities and interventions for the students. The support from the district office was mentioned as helping staff from the high school meet with the feeder middle schools, which helped keep the lines of communication open.

### **Strategy Spotlights**

***I think we are lucky, our principal is very lenient when it comes to these grants. The principal has a lot of trust in the people running the grant. [The principal] will let us do whatever is necessary to go and help out the students. We do a lot of things other schools won't even consider doing. The principal says, "Just tell me what you are going to do, and you have got all the support from the faculty."—Staff Member***

### **Barriers**

There were no major barriers to successful program implementation at Porter High School, but staff members did mention a few minor difficulties. Teachers said it would be helpful to hire additional staff members to help with the EWDS and interventions during the school year so they could expand services to more students. Respondents were concerned that the reduction in grant funds for Year 2 would limit the number of staff who could be involved in the program. One conflict that was mentioned was that the summer school schedule was right before the beginning of the summer bridge program. Many students were required to take summer classes for remediation, and there was not much of a break between that and the beginning of TNGTI summer activities. Some staff were concerned about student and teacher burnout and recommended spreading the two programs out to allow vacation time in between.

### **Planned Continuation of Program**

A ninth-grade transition program was previously offered at Porter High School, but respondents said the TNGTI grant provided more funds to pay for teachers and activities and provided a program structure. Staff at Porter High School said they have a commitment to following the students in Year 1 and Year 2 of the TNGTI grant program through to high school graduation. Staff would like to continue to offer the summer bridge program in the future and will use the EWDS to maintain and update data on struggling students.

### **Program Highlights**

***We call those kids from last year the 2013 grant, so we keep those students together. These students we are getting this year with the summer bridge program, we are calling the 2014 grant and grantees. And we separate both groups, we do the same thing...we just use it to differentiate these kids. These are the kids that will come every week and report to us.—Staff Member***

Brownsville ISD wants to maintain and strengthen the supports provided by the campus dropout specialist and the district dropout coordinator, and the TNGTI grant program is part of this support. For the future, staff would like to extend summer activities, have more planning time, and offer more field trips and incentives to students. Above all else, staff at Porter High School want their students to be successful and attain a high school diploma. As one respondent summarized, ***"We have got to make sure that they know that there is a light at the end of the tunnel, and it is not a train coming at them."***

## Dallas ISD—Moises E. Molina High School

### The Program

**Demographics:** Dallas ISD is a large city district in the northern region of Texas and has five campuses participating in the TNGTI grant. Moises E. Molina High School is a moderately large school, with 1,704 students enrolled (545 freshman students) for the 2010–11 academic year. The majority of the students at Molina High School are Hispanic (90%) and economically disadvantaged (80%).

**TAKS Performance:** On the 2009 TAKS Reading, the percentage of ninth-grade students at this campus who met the standard (88%) was **higher than** the district average (85%) but was **lower than** the state average (91%). For the 2009 TAKS Mathematics, the percentage of ninth-grade students at this campus who met the standard (71%) was **higher than** the district average (59%) and was **similar to** the state average (71%).

**Campus Funding:** For Year 1 of the TNGTI grant (2009–10), Molina High School was allocated \$72,000 to provide ninth-grade transition and intervention support services to approximately 250 students, resulting in a targeted \$288 per-student allocation. For Year 2 (2010–11), Molina High School received approximately \$51,676 in grant funds as its portion of the allocation for Dallas ISD divided between five campuses.

**Student Attendance in Summer Transition Program:** Molina High School targeted at-risk students for the summer transition program. Students who did not pass the eighth-grade TAKS but who were still promoted to high school were required to participate in the summer program. It was reported that 155 students participated in the 2009 program, and 120 students attended the 2010 summer program.

**Impact of the 2009–10 TNGTI Program:** For the impact analysis, the program effect on students who participated in the summer transition program in 2009 was compared with similar students who did not participate. In terms of program impact on students, the performance of Molina High School was **moderately positive**. Molina High School was ranked **14th** for TAKS Reading scores and **15th** for TAKS Mathematics scores out of the 62 campuses that participated in the TNGTI program.

**Perceived Effectiveness of the 2009–10 TNGTI Program:** On the staff survey administered in March 2010, teachers who had TNGTI students in their classrooms were asked to rate how effective the summer transition program was in preparing ninth-grade students for high school. Not enough survey responses were provided from Molina High School to calculate a perceived effectiveness score.

### Summer Transition Program Activities

Molina High School held its 2010 summer program from August 2 to August 13 as a half-day program, from 8:45 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., with four sessions scheduled per day. The summer program offered activities in three core subject areas: English language arts, mathematics, and science. In addition, the program offered structured sessions on leadership. In 2009, the summer transition program covered the

first six weeks of the academic year curriculum in an abbreviated fashion. In 2010, although it focused on the skills and content of the curriculum covered in the first weeks of the school, the program did not use the materials used during the school year because the district requested that they use different materials.

The summer program activities were designed to relate to students' lives and engage them in fun learning activities. For example, in the program curriculum for geometry, the lesson plan on polygons suggests asking students to build a model of the school or one of the area landmarks to apply their knowledge. The science session that was observed during the site visit covered infectious diseases and focused on HIV/AIDS. During observation time, students watched a video and participated in an experiment on the spread of diseases. Students were engaged in activities and asked questions.

During site visit observations, overall student engagement was medium to high; students were attentive and followed the instruction, but student questions and discussions were sparse. The classroom environment reflected a positive climate; students felt comfortable asking questions, teachers provided positive and supportive comments, and student attention was directed with little effort. The classes were well structured, the teachers were prepared, materials were readily available, and teachers had adequate support from other staff or students.

The social and behavioral activities offered during the 2010 summer transition program were primarily focused on creating a positive climate and providing opportunities for students to get to know their peers, mentors, and the teachers. For example, every morning the incoming students met with the mentors and volunteer students who had just completed their freshman year to talk about **"bang ups and hang ups in high school"** and engaged in activities to help students get accustomed to high school. Student participants received T-shirts at the end of the program, which was described as something the students were proud to wear and other students who have not attended the summer program were allowed to **"earn along the way"** once school began.

Another focus of social activities in the summer program was on building positive relationships and communication skills. One of the program components at Molina High School was leadership, which used the book *Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens* to discuss leadership and communication skills. During the site visit observations in the leadership session, mentors and other volunteer students engaged in role-playing activities and discussed effective communication skills. One of the program changes that both the teachers and students mentioned was the dance performance at the end of the program. In summer 2009, the students worked with a dance coordinator, who came to the school and helped them put together a performance. In summer 2010, students were expected to come up with their own dance performance, the **"Wakka Wakka."** Although the teachers indicated that they eliminated this activity because coordination took a lot of program time, the students said they liked the change because, they said, **"this year mentors are more hands-on"** and **"we are coming up with ideas on how to help [the freshmen] and motivate them and encourage them to do things."**

Molina High School provided a variety of activities related to high school attendance and college planning. On the topic of high school requirements, interviews indicated that counselors gave an

overview of the classes, credit system, and graduation requirements. Mentors also talked with the freshman students about the classes and the extracurricular activities available. The daily leadership sessions asked students to reflect on their short-term and long-term life goals and identify steps they needed to take to achieve them. In regard to college planning, presenters were invited to the program's morning session to talk to freshman students about their college experiences. In addition, college trips were incorporated into the summer activities. The students who attended the summer program in 2009 visited a nearby community college during the winter break. As a change from the previous year, students in 2010 visited Southern Methodist University, a four-year college, during the second week of the summer program. Interview respondents said this change in timing and choice of college aimed to expose them to a four-year college experience and get them motivated early in the year.

### **Strategy Spotlights**

***They are giving the students exposure to a postsecondary institution, a very elite one, to expose them so they know they have other options besides junior colleges, what their options are, and get them excited about it.—Staff Member***

### **Parent Activities**

Three activities were organized to involve parents and inform them about the program. On the first day of the program, a principal picnic was organized for parents to meet with the teachers and administrators and learn about the program. One program staff member indicated that they had about 100 parents of the 120 students who attended the program. Although this activity was the same as in the previous year, parent participation has improved since last year. The second activity was an evening open house with the teachers and administrators to talk about the importance of ninth-grade performance and high school expectations to familiarize the parents to their children's education. The awards ceremony, at which student achievements and participation were recognized, at the end of the program was another activity that involved the parents. In addition, a respondent stated that they received many phone calls from the parents prior to the program, and the site coordinator held one-on-one parent conferences to answer questions and provide more information about the program.

### **Program Implementation Strategies**

Interview respondents identified the main goal of the TNGTI program as helping students start ninth grade with a positive transition from middle school to high school. Students can become familiar with the building, their peers, the teachers, the credit system, courses, extracurricular activities, and expectations of high school. Another primary goal was to target at-risk students early and provide support services throughout the year as students needed them. As a result, the program was open to all incoming freshman students.

### **Planning and Collaboration**

Molina High School and the feeder middle school worked collaboratively to reach out to at-risk and high-risk students. The associate principal indicated that one thing they did differently this year was to look at

the data much earlier in the school year to identify and recruit these students. In addition, students who were not able to pass the TAKS test in eighth grade but were promoted to high school were told that participation in the summer program was mandatory. One staff member reported that of the 36 students in this category who were invited, 32 of them came, primarily as a result of the school's efforts to communicate with the parents. The academic profiles of these students also were distributed to all freshman-level teachers prior to the start of the new academic year so that teachers could plan their lessons and provide additional support as needed.

### **Strategy Spotlights**

***That was the best switch from how [the high school and middle school] worked together from last year, was getting more data on the kids earlier.—Staff Member***

The High School Redesign grant available to the school in the past years also was mentioned as a resource that changed the organizational structure of the school and pushed for a data-driven culture. Teachers and students are structured into distinct groups called houses, and student needs and progress are monitored closely using formative and summative data available through the data systems.

An important component of the summer transition program at Molina High School was the peer mentoring provided to freshman students throughout the year. Upperclassmen were trained before the program in the spring and summer to prepare them to work with the freshman students. The mentors participated in the summer program, led some of the leadership sessions, and were carefully matched to each freshman student on the basis of teacher observations during the summer program. Mentoring activities are supervised continuously throughout the year by four teachers in each house, as well as by counselors and administrators.

### **Teacher Recruitment**

Interviews indicated that the teachers who taught in the summer program were carefully selected to work with the incoming freshman students and described as a ***“different breed of teachers”*** who knew how to work with this age group and get them motivated to achieve in high school. The majority of these teachers were teaching at the ninth-grade level during the school year. The teachers indicated that they enjoyed getting to know the incoming students and making connections with them prior to the school year. One respondent said, ***“You are their first high school teacher that they have had contact with. So they have so many questions for you and it is just neat to see how excited they are about coming here.”*** Teachers also worked collaboratively to plan for summer activities, and administrators had confidence in the teachers' abilities to plan and deliver a high-quality program. One of the respondents said, ***“Academically these teachers have a lot of ownership.”***

## Perceived Program Impact

### Program Impact on Students

The staff at Molina High School reported that they saw several positive impacts—social, emotional, and academic—of the program on students who participated in the summer transition program. A primary impact was the comfort level the students developed as a result of getting to know some of their teachers and peers for two weeks before the school started. Students who participated in the focus group indicated that the program helped them make friends and connect with teachers. Each student was able to identify a different teacher or staff member in the program that they felt connected to after participating in the program, indicating that they **“do an awesome job,” “care about you,” “motivate you,”** and **“pay attention individually to every student.”** Students also talked about meeting their peers in the program.

### Program Highlights

*Before I came I barely knew anybody, just the people from my old school. Coming to [the program] has really helped me meet new people. These people are really great, these sophomores and juniors. They really helped me get an understanding of like what the school was going to be like and like what to expect and how to deal with these problems that you might have and people you need to stay away from.—Student*

The summer program also increased students’ sense of belonging and connection to the school. One teacher said, **“The kids last year that went to [the program] walked loud and proud: We were at [the program], we know, you just come to us, we will tell you what to do. There was a definite swagger among those freshmen.”** The sense of belonging and connection was also evident in student reflections during the focus group. The juniors and seniors who were mentors said they were mentoring because **“we really care”** and **“we get to help the freshmen out, something that I did not have.”**

One teacher highlighted how the program brought out the unique skills and strengths of each student and helped them identify the potential mentors to support other students. Student responses in the focus group also were consistent with teacher perceptions. The students said that the program helped them to **“come out,” “not be so shy,”** and **“become a role model.”**

### Strategy Spotlights

*What the summer program did last year was it really brought to light some potential mentors. When we look for mentors, we do not look for just those kids that are involved in everything. We try to get a big wide spectrum of students. So sometimes it is recruiting those wallflowers. Because it is important that every freshman that comes has someone they can connect with.—Staff Member*

Teachers and students also pointed out the academic benefits of participating in the program. For example, teachers who were in the 2009 summer program indicated that the summer school increased

students' confidence in the classroom when the school started, and they would be ***"the first to answer questions."*** Some of the incoming freshmen in the focus group talked about the benefits of having a mentor and the advice they received from the mentors to be successful in high school. One student said, ***"The mentors give us a lot of advice for freshmen. They told us, don't mess up your freshman year, get good grades."***

### **Strategy Spotlights**

***We tracked the entire freshman cohort last year, and as of May of last year, 87% of them were on-track to graduate on time. The TNGTI grant last year inspired us to change the way that we did our student improvement plans and assigning them mentors, and it has really shown a higher performance in that entire cohort.—Staff Member***

Although there is evidence that the program positively influenced incoming freshmen, other students who participated as mentors also benefitted from it. For example, students said being a mentor counted as community service hours, which ***"looks great on a college scholarship application."*** Other student mentors said, ***"the leadership skills really help improve me as a person,"*** and the program helped build skills related to ***"interacting with other people, working somewhere and being able to cooperate with them...depending on what your occupation is going to be, it helps a lot really with everything."***

### **Program Highlights**

***When I came to mentor last year, I heard some teachers and counselors talking to the freshmen about it. After they left, I went to go talk to the counselor because I wanted to join in some activities as well. That helped me out too. I don't want to say I really didn't care about my grades, but I wasn't really into that. I was more into sports. [Afterward] I started noticing that I wanted to be in the top 10 percent and graduate.—Student***

### **Program Impact on Teachers**

Interview respondents mentioned several benefits that teachers experienced from working with the students in the summer program. One of the main benefits was that the teachers were able to determine students' academic standing along with their weaknesses and strengths, which allowed them to work on specific content areas to prepare the students for the academic year. As one staff member indicated, ***"These teachers are filling in gaps so that on the first day of school we are not wasting any time."*** In addition, teachers were able to identify individual students who needed additional support after the summer program ended. Teachers were able to recognize individual personalities and social dynamics that helped with their planning for the school year. As one respondent said, ***"I know several personalities already, and who doesn't need to sit with who because they talk too much. So it gives us an idea of what the kids are like."***

## Program Impact on the School Culture

Interview respondents stated the TNGTI program enhanced the data-driven culture throughout the school. The administrators and the teachers were able to review student data to identify student needs and plan for instruction and support services on the basis of student needs. Interviews also suggested that the increasingly data-driven culture facilitated communication within the school and between the other high schools in the district.

### **Strategy Spotlights**

***I am not saying that two weeks makes these kids go from the bottom to the top, but the fact that we are creating a culture of data-driven instruction that begins before school even begins, that carries over throughout the school year.—Staff Member***

## Sustainability of Program

### Facilitators

The enthusiasm and quality of the program coordinator and program staff, as well as the collaborative work environment in the school, were frequently mentioned as important facilitators in the planning and implementation of the summer transition program.

### **Strategy Spotlights**

***I think it really started with the coordinators. They made it very clear what our goals were, what our objective of doing this was for. They said, obviously we want to bring the academic level in, but we also want it to be fun. We want to bring the kids back. We want the kids to get accustomed to our school. We want to increase school pride.—Staff Member***

The strong communication and collaboration with the feeder middle school allowed Molina High School to identify and recruit high-risk students and reach out to them before the school year started. Dallas ISD supported the summer transition program as a requirement for the students who did not pass the TAKS but were promoted from middle school to high school. The district also provided busing and lunches, and training to program staff, as part of the district Early Start program. Respondents also mentioned that district meetings for program leaders provided an opportunity to exchange information and develop relationships with other schools.

### Barriers

There were no major barriers to successful program implementation at Molina High School, but staff members did mention a few minor difficulties. The associate principal said scheduling teachers during the summer was a challenge because school planning happened during the same time. There also were some logistical issues resulting from the fact that the school building was shared for multiple purposes. Another challenge mentioned by respondents was the relatively low level of student participation in

comparison with whom they originally targeted, and that they would like to have all incoming freshmen participate in the program. Transportation and mobility of the students was a challenge, however, in getting more students to attend the summer transition program.

### **Planned Continuation of Program**

All interview respondents indicated an interest in continuing the program next year. Respondents stated that all teachers who worked in the summer program in 2010 wanted to come back again for the summer 2011 program, and many other teachers showed an interest in helping as well. The program coordinator said that there were so many students who wanted to volunteer as peer mentors for the program that they had to turn away some of them to keep the sessions running smoothly. Respondents also commented on the district's increasing focus on ninth-grade transition and monitoring students. The district has several grants that focused on ninth-grade students, who are monitored closely through the dropout early warning system. One respondent said: ***"Next year I anticipate a great amount of support from middle and elementary schools in profiling and targeting and tracking."***

## Houston ISD—Westbury High School

### The Program

**Demographics:** Houston ISD is the seventh largest public school system in the United States. Westbury High School is one of 23 campuses in Houston ISD participating in the TNGTI grant. Westbury is a large school, with 2,116 students enrolled during the 2009–10 academic year (677 ninth-grade students). At Westbury High School, 47% of students are Hispanic and 44% are African American. The majority of students are economically disadvantaged (71%) and classified as at-risk (75%). Also of note is the high rate of mobility at this school: From the 2007–08 school year to the 2008–09 school year, there was a 25.9% mobility rate at Westbury, in comparison with a district rate of 20.1% and a statewide rate of 19.8%.

**TAKS Performance:** On the 2009 TAKS Reading, the percentage of ninth-grade students at this campus who met the standard (75%) was **lower than** both the state average (91%) and the district average (85%). For the 2009 TAKS Mathematics, the percentage of ninth-grade students at this campus who met the standard (39%) was **lower than** both the state average (71%) and the district average (60%).

**Campus Funding:** For Year 1 of the TNGTI grant (2009–10), Westbury High School was allocated \$12,000 to provide ninth-grade transition and intervention support services to approximately 100 students, resulting in a targeted \$120 per-student allocation. For Year 2 (2010–11), Westbury High School received approximately \$11,000 in grant funds as its portion of the allocation amount for Houston ISD divided among 23 campuses.

**Student Attendance in Summer Transition Program:** Westbury High School originally targeted at-risk students for the summer transition program, with priority given to overage ninth-grade students who were required to attend summer school. There were 100 students targeted for the program, and it was reported that 103 students participated in the 2009 summer program or were added during the school year. It was reported that 98 students participated in the 2010 summer program.

**Impact of the 2009–10 TNGTI Program:** For the impact analysis, the program effect on students who participated in the summer transition program in 2009 was compared with similar students who did not participate. In terms of program impact on students, the performance of Westbury High School was **moderately positive**. Westbury High School was ranked **6th** for TAKS Reading scores and **6th** for TAKS Mathematics scores out of the 62 campuses that participated in the TNGTI program.

**Perceived Effectiveness of the 2009–10 TNGTI Program:** On the staff survey administered in March 2010, teachers who had TNGTI students in their classrooms were asked to rate how effective the

summer transition program was in preparing ninth-grade students for high school.<sup>5</sup> Six teachers responded to this survey question with an average score of **2.83** (SD = 0.41) on a 4-point scale, reflecting the teachers' opinions that the program was minimally to moderately effective.

## Summer Transition Program Activities

Westbury High School held its 2010 summer transition program, titled Rising Stars Camp, as a half-day program from 8:00 a.m. until 12:00 p.m., from June 9 through June 25. There were four 45-minute sessions daily with a half-hour break for video/snack time. School staff involved in the summer program indicated that, unlike the 2009 program, the 2010 program had a structured social/behavioral component and targeted students entering ninth grade who were age 15 and older.

### Strategy Spotlights

***One focus was to get students acclimated to high school. If they were failing or they were weak in certain areas, then our program provided some enrichment and a chance for them to earn grades that they needed to pass or to be promoted from eighth to ninth grade.—Staff Member***

All students at Westbury participated in activities related to each of the four content areas: science, mathematics, English, and social studies. In addition, students participated in several field trips, including a trip to the Museum of Natural Science. According to the school staff members who were interviewed, the academic activities were designed to address four goals: (1) Reinforce material that was learned in eighth grade, (2) help students accomplish their goals in retaking the TAKS, (3) help students focus on the districtwide required reading assignment, and (4) introduce students to some components of the ninth-grade curriculum.

School staff said that students were given strategies and tools to aid them in taking the TAKS test, including hands-on activities, laboratories, and working in small groups. A teacher described one summer activity that tied science and mathematics together during which students examined a population of fish to help them understand how to calculate measures of central tendency. The teacher explained that the purpose was to reinforce certain concepts in preparation for the work students would be doing in high school. The literacy activities were designed to connect students with the book that was required summer reading and to integrate social studies concepts at the same time. Several of the social studies activities (e.g., map making) were designed to introduce students to the ninth-grade curriculum. In a focus group, one student remarked, ***“I wasn’t a big fan of geography until now.”***

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<sup>5</sup> The following question was presented on the staff survey: “Overall, how effective do think your school’s summer transition program was in preparing entering ninth-grade students for high school (and beyond)?” Respondents had the choice between the following options: Not at all effective (1), minimally effective (2), moderately effective (3), very effective (4), or don’t know (N/A).

### **Program Highlights**

***The social studies activities this summer tied in with Enrique's Journey [required summer reading], looking at Central America and South America and how they tie in with Texas history and geography.—Staff Member***

The social and behavioral activities offered during the 2010 summer program were described as more structured than those in summer 2009. For the Rising Stars Camp of 2010, a curriculum titled *We Try* was used. The curriculum incorporates 10 visual analogies, among them decision-making, conflict resolution, peer pressure, stereotypes, and strategies for handling challenges. The curriculum involved students in a series of experiential activities and followed the format of question, discussion, and challenge. During the activities, students took roles in scenarios that required them to reflect upon and share what they would do in certain situations or explain why they chose to respond a certain way. Each day of the summer transition program was designated with one of the *We Try* themes (e.g., *The Motivation Formula*, *Jumping Hurdles*, *Climbing Out*). One staff member described the visual analogy used in the *Climbing Out* activity: The students had to think of themselves as crabs in a boiling pot of water, taking account of the fact that as one crab begins to climb out, the other crabs tend to pull it back in. Students discussed what it could represent and how the situation could apply to themselves and their peers. According to a staff member, students began to draw their own conclusions and make inferences about peer pressure and negative behaviors; ***“They began to see that sometimes their friends could be their worst enemies.”***

As part of the summer transition program, students were also given a tour of the building(s) and provided with information on resources such as tutoring, counseling, courses, and activities that would be available to them when they entered Westbury High School. Students said that they found the tour of Westbury High School very helpful. One student said she was glad to know the location of the nurse’s office, and another student commented, ***“I went to Rising Stars Camp, so I already knew where my classes were.”*** Westbury High School also provided activities related to planning for college through access to the Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID) program, a curriculum used to accelerate student learning. A student and an administrator mentioned that an AVID teacher worked with students to introduce them to financial aid forms as well as college readiness skills and setting goals. According to teachers, several guest speakers also came to the school and gave presentations during the summer transition program.

### **Program Highlights**

***We had a representative come from the University of Phoenix. She talked with students about the importance of college and planning ahead. She talked a little bit about financial aid and scholarships.—Staff Member***

### **Parent Activities**

Interviews revealed that activities designed to involve parents in the summer transition program were limited. Parents were invited to attend the orientation that was held on the first day of the program.

One respondent recalled that about half the students' parents stayed for the orientation. Another respondent mentioned that for the summer 2010 transition program, parents were required to sign weekly progress reports, which students had to bring back to the school. One staff member noted that the school conducts a separate parent camp along with the regular freshman camp in August and indicated that this could be the reason that there was little emphasis on involving parents in the TNGTI program activities.

## Program Implementation Strategies

According to interviews, school staff engaged in more planning for the 2010 summer transition program and worked to enhance program implementation than they had for the 2009 summer program. Respondents indicated that more effort was put into recruiting students during the second year of the TNGTI grant, and several components were added such as student progress reports and the structured behavioral/social program.

In 2009, the summer transition program coincided with the summer school schedule. According to school staff, less than a third of students who began the 2009 summer transition program completed it. In 2010, students who were required to attend summer school were offered the option to participate in the Rising Stars Camp at Westbury High School and receive promotional credit for successful completion of the summer program. Many students chose this option and attended summer school at Westbury High School instead of at the middle school. Priority was given to overage students who were required to attend summer school, but a few students who did not have to attend summer school also were allowed to participate.

### Strategy Spotlights

***About 40% of our ninth-grade students come in age 15 or older. We really set out this summer specifically to try and give those overage students a reason to want to do more than just show up until they are age 18 and drop out. It was mostly focused on helping them have better attitudes about school. —Staff Member***

Teachers indicated that the goal was to acquaint targeted students with the campus and encourage them to stay in school and graduate. One staff member described the goal as ***“getting kids reinvested in their education”*** and emphasizing the importance of a high school education.

### Program Highlights

***It really did prepare us for coming to high school because we did not know what the experience would be like....they showed us the work we would be doing and how it was going to be a bit hard, but we could do it. —Student***

## Student Recruitment

Respondents reported that of the approximately 667 incoming freshmen for the 2010–11 academic year, about 100 enrolled in the summer program and 98 students completed it. A reported

improvement from last year was the level of effort that Westbury High School staff made to reach out to students and invite them to participate in the summer transition program. A team of staff members worked to recruit students for the 2010 summer transition program, and flyers and information were sent to feeder middle schools. The material laid out the criteria for participation in the summer transition program and characterized it as a special opportunity for select students. The program materials emphasized that eighth-grade students who were required to attend summer school could attend the Rising Stars Camp at Westbury High School and receive credit toward promotion. In addition, invitations to the 2010 summer program indicated that participating students would receive a T-shirt, and they would have the option of participating in an accelerated graduation plan called Surge Ahead. Recruitment strategies also included meeting with staff at feeder schools to coordinate the program and calls to parents.

### **Strategy Spotlights**

***We worked together as a team to call parents of children that were on our list. We pretty much each had a list of about twenty to twenty-five students and we made it a challenge to see which staff members could get the most kids into the program.—Staff Member***

### **Planning and Collaboration**

Interview respondents indicated that in 2010, there was more planning and collaboration with the middle schools for the summer transition program than in the previous year. One respondent noted, ***“One of the counselors at the middle school really promoted it amongst the kids at her school.”*** Westbury High School worked together with the feeder middle schools to identify the overage students who met the criteria for participation in the summer transition program. Another respondent noted that there was ***“collaboration between the counselors here and the counselors at the middle schools because they actually gave the [academic] information about the kids who need summer school.”***

### **Program Highlights**

***A lot of students did have to fulfill the summer school requirement. Some of the kids had to retest for TAKS. They were already on their middle school campus in a TAKS lab. Some of those students that needed to retake the TAKS came to our program because we did the same remedial activities so that they could obtain those credits or meet the standard.—Staff Member***

In addition, it was noted that the primary coordinator of the program was proactive and had done research to add components that would enhance the program. One staff member said, ***“Everything was provided for us up front, so we knew exactly what to do and how to do it.”*** Teachers participated in two days of training and planning prior the start of the Rising Stars Camp and were provided with information and materials.

### **Strategy Spotlights**

*Prior to the beginning of the program, the teachers met who were going to be involved in the program. We sat down and we looked at the We Try curriculum. We talked about what we were going to do. What were our goals? What did we want the children to get out of the program? We looked at the list of potential students.—Staff Member*

## **Perceived Program Impact**

### **Program Impact on Students**

The staff members at Westbury High School reported that they saw several positive impacts of the program on students who participated in the summer transition program, including social, emotional, and academic impacts. A primary impact was the increase in the comfort level the students developed as a result of getting to know some of their peers and teachers before the school started. A few teachers noted that some of the students who participated in the summer 2010 transition program were in their ninth-grade classes in the fall. Teachers also remarked that students who participated in the Rising Stars Camp appeared more confident when they started school in the fall: ***“They have really stepped up as leaders in my class.”***

### **Program Highlights**

*At the beginning of the school year, you could see which students had made friendships over the summer. I think the [Rising Stars Camp participants] were more comfortable coming into the school. They were a bit more assertive. They knew their way around and they already knew some of the teachers.—Staff Member*

Focus group participants indicated that the Rising Stars Camp helped promote students’ identity as high school students. One staff member noted that students who participated in the summer transition Rising Stars Camp had a ***“leg up”*** because they were exposed to the policies and procedures of Westbury High School. In addition, respondents said that participation in the summer 2010 transition program increased expectations about work habits associated with being a high school student. One student said, ***“I knew that this school was going to be hard, but it would be easier if I went to the summer camp and got more information.”***

### **Strategy Spotlights**

*The students came in ready to work and they knew what to expect. It helped us as teachers. They would tell their friends what we expected as well. I wish everyone could have [participated] beforehand.—Staff Member*

Students who attended the Rising Stars Camp of summer 2010 were able to meet their summer school attendance requirement and received credit toward promotion to advance to ninth grade. In addition, one school staff member noted that ***“Our promotion rate from ninth to tenth grade this year was higher than it has ever been. Those students that were in the program last summer pretty much***

***stayed around.***” One respondent summed up the program benefits to students as follows: ***“It is just an enriching program for students, and I think it definitely benefitted them this summer.”***

### **Program Impact on Teachers**

Interview respondents mentioned several benefits teachers experienced from working with the students in the summer transition program. One benefit noted was that students had developed respect and rapport with the teachers who taught in the Rising Stars Camp. Students then passed along positive information about the teachers and the summer transition program to other incoming ninth-grade students.

#### **Program Highlights**

***Already having the relationships with the students, even the students that I was not fortunate enough to have in my class, is beneficial. When I see them in the hallway, they are very polite and respectful. They let their friends who do have me know to be nice. I think a lot of them will encourage younger children coming in to participate in the program.***—Staff Member

According to one respondent, many of the teachers who taught in the Rising Stars Camp were accustomed to teaching pre-AP students rather than at-risk students. Teachers benefited from delivering the social and emotional activities of the *We Try* curriculum and interacting with the students in a nonacademic setting.

#### **Strategy Spotlights**

***I think that several of the teachers have benefitted from seeing some of the activities, especially the social activities about decision-making and stereotyping and they can use this with their classes.... I think it also reminded them that those students we don't see as pre-AP kids, they can learn, too, and they deserve to be taught.***—Staff Member

### **Sustainability of Program**

#### **Facilitators**

The enthusiasm, preparedness, and expertise of the program coordinator and teachers who taught at Westbury High School were frequently mentioned as important elements in the planning and implementation of the summer transition program. Interviews indicated that the teachers who were selected to work in the Rising Stars Summer Camp already had been working together during the school year, and one respondent said, ***“They used the best teachers.”***

### **Strategy Spotlights**

***I think it really started with the coordinators. They made it very clear what our goals were, what our objective of doing this was for. So they just said, we want to bring the academic level in but we also want it to be fun. We want to bring the kids back. We want the kids to get accustomed to our school. We want to increase school pride.***

***—Staff Member***

The increased communication and collaboration with the feeder middle schools allowed Westbury High School to identify and recruit overaged, at-risk students to participate in the Rising Stars Camp. By all accounts, the summer 2010 program enjoyed more success and had four times the number of students participating that the 2009 program did. The option of receiving credit toward promotion for completing the summer transition program was an attractive incentive to many students. This agreement between the middle schools and Westbury High School may have contributed to the increase in student participation during 2010.

### **Barriers**

The few program challenges that were mentioned by respondents were the following: student transportation issues during the summer months and instances of attrition when one or two students found out that they were not required to attend summer school or were not in the school zone for Westbury High School. One student mentioned the desire for more discussion about student goals and dreams. In addition, it was noted by a school staff member that the EWDS did not align with the school's student data management system. A respondent indicated that staff members had to go into the system and manually access middle school students' attendance and report card information.

### **Planned Continuation of Program**

All interview respondents indicated an interest in continuing the program next year, in light of the large amount of support from district, administrators, teachers, and students. School staff members reported that there was a vast improvement in program implementation and student participation in 2010 than in the first year of the TNGTI grant. One respondent mentioned that sustainability of the program may depend on working with the middle schools to make sure the summer transition program fulfills the same requirements as summer school does. Participating students indicated that they would recommend the Rising Stars program to other students for next summer.

## Houston ISD—Worthing High School

### The Program

**Demographics:** Houston ISD is the seventh largest public school system in the United States. Worthing High School is one of 23 campuses in Houston ISD participating in the TNGTI grant. Worthing is a medium-sized school, with 1,023 students enrolled during the 2009–10 academic year (319 ninth-grade students). At Worthing High School, the majority of students are African American (91%) with a small percentage of Hispanic students (8%). Most students are identified as economically disadvantaged (76%) and classified as at-risk (80%). Also of note is the high rate of mobility among the Worthing High School student body. From the 2007–08 school year to the 2008–09 school year, there was a 23.6% mobility rate at Worthing, in comparison with a district rate of 20.1% and a statewide rate of 19.8%.

**TAKS Performance:** On the 2009 TAKS Reading, the percentage of ninth-grade students at this campus who met the standard (76%) was **lower than** both the state average (91%) and the district average (85%). For the 2009 TAKS Mathematics, the percentage of ninth-grade students at this campus who met the standard (34%) was **lower than** both the state average (71%) and the district average (60%).

**Campus Funding:** For Year 1 of the TNGTI grant (2009–10), Worthing High School was allocated \$26,830 to provide ninth-grade transition and intervention support services to approximately 100 students, resulting in a targeted \$268 per-student allocation. For Year 2 (2010–11), Worthing High School received approximately \$11,000 in grant funds as its portion of the allocation amount for Houston ISD divided among 23 campuses.

**Student Attendance in Summer Transition Program:** The Worthing High School transition program focused on a student population of particularly high need: overage students. This group included students who were 16 years or older in eighth grade and students who were repeating ninth grade. The goal of the program was to serve 100 students, and it was reported that 63 students actually participated in the 2009 summer program. According to interviews, approximately 60 students were targeted for the 2010 summer program.

**Impact of the 2009–10 TNGTI Program:** For the impact analysis, the program effect on students who participated in the summer transition program in 2009 was compared with similar students who did not participate. In terms of program impact on students, the performance of Worthing High School was **substantially positive**. Worthing High School was ranked the highest of the TNGTI-funded campuses—**1st** for TAKS Reading scores and **1st** for TAKS Mathematics scores out of the 62 campuses that participated in the TNGTI program.

**Perceived Effectiveness of the 2009–10 TNGTI Program:** On the staff survey administered in March 2010, teachers who had TNGTI students in their classrooms were asked to rate how effective the summer transition program was in preparing ninth-grade students for high school. One teacher from Worthing High School responded to this survey question, and therefore results are not reported.

## Summer Transition Program Activities

The TNGTI program at Worthing High School was designed to focus strongly on credit recovery in a positive atmosphere for students one year or more behind. The program was designed with three phases: (1) an eighth-grade component of Saturday courses and mentoring, (2) a ninth-grade academy in the summer between eighth and ninth grade, and (3) an accelerated academy offering credit recovery courses for students more than one year behind their peers. Through this intensive program, the campus assisted overage students in catching up to the grade level of their peers.

The Worthing High School TNGTI program had a strong focus on academic activities. The program offered instruction in core subject areas—ELA, mathematics, science—as well as some elective courses, including journalism, speech, and band. For the eighth-grade and summer components, students took four courses during each phase: two core and two electives. The summer component also included a TAKS preparation course for those students who did not pass the eighth-grade TAKS exam. Program courses were delivered either by computer instruction or by traditional classroom instruction. Classroom courses were conducted in small-group settings of approximately 10–15 students.

Although a lot of the emphasis was on academics, the Worthing High School program included some social activities, such as field trips. As participants in a Houston Police Department (HPD) mentoring program, students were special guests at several Houston-area attractions, including a Houston Astros baseball game, the Museum of Natural Science, and the Toyota Center for a science event. Students also had opportunities to participate in athletic activities, such as football or basketball, during free time.

The Worthing program did not specifically offer behavioral activities. Interview respondents noted that many of the behavioral problems that these students exhibited in middle school disappeared once they began the program. Their hypothesis was that what made the difference for the students was coming to the high school campus each Saturday. The high school was a more developmentally appropriate environment for older students, and they felt like they fit in better and no longer felt the urge to act out.

### **Strategy Spotlights**

***Taking them out of their middle school element and putting them in an age-appropriate element of high school kind of corrected a lot of the behavior. They felt an accomplishment just by being here. We had very, very little behavior issues and we would probably accredit that to the change in setting—being 16 in middle school versus being 16 in high school.—Staff Member***

Besides academics, another area of strong emphasis was planning for high school and college. One approach to this was a character-building component, which program staff indicated was one of the three major goals of the program. The character-building component was adopted from Project PYRAMID, a middle school mentoring program through the Houston Police Department. The mentoring program had several stages, related to exploring the past, present, and future; setting goals; creating action plans; and doing self-assessments. Many of the students participated in this program in the eighth-grade component of the transition program, and so the high school staff chose to adopt the same

approach. One respondent stated that this component had the biggest impact on participating students by ***“building their awareness and understanding and reframing their mindsets to the value of education.”*** The character-building piece was introduced in Year 1 of the program, and program staff indicated that it would become more of a focus in future program years.

Another program feature related to high school and college planning was improving students’ understanding of the high school credit system. With the focus on overage students and advancing them to their appropriate grade level, it was necessary for participants to understand credits and their significance in students’ grade advancement. Once this understanding was in place, students knew what they needed to accomplish in order to move up a grade. To help students understand this system, counselors worked with students and their transcripts to show them the process of the number of credits needed to move up in a grade.

Finally, students attended some youth conferences focused on college and career planning. One was the Reinvent Your Future 2010 Career Event, sponsored by the University of Phoenix and Career Builder. The event focused on career and leadership development, offered workshops on job search skills, and booths for local employers. Another conference students attended was Congressman Al Green’s Town Hall Youth Summit with several other area high schools. The event addressed a variety of academic and career planning topics, including studying techniques, test-taking skills, and preparing for the job market.

### **Parent Involvement**

The Worthing High School transition program provided several opportunities for parents and family members to get involved. The major piece of parent involvement was several seminars offered to educate parents about high school and the credit system. The program coordinator explained that these seminars were important because many parents did not know enough about high school to support their students. The seminars provided information about the high school curriculum, how the credit system works, the state requirements for graduation, and the major differences between middle and high school. Staff members indicated that these seminars had a positive impact on both program participation and parent support.

#### ***Program Highlights***

***The program itself created such a buzz that the parents were curious, they wanted to know what it was about, and then they wanted to see if we were going to deliver.... They wanted to hold us true to our goal and commitment to them. The more we serviced them and provided information, the more they responded.—Staff Member***

Program staff also indicated that some parents volunteered for the program, filling roles such as front desk receptionists and classroom assistants. The program coordinator reported they made an effort to reach out to parents and invite their participation, which benefited both the parents and the students.

### **Strategy Spotlights**

***We really opened the doors for those who wanted to get involved. Some volunteered, some came to watch and monitor, just to see. Others kind of adopted kids who didn't have active parents, like the buddy system.... When they checked on one, they checked on two or three.—Staff Member***

### **Program Implementation Strategies**

The Worthing High School transition program had three main goals beyond getting students into their appropriate grade: (1) building character, (2) identifying current skills, and (3) strengthening their intellect in core subject areas. Program staff indicated that in designing the program, they decided to include elective courses as well as core courses to provide more motivation: ***“All the core courses were offered and to also kind of dangle a carrot in front of them, we made sure we had some fine arts or some elective courses that they may enjoy.”*** The staff at Worthing had experienced such success with this program model in the 2009–10 year that they were hoping to see a repeat performance for the 2010–11 school year.

According to interviews, most students who chose to participate remained in the program through the summer. Only a few students had to be removed for not meeting the program expectations for completing assignments. Throughout conversations with program staff and student participants, it was clear this opportunity to earn credits and get into the right grade was a strong motivating factor for participants.

### **Program Highlights**

***The kids are motivated. They just desire to get in their right grade. I think that is the major part of it, they were motivated to do it intrinsically. It wasn't like somebody was telling them [to do it], they wanted to do it.—Staff Member***

Students also talked about the motivation of getting into the right grade. When asked whether they would recommend the program to other overage students, one student participant said, ***“It was a good opportunity. I wouldn't just let it go to waste.”***

### **Planning and Collaboration**

To assist in the development of the program, Worthing High School program staff established a secondary advisory committee composed of the counselor, principal, and middle school teachers. The group reviewed data to identify areas of need for the students and planned the summer program. The advisory committee also was able to find solutions to potential implementation barriers, such as the need for participants to attend eighth-grade summer school. By working with the district and the middle school, the transition program was able to accept students who were sent to summer school for minor attendance issues or TAKS testing. TAKS preparation courses were offered to students as part of the summer component. Program staff indicated this was a major facilitator in the success of the program.

## Early Warning Data System

Worthing program staff actively used student data in planning for and implementing the program. This involved both student data collected prior to the initiative and using the EWDS during the program. Respondents indicated that student data played a significant role in the initial development of the program, showing school staff the need to focus on overage students. Realizing the strong need for academic interventions with their incoming students, the program staff decided to design the transition program to begin during the eighth-grade year.

### Strategy Spotlights

***After we crunched the numbers, we realized that our demographics were so alarming that we had to take a different approach. We didn't have a true group of "ninth-grade students"...because of the age differences and the repeaters and overage kids.—Staff Member***

Data analysis continued throughout the school year, and the EWDS tracked the progress of participating students. The program coordinator explained, ***"It kept us focused. So when we put the data in we knew exactly what we were looking at and how it was going to impact our program....It helped frame our focus."*** The EWDS also helped the program staff identify more interventions to support their students. Program staff explained that ***"Studying that information gave us insight into growing problems."*** Two major findings from the data were that this population of students was failing and they were not attending classes. Data from the EWDS led program staff to enhance the credit recovery aspect of the program and working with a full-time truancy officer.

## Perceived Program Impact

### Program Impact on Students

Program staff perceived that the program positively affected students. The strong academic focus of the program helped many students earn credits toward moving up to their age-appropriate grade, and improved their skills in core subject areas as well. The summer TAKS preparation also made a positive impact.

### Program Highlights

***I will never forget this parent who came up after TAKS and said her kid passed the TAKS test, and she was just over the top. She credited [the success] to that student being in the program.—Staff Member***

Beyond academics, program staff reported the program also affected student investment in school. Students were highly motivated to participate and complete their classes. Participating students also demonstrated improved better understanding of how the credit system works. The realization that catching up with their age peers was a possibility reinvigorated the students' desire to succeed.

### **Program Highlights**

***One student became so motivated to graduate on time that she has taken advantage of the twilight school where they are offering opportunities to earn original credit. She has more credits than all of them. She truly understands how it works, and because she is overage, she really wants to graduate with her peers. So her focus is strictly academics.—Staff Member***

In addition, program staff noted that many students showed more maturity through participation in the program, which also affected their personal investment and activeness in their schooling.

### **Program Highlights**

***Prior to the program, a lot of them were giving up because they were old [for their grade] and they weren't really focusing as much.... While participating in the program, they started taking responsibility for what they needed to do; asking questions, keeping [their] parents informed.... We saw children actually become young adults quickly.—Staff Member***

Finally, many students demonstrated more self-confidence after participating in the program. Program staff felt that this self-confidence was the result of both the change of venue to the high school for the overage eighth-grade students and the opportunity to advance in grade level and make steps toward graduation. One respondent noted, ***“It seemed like it was empowering for them... I honestly think a lot of them were getting to the point where they thought that [graduation from high school] wasn't going to be a possibility.”***

### **Program Impact on Teachers**

Interview respondents reported that the transition program had a positive impact on teachers and school culture. One staff member described it as a ***“reality check”*** for teachers, illustrating both the academic needs of the students and the impact targeted instruction can make for those students.

### **Program Highlights**

***I think probably the biggest benefit is you never really know or realize just how far a child can get behind. I think I have benefited by learning that with the right amount of pacing and guidance, a child can get caught up in a reasonable amount of time.—Staff Member***

Program staff reported the Worthing High School transition program ***“created a new sense of awareness”*** about teaching and instruction, motivating teachers to reflect upon their own teaching and make changes to better educate the students. This motivation also translated to other teachers, as the lessons learned through the transition program were then applied schoolwide.

### **Program Highlights**

***Because we are [targeting] certain subgroups, it calls for a different approach to delivering information. It causes a reflection of how we communicate what we teach.... For those groups of teachers, it really caused them to dig deep and soul-search and then open up to receive constructive criticism to improve their craft. That carried over to our regular school setting because as a whole we learned from the program.—Staff Member***

## **Sustainability of Program**

### **Facilitators**

Program staff for the Worthing High School transition program discussed two major factors leading to the success of the program. First, staff support of the program was strong. The positive attitudes and determination of program staff drove the program and brought about its successful implementation.

### **Strategy Spotlights**

***[The program coordinator] was a sunbeam. He never allowed us to give up. [The middle school principal] was very, very supportive. She was full steam ahead. The eighth-grade team really stuck close with those children and kept up with them. It became something that we were proud of.—Staff Member***

Another important factor was the dedication of the teachers themselves. First, the program teachers were willing to be flexible with their scheduling and taught part-time a couple of regular school days so that they could come in on Saturdays for the program. Second, the teachers individually supported student participants, providing both academic and emotional support to the students.

### **Strategy Spotlights**

***[The support from teachers had] a positive impact on the students...Sometimes you get high school teachers that drop you in a pot of grease and they are not really nurturing to get you over that hump from going from middle school to high school.... [In this program] it wasn't like they left the nest and were thrown out.—Staff Member***

### **Barriers**

Program staff mentioned few barriers to the program. Student behavior was excellent; students who typically had problems in middle school were well behaved at the high school, a phenomenon program staff credit to the change to a more appropriate environment. Competing programs, such as summer school, were not an issue because program staff were able to work out a compromise in which the students who required summer school for minor infractions or TAKS retesting could attend the high school summer program instead. Finally, paying for staff was not an issue because of the flex scheduling for teachers, allowing them to work part-time some days in order to fit in the Saturday courses.

The one barrier Worthing staff mentioned was logistical: feeding the students. Interview respondents indicated that during the rush to plan the eighth-grade and summer components, the issue of lunches for Saturdays and summer program was forgotten. Program staff said they were able to offer lunch to the students, often by using their own funds to pay for meals. Respondents indicated that planning for next year would include meals in the program framework.

### **Planned Continuation of Program**

Worthing High School staff indicated that they will continue the transition program. They feel the program was successful for the students, and they see it as serving the needs of their overage population. Program staff hoped that with continuing program support for the overage students, eventually all ninth-grade students will enter high school in their correct peer group by age.

#### ***Program Highlights***

***I keep thinking or hoping that we will actually put ourselves out of business...because we will accomplish what we set out to accomplish, and we won't have any overage ninth-grade students. It has just been exciting to see it actually work.—Staff Member***

## Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD—PSJA High School

### The Program

**Demographics:** Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD is a large suburban school district in the Texas Rio Grande Valley that has three campuses participating in the TNGTI grant. PSJA High School is a large school located in San Juan, Texas, and serving students from nearby McAllen, Pharr, and Alamo as well. In the 2009–10 school year, PSJA had 2,414 students enrolled, of which 699 were ninth-grade students. Almost all students at PSJA are Hispanic (99%). The majority of the students are also classified as economically disadvantaged (89%). Also of note is the high rate of mobility among the PSJA student body. From the 2007–08 school year to the 2008–09 school year, there was a 22.7% mobility rate at PSJA, in comparison with a district rate of 21.7% and a statewide rate of 19.8%.

**TAKS Performance:** On the 2009 TAKS Reading, the percentage of ninth-grade students at this campus who met the standard (84%) was **lower than** the state average (91%) but was **higher than** the district average (81%). For the 2009 TAKS Mathematics, the percentage of ninth-grade students who met the standard (52%) was **lower than** both the state average (71%) and the district average (54%).

**Campus Funding:** For Year 1 of the TNGTI grant (2009–10), PSJA High School was allocated \$79,166 to provide ninth-grade transition and intervention support services to approximately 100 students, resulting in a targeted \$792 per-student allocation. During Year 2 (2010–11), PSJA High School received approximately \$48,130 in TNGTI grant funds.

**Student Attendance in Summer Transition Program:** Originally, PSJA High School intended to target at-risk students for the summer transition program. Most of those students, however, were not available because they were required to take traditional summer school to meet the Student Success Initiative (SSI) grade placement requirements. PSJA High School then selected “bubble students” for the program—students who had barely passed the eighth-grade TAKS, struggled with grades, or had attendance or disciplinary issues in middle school. There were 100 students targeted for the program, and administrators reported that 69 students attended the summer program in 2009, and 48 attended the 2010 summer program.

**Impact of the 2009–10 TNGTI Program:** For the impact analysis, the program effect on students who participated in the summer transition program in 2009 was compared with similar students who did not participate. In terms of program impact on students, the performance of PSJA High School was **substantially positive**. PSJA High School was ranked high relative to other TNGTI-funded campuses—**4th** for TAKS Reading scores and **3rd** for TAKS Mathematics scores out of the 62 campuses that participated in the TNGTI program.

**Perceived Effectiveness of the 2009–10 TNGTI Program:** On the staff survey administered in March 2010, teachers who had TNGTI students in their classrooms were asked to rate how effective the

summer transition program was in preparing ninth-grade students for high school.<sup>6</sup> Four teachers responded to this survey question, with an average score of **3.5** (SD = 0.58) on a 4-point scale, reflecting the teachers' opinions that the program was rated as moderately to very effective.

## Summer Transition Program Activities

The 2010 summer transition program at PSJA High School served students from May 31 to June 24. The hours of operation for the program were 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. on Monday through Thursday. Breakfast, lunch, and transportation were provided to participating students. Site visitors conducted interviews and focus groups with program staff and students who had participated in the program in October 2010.

The academic activities at PSJA High School centered on the following subjects: principles of computer technology, first-year algebra, and introductory science. Students were able to earn credit for the computer technology elective. The curriculum for the summer program offered numerous opportunities for project-based learning, which could later be shared with parents at the end-of-program celebration. The summer program also offered students the opportunity to participate in field trips. The mission of the summer transition program, termed the "On Target Summer Program," was to ***"reduce ninth-grade retention and educate students and parents about the requirements of high school by providing effective academic and social skills necessary for students to graduate on time and be prepared for postsecondary studies or career."*** The motto for the program was "Learning Is Fun! High School Is Fun!" Program activities were organized around these themes.

The two-hour Algebra 1 classes were taught using the Academic Youth Development (AYD) program developed by the Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas at Austin and Agile Mind. AYD is an extensive transitional algebra curriculum designed to help students change their relationship to learning, understand their active role in the learning process, and develop the attitudes and social supports key to success in ninth-grade algebra. The AYD curriculum included Web-based activities and group work, and program staff felt that this approach would help the incoming ninth-grade students.

### Program Highlights

***Our goal was to make sure that the students found the transition from middle school to high school in a positive way. We wanted to keep them motivated and positive with this whole program.... We know that [Algebra 1] is a good indicator of [whether] our kids would be successful or not. And so we thought, okay, if they are going to give up their summer, and they are going to come to this program, they are going to be taking the Algebra 1 class, which we tied in to the AYD program.—Staff Member***

PSJA staff encountered some obstacles in implementing other academic components of the program (e.g., securing the funding and necessary materials in time), so teachers were flexible with the

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<sup>6</sup> The following question was presented on the staff survey: "Overall, how effective do think your school's summer transition program was in preparing entering ninth-grade students for high school (and beyond)?" Respondents had the choice between the following options: Not at all effective (1), minimally effective (2), moderately effective (3), very effective (4), or don't know (N/A).

curriculum plan and spent time instead leading the students through college and career research activities. The program teachers were committed to the idea of enhancing the development of participating students not just in one subject area but also across all subjects, and improving their ability to think in general. One staff member noted of the AYD curriculum, ***“The primary goal is to improve their skills, not only in Algebra 1 but in the higher level math.”***

The Principles of Computer Technology course was chosen because students in the 2009 summer program expressed more enthusiasm for the computer class than for the other offered summer elective, which had been horticulture. One academic change between the 2009 and 2010 programs was the focus of resources into the computer technology class and eliminating the horticulture option to capitalize on student interest.

### **Program Highlights**

***We took them into the computer lab so they learned skills on the computer. They wrote about what their goals were, as far as college and careers. And I helped them with their grammar, their writing. Developing their thinking skills.—Staff Member***

Many social and behavioral activities offered during the 2010 summer transition program were integrated into the academic course components through the AYD curriculum. The AYD curriculum focuses on using peer-to-peer influence and social networks to create positive learning environments, so this positive socialization component figured prominently in the mathematics courses during the summer program. Students indicated that the program allowed them to ***“interact with people we did not usually interact with,” “make new friends,”*** and ***“meet new people from other schools.”***

### **Strategy Spotlights**

***I know it sounds pretty weird to have algebra transforming kids in a positive manner through social skills and activities...but there was a lot of team building. A lot of bonding [occurred] through this program.... They were taken out to fly kites and do experiments that you do not ordinarily do in a math class.—Staff Member***

Campus staff members also noted that the unconventional structure of learning during the summer program helped to build a strong rapport between the teachers and the students. One staff member observed that ***“When we went on a field trip, we spent a whole day with them. That really helped in building rapport and a trusting relationship that, now, has been carried into class.”*** Students also appreciated the time that was spent together during the program: ***“Everybody was comfortable with one another. We were all interacting.”***

The activities offered for high school preparation focused primarily on college readiness. Students were exposed to the PSJA requirements for graduation and staff members distributed credit checklists to help students plan their high school paths. In one of the observed summer courses, the instructor assigned each student a different college or university in Texas and the students researched that institution.

### Strategy Spotlights

*I assigned a university or a college to them because all of them seemed to always go for the one that they know...so I gave them different ones across the state. And I started to have them talk about what kind of classes they would need to take in high school to be prepared for college. And they presented it to the rest of the classes so they were able to hear about all the different [Texas universities and colleges].—Staff Member*

Although the summer program cohort in 2009 took more field trips to university campuses, the 2010 cohort took one field trip to Texas A&M at Corpus Christi. One respondent explained: ***“This year they did more activities within the program and took one field trip. So we tried to do it different ways to see which would be more effective.”*** Students who participated in a focus group about the summer program said the field trip to Texas A&M was one of the best elements.

Students also talked about how the summer transition program activities made them think more about what they wanted to do after graduating from high school. Students indicated that the program had taught them that ***“there would be many choices”*** after high school. Several students were very specific about their postsecondary goals. For example, one student said, ***“I want to be like a forensic scientist or something that has to do with science.... Or like a therapist, like a physical therapist. If somebody is in an accident, to help them get better.”*** Other students indicated how the summer program had encouraged them to pursue dual credit programs and advanced degrees.

### Program Highlights

*The program actually inspired me to get my two-year degree in college while I am still in high school. So I want to graduate college and high school at the same time with the two-year degree. And I want to get my Ph.D. in psychiatry and my minor in French.—Student*

### Parent Involvement

Program staff indicated that an explanatory letter was sent out to parents of incoming freshmen in May, before the program began. Staff also called the parents of each student to encourage participation. Parent signatures were required for registration and for the field trip permission slips, so they were aware of the program activities. It is most significant that the summer program hosted an informational parent meeting at the beginning and a social parent night at the end of the program at which parents could see the projects the students had created.

### Program Implementation Strategies

The summer transition program at PSJA was implemented with a clear set of goals in mind: (1) to keep students interested in school to have a successful ninth-grade year; (2) to graduate students from high school in four years; (3) to help students gain admission to college or other postsecondary educational institution of their choice; and (4) to prepare students to work in a job or career of their interest. In addition to having clearly defined goals, the program staff at PSJA High School planned the 2010

summer program with the knowledge of the successes and failures of the 2009 summer program in mind. For example, while they recognized the value of continuing AYD, staff at PSJA High School moved away from the horticulture class toward technology to better align with student interests.

### **Planning and Collaboration**

PSJA High School staff worked closely with the feeder middle school staff on the identification and recruitment of eighth-grade students for the summer transition program. Program staff said that student recruitment was a challenge because of scheduling conflicts with required summer school for students who failed to meet state standards on the eighth-grade TAKS test. For this reason, rather than focusing on TAKS results as the primary criterion for selecting students, PSJA and middle school staff reviewed data on attendance, behavior, and grades to select students for the program. Instead of selecting the students who failed the TAKS and requiring them to attend traditional summer school, they targeted the bubble students who were just above the line.

#### **Strategy Spotlights:**

*They might have passed TAKS but barely.... These students might have had trouble with their grades during the year. And maybe they had barely passed TAKS but had other issues, like attendance and behavior. So we looked at all that.—Staff Member*

District coordination of the programs between the three PSJA high schools participating in the TNGTI grant was minimal. Because all three campuses used the AYD curriculum for algebra, the district office coordinated resources and training necessary for the schools to implement that curriculum. Campus administrative staff at PSJA High School designed their program at the campus level and did not work significantly with the staff at the other PSJA high schools. Respondents indicated that there was no collaboration with any other TNGTI schools outside the PSJA district.

### **Early Warning Data System**

The EWDS component of the TNGTI grant program at PSJA was not in effect during the first year of the program in 2009–10. Student-level data were still compiled across the campus and teachers had access to the data, but there was no flagging system in place. For the second year of implementation, the campus switched to the E-School database software, and the administration indicated that they were working on accurately synching the E-School program with the EWDS. Campus administrators received some training but indicated that it is still a new and challenging process. Another new data system, *Eduphoria*, is also being used in the district to maintain TAKS data, and not all campus administrators had the opportunity to train on that system.

### **Perceived Program Impact**

#### **Program Impact on Students**

The major program benefits mentioned by school staff and the students themselves were the opportunity to earn high school credit, the time to forge bonds with school teachers and administrators, the opportunity to connect with students from other middle school campuses and make new friends,

and feeling a boost of confidence and comfort within the school and their peer groups. Students in the focus group graded the summer program as an **"A+,"** explaining that ***"It was so fun," "It helps you out with credits,"*** and ***"It made you think...you have to use your brain. You can't just have the answers given to you because they are not going to do that [in high school]."***

Students who had participated in the 2009 summer program were perceived by teachers and administrators to be more outgoing and more involved and were student leaders during the following school year. The entire 2009 summer program cohort successfully completed ninth grade and moved to the tenth grade, with some standing out as student leaders.

### **Program Highlights**

***The freshmen almost always have more spirit sometimes than the seniors do. And [this student] is the leader in that.... I think the self-confidence was given to him during the summer and it has helped him to feel like, we are part of this, even though we are freshmen and everyone looks down on freshmen.... He has made himself known here.—Staff Member***

Program staff at PSJA offered the following perspective on students who participated in the 2010 summer program: ***"I think it was so effective that we were able to help all other ninth-grade students. Those 48 kids, when they came in the first day of school you could tell which ones were the 48 because they knew where to go. And they were showing their other friends. There was so much influence in that program in one month."*** Students in the focus group of ninth-grade students who participated in the second year of the summer transition program corroborated this. As one student explained, ***"When you start off, you are really shy and not wanting to talk to people. When I came the first day, I was talking to seniors that I did not even know. I was just like, 'Hi!'"***

### **Strategy Spotlights**

***It really showed me hands-on where my classes were going to be at. So once I got my schedule I pretty much knew where they were going to be. And if I had any problems, I could go to the teachers I had with the summer program and talk to them.—Student***

The small learning community structure at PSJA makes it possible to ensure that incoming freshmen who participated in the summer program were placed with the teachers they had over the summer. This structure was intended to ensure ongoing benefits of the close relationships forged between students and staff during the program. One staff member noted that this ***"made [the students] feel more comfortable coming into the school. They think, 'I already know several people that can help me, that I can turn to if I need help.'"***

### **Program Highlights**

***I feel like you could tell who [the students who participated] were at the start of the year. They were the ones telling the others...serving as tour guides for the other ninth-grade students. So we did see a boost in their confidence, thanks to the AYD program and the technology and, of course, the teachers that we had on staff. It was amazing.—Staff Member***

### **Program Impact on Teachers and Staff**

The staff members at PSJA High School often cited gaining familiarity with this group of students during the summer transition program as the biggest positive impact on them. Especially because the program targeted students at risk for dropping out, teachers and administrators had the opportunity to learn early on which strategies worked best with a historically difficult group of students. Some staff members mentioned that they benefited from the opportunity to try out different approaches with the students, such as using the more project-based curriculum and working to make lessons fun and engaging.

### **Strategy Spotlights**

***Seeing things from a perspective of the freshmen kids as they are coming in [was helpful]. We are so used to always being here. We expect certain things. But we do not realize what they are feeling when they are just going to start high school. But you start to understand a little bit more when you talk to them.—Staff Member***

Teachers also had the opportunity to request that particular students be in their Family and Student Advocate System (FAS) group. FAS is a structure to help small learning communities achieve their goal of improvement in student performance. Advocates take special responsibility to help a manageable number of students succeed in school and, at the same time, work to engage their families in helping them achieve their goals.

### **Program Highlights**

***[The administrator] asked us which students do you feel you got along with better, that you had a better rapport with, so that they could put them in our FAS as opposed to somebody else's. Then you can continue the communication, the rapport, and the relationship in the FAS. So we were able to make that decision.—Staff Member***

## **Sustainability of Program**

### **Facilitators**

The structure of the program at the campus level and the support and dedication of campus staff emerged as the greatest facilitators to the success of the PSJA summer transition program. The teachers were given the freedom to offer activities that the students responded to, and the AYD curriculum was often cited as a positive factor. The summer transition program also was integrated into the small learning community structure of the school in a way that extended the benefits of transition.

### **Strategy Spotlights**

*A perfect example would be the FAS activities that happen throughout the campus. Some of it we bounced off the ninth-grade transition kids as to what kind of activities can go on through FAS.... And [the teachers] see these things work for the kids. They get enthusiastic about it. —Staff Member*

### **Barriers**

Program staff mentioned several barriers to a successful implementation of the summer transition program. First, PSJA High School held more than one summer program at the campus that competed with the transition program for students and time. Second, there were some difficulties with getting the funding to the campus on time, and the limitations on how to spend it made it difficult for teachers to plan all the hands-on activities. Program staff noted that insufficient funding had been somewhat of a drawback to implementation, but that the overall success of the program could be traced to strong administrative support in the face of these setbacks.

### **Program Highlights**

*[The administration is] very supportive....The funding thing was a little bit difficult but they said whatever you can get from the supply room that you need, get it. And whatever you can use, go for it. So they were supportive in that way as well. —Staff Member*

### **Planned Continuation of Program**

Program staff at PSJA High School were generally enthusiastic about the summer transition program, and there seemed to be no question that the program should continue in future years. When asked whether the program could continue if state funding ended, one staff member responded, ***“We would like to. It would take a lot of planning.”*** Suggested modifications for the future included more targeted and aggressive recruiting, working more closely with other campus summer programs to resolve overlap issues, and extending the day to allow more time for the AYD portion of the program. The program staff at PSJA continually mentioned lessons learned from the previous year and perceived that the program could improve again in 2011. Participating students in the focus group also mentioned that the program days should be longer, the program should be held for more days, and that the program should happen ***“every year, for every grade level.”***

## Valley View ISD—Valley View High School

### The Program

**Demographics:** Valley View Independent School District (VVISD) is a rural district in Pharr, Texas, which is located near the United States—Mexico border. VVISD has one TNGTI grant program that was implemented at Valley View High School in 2009 and expanded for the 2010–11 school year to encompass Valley View Early College Campus (ECC). Valley View High School is a medium-sized school, with 1,194 students (376 ninth-grade students) enrolled for the 2009–10 school year. Almost all students at Valley View High School are Hispanic (99%), and most are economically disadvantaged (96%).

**TAKS Performance:** On the 2009 TAKS Reading, the percentage of ninth-grade students at this campus who met the standard (85%) was **lower than** the state average (91%) and was **similar to** the district average (84%). For the 2009 TAKS Mathematics, the percentage of ninth-grade students who met the standard (64%) was **lower than** the state average (71%) and **higher than** the district average (62%).

**Campus Funding:** For Year 1 of the TNGTI grant (2009–10), Valley View High School was allocated \$75,000 to provide ninth-grade transition and intervention support services to approximately 75 students, resulting in a targeted \$1,000 per-student allocation. For Year 2 (2010–11), VVISD expanded the program to include students at both Valley View High School and the Valley View ECC (which served only ninth-grade students in 2010–11). Valley View HS and Valley View ECC each received \$22,799 to provide services to approximately 75 targeted students between the two campuses.

**Student Attendance in Summer Transition Program:** For the program at Valley View High School, the school targeted older students who had not accumulated enough credits to move beyond the ninth-grade level for the summer transition program. Approximately 75 students were targeted and served by the summer program in 2009. In 2010, Valley View ECC targeted students who struggled on the eighth-grade TAKS and students with poor grades, attendance issues, or behavior issues. In 2010, program administrators estimated that 80 students were targeted for the summer program, and approximately 70 students attended the programs, split evenly across the two campuses.

**Impact of the 2009–10 TNGTI Program:** For the impact analysis, the program effect on students who participated in the summer transition program in 2009 was compared with similar students who did not participate. In terms of program impact on students, the performance of Valley View High School was **moderately positive**. Valley View High School was ranked **8th** for improving TAKS Reading scores and **8th** for improving TAKS Mathematics scores out of the 62 campuses that participated in the TNGTI program.

**Perceived Effectiveness of the 2009–10 TNGTI Program:** On the staff survey administered in March 2010, teachers who had TNGTI students in their classrooms were asked to rate how effective the summer transition program was in preparing ninth-grade students for high school. Fifteen teachers responded to this survey, but there were not enough responses to this specific survey question to report results.

## Summer Transition Program Activities

Valley View High School and Valley View ECC held the 2010 summer program from June 6 to June 15. The program included (1) incoming ninth-grade students who were flagged at the middle school as being at risk for dropping out because of attendance, behavior, or grades; (2) incoming ninth-grade students who were coming from outside the district, including immigrants, who were not prepared for the ninth grade; and (3) current high school students being held back to repeat the ninth grade.

Participants in the summer transition program attended activities for four hours each day. For two hours of the day, students attended remedial mathematics and reading classes. These classes used various curriculums of the teacher's choosing and focused on TAKS preparation skills as well. For example, one remedial mathematics class used the *Closing the Distance* curriculum, and another reading teacher said that students read selected stories, discussed the story, and then wrote reflection statements in the summer class. For the other half of the program day, students were taught college success skills by professors from the local South Texas College. Students had the opportunity to take elective courses taught by the college faculty, such as automotive repair or culinary arts, and they received a certificate towards college credit if they passed. Students talked about how taking the college course placed a greater level of responsibility on them.

### Program Highlights

*It is more like if you want to do your work, it is up to you. It is not the [professors'] responsibility; they are just there to teach. So that just kind of helps you understand you need to focus and be there to pass the class.—Student*

The college success curriculum centered on time-management skills, study habits, and how to successfully transition from high school to college. Some students attended these classes at their former junior high, while others, primarily the older students who were about to repeat the ninth grade, traveled to the college campus for classes. Students had the option to stay at the ninth-grade campus during the summer to take a high school world geography class and gain high school credit. In previous years, the college readiness component had taken place at Texas State Technical College in Harlingen. The program was switched to the nearby South Texas College to minimize the students' transportation time.

### Program Highlights

*They get a taste [of college]. If you continue to do well, once you get to the high school, you can start taking college classes slowly. So I think it is a very good idea to bring them in. They struggle a lot less once they become ninth-grade students. A lot less.—Staff Member*

There were no explicit social and behavioral activities during the Valley View summer transition program, but the students who were bused to the college campus were expected to follow the Valley View High School rules and “**represent Valley View High School.**” In addition to this, the professors at the college wove into their lessons stories of their own “**mistakes in the past**” and the importance of

***“trying no matter what.”*** One student noted that ***“college kind of matures you.”*** These higher expectations of the students in a new environment helped to promote better behavior. The college setting also helped to motivate the older, 16- or 17-year-old incoming freshmen, whom the staff feared would be discouraged if they had to take remedial instruction with younger students. One staff member explained that being on the college campus for these older students ***“really helped their confidence. And a lot of these kids, when you would talk to them, they would have their heads down all the time. Now you talk to them and they look you in the eye. You can tell that there is a change in them.”***

The high school preparation activities offered during the 2010 Valley View High School summer transition program focused on the counselors providing information to the students about the procedural and academic differences between middle school and high school. The main component of high school readiness was the emphasis on college readiness, and transferring time-management skills and study habits to high school classes. By exposing the students to the benefits of college, the summer transition program motivated them to take their high school education more seriously. A staff member explained that counselors would sit with the students and discuss the college credit process and their available course options.

### **Strategy Spotlights**

***The kids went into [college] classes that they liked and it was a field of study they would like to pursue. That made it a little easier for them to want to learn like culinary arts, because they thought it was interesting. And they came out of it saying they really wanted to do this now. “I like the class; this is what I want to do.”—Staff Member***

### **Parent Involvement**

The main strategy for recruiting students into the summer transition program was to explain to the parents the behavioral and academic benefits and the possibility of earning a college credit. Students were hooked in by the college piece as well, and parent involvement in meetings was required for the program. One student explained that parent encouragement played a part in the decision to participate: ***“Our counselor talked to our parents, and our parents told us, and we were in it...not like pushing us to do it, but like they tried to show us the chances we had.”*** Valley View High School also has a certified parent liaison on staff, and parent meetings were offered two times a week to explain various strategies and opportunities for helping the students to get ahead. A staff member mentioned how cooperative the parents were: ***“They knew me because I had been talking to them all year long. And a lot of them told me whatever they can do in the summer, whatever extra they can do, let them know.”***

### **Program Implementation Strategies**

The unique feature of the 2010 Valley View High School summer transition program was matching TAKS remediation work with college credit courses taught by local college faculty. Emphasizing the college piece increased student and parent buy-in for the program. To make the implementation smoother, the partner college was switched from Texas State Technical College to South Texas College, which is closer

to Pharr. Some students were bused to the college campus, and others took classes from college faculty at the high school campus.

The main goal of this college-focused summer program was to motivate students to succeed in high school by giving them a taste of college. Respondents indicated that the college component served as a motivator to boost program participation, was a way of encouraging good study habits and behavior among the students, and was an incentive for the students to work hard throughout the year and plan ahead to return to college.

### **Program Highlights**

***We know where our weaker students are at. So we kind of went to the most at-risk. And we started targeting those kids. We knew these kids would not come in without a clincher. They do not want to come in and give up their summer. They hardly want to come in during the school year.—Staff Member***

### **Planning and Collaboration**

Program staff expressed the feeling that the coordination between the middle schools and the high school and Early College Campus was simpler during the 2010 summer program than the previous year, because the curriculums were more aligned across the district. In addition, students were tracked at the middle school level, facilitating the attempt of the summer transition staff planners to identify which students needed to be targeted by this program. One staff member noted that middle school and high school personnel ***“are constantly meeting. It seems we are meeting on a two-week basis or more than that. Talking about the sequencing of classes, the kids...[and] what was going to be done.”*** This collaboration was primarily at the administrative level. The middle school staff members were the ones who were able to rally the parents, since they had already built strong relationships with them. This was a crucial step in the recruiting process.

Teachers at the high school level indicated that they did not have a role in planning the program. This is reflected in the lack of curriculum coordination across the remedial classes. One staff member noted that the program ***“came pretty quick. It was like, okay, we will do it. That was it.”*** Other staff members corroborated this lack of preparation at the classroom level: ***“we chose teachers who are very successful at what they do. But they have not worked with all of them together, a [low-performing] group of students together.... [There was no] training or planning meeting for them to get more information on the students before the first day. That is one thing I would do differently.”***

### **Early Warning Data System**

At Valley View High School, interview respondents indicated that they used an in-house-developed database as their EWDS to track their students in a way ***“that makes sense”*** for the district. Grades, attendance, and disciplinary data are collected for every student, and the data are analyzed by that student’s grade-level administrator and counselor. Valley View High School has specific interventions for different types of problems. Interventions include parent meetings, enrichment courses, meetings with the attendance committee, schoolwide truancy courts, and student-counselor sessions. Similar

interventions are implemented at the Early College Campus, but their EWDS is newer and not yet used to track all students. EEC staff used the summer transition students as a target group and were pushing to track all students campuswide. Teachers noted that the overall TAKS profiles were helpful for identifying every six weeks which objectives students struggled with. Schoolwide data are distributed to the teachers in spreadsheets, and teachers can then create their own datasheets with their students. One respondent stated, ***“The more data you have, the more you are tracking.”***

## Perceived Program Impact

### Program Impact on Students

The main program benefit to students cited by the transition program staff at Valley View was an increase in confidence. One staff member explained that ***“I think I even see them a little bit more mature this year. They were motivated also, for being in college.... You can see their whole persona, they look a lot more mature.”*** Another staff member noted, ***“They think they are college kids now so they are kind of trying to act like it, which is good.”*** This is echoed by some students themselves, who felt that the transition program helped with their confidence at school. Another benefit to students was that the program inspired them to think more about their careers after high school. One student said, ***“I was [planning to do] cosmetology...but then I took that class and it changed me. I want to be something where I can get a degree.”*** This exposure to college campus culture, with an emphasis placed on self-discipline, organization, and motivation, seemed to have a large effect on the overage students.

### Program Highlights

***No dropouts from this group.... [T]hey got their college credit and they are in their second class already. We don't have any issues. They are looking at graduation and preparing for this TAKS test.—Staff Member***

Another benefit to participating students was that those who passed their summer classes gained a college credit certificate at no cost. As one student put it, ***“Who wouldn't want to take a college class for free?”*** Program staff noted the excitement the students expressed at being able to partake in the college environment: ***“These kids were so excited because they were in their scrubs. They were over there with a mannequin that was \$100,000.... To be in that type of setting, they will come back and talk about the classes.”***

### Strategy Spotlights

***I remember telling [the students] that if I had this opportunity I would have taken it up right away. There are a lot of kids out there that want to do this and say that they are taking a college class. I said, “You need to take advantage of it right now.” Just by telling them that, I think that kind of woke them up. And they benefited by coming to school every day and attending my class. It was good to see them every day.—Staff Member***

Although interviewed staff and students did not emphasize the TAKS remediation program component, the success of the cohort was reflected in that component as well. One staff member estimated that only two out of the 37 students who participated were still struggling in mathematics during the school year, and those struggling students actively sought assistance.

### **Program Highlights**

***[One student] was ready to give up; he did not want to come back to school anymore. We talked to him and brought his parents in. He ended up coming [to the summer program] and passed his math TAKS at the end of the year. He did not pass the reading but he showed so much improvement. So this year he comes in and he is telling me, you know, what college course can I take? This was a kid who did not want to come to school anymore, who was ready to go to Mexico and go back home because he had given up. And he saw some hope for himself.—Staff Member***

### **Program Impact on Teachers and Staff**

Teachers and staff cited the increase in motivation of the students as a major program benefit. This reduced behavioral problems in a subset of students who had caused major disciplinary issues in the past. They were able to hold the students to a higher standard because the students had learned what would be expected of them in college. One staff member explained that the teachers from the summer program struggled with teaching the most at-risk students, so they collaborated with the administration to prepare. This increased collaboration strengthened their instruction during the school year.

## **Sustainability of Program**

### **Facilitators**

Staff members cited the collaboration with the college faculty as the greatest facilitator for the summer transition program. Because the college preparation and college credit components were the main draw for student attendance and for parent buy-in, it was a critical key to the program's success. One respondent explained that ***"It was just a great opportunity.... I don't know if these kids would ever even touch the floors of a college or a university. For them to at least be exposed to it, and then they can make a choice...at least they know there is so much out there."***

Another main facilitator cited was the program buy-in at the district, administrative, and teacher levels. Staff enthusiasm for the program boosted enrollment and helped make an emotional impact on the students. One program staff member explained that the teachers had an attitude of ***"whatever we can do, we are going to do it. We get three, four, or five to pass; that is going to be awesome. Just the positivity in the teachers and the willingness to do what they have to do and go above and beyond."*** Another respondent noted that the ***"respect that [the] administrators have gotten from the community,"*** went a long way to convincing parents to enroll their children in the program.

### Strategy Spotlights

***[Administrative buy-in] has carried down to the students and the attitudes that they have. So that definitely has influenced the kids to want to participate in this program. Not only that, [but] complete it, continue with it, and be successful in it.—Staff Member***

### Barriers

Program staff at Valley View mentioned restrictions of funding and time as the main barriers to implementing the program. This particular program was expensive because the school paid tuition for the students for the summer college courses, for textbooks, and for transportation to and from the college campus. Program staff members mentioned that they would love to extend the opportunity to more students, and ***“it is very hard to pick forty kids when you know there are maybe seventy that you could help out.”*** One staff member mentioned how hard it was to have to ***“turn down parents that wanted to put their students in.”*** Respondents indicated that to continue this program in its current configuration would require more funding from additional grant sources.

The other main barrier mentioned was lack of time. At the teacher level, respondents wanted more time for planning, for targeted training, and for collaboration before the beginning of the program. Several program members also mentioned wanting more time with the students during the program because ***“one hour [for mathematics or reading] is just not enough. It is never enough.”*** Students interviewed stated that they would like to take two college courses over the summer program, effectively doubling the length of the program to the whole summer.

### Planned Continuation of Program

All those interviewed at the Valley View site were enthusiastic about the grant program. Students would ***“definitely”*** recommend it to future incoming freshmen, because they said it ***“is a great experience.”*** Program staff were primarily concerned with how to improve the program, possibly by collaborating with other grantee campuses, finding other funding to expand, and continuing to give more students that ***“taste”*** of college to motivate them to succeed in high school. One staff member suggested targeting not only the most at-risk students, but also those ***“who struggle. They made it, but barely made it. They are right there on that borderline.... Just give them a little extra push so they can keep going up and going up.”*** Other staff members agreed that the program is a successful one and should be ***“opened up,”*** perhaps to include more grade transitions in addition to more students at each grade level.

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