

# **Evaluation of the Texas Grants to Reduce Academic Dropouts Program**

**Program Activities Implemented  
Summer 2004 Through Summer 2005**

**October 2006**



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**Prepared for the Texas Education Agency**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Background**

The purpose of the Texas Grants to Reduce Academic Dropouts program, also referred to as the Texas Dropout Prevention Grant (TXDPG) program, was to provide funding for intervention programs that would result in increased numbers of students earning a high school diploma. The goals of the grant program were twofold: to increase the number of students who graduate from high school in districts that exhibited lower than state average completion rates, and to proactively address the underlying factors that cause some students to drop out of school prior to receiving their high school diploma. This report presents descriptive information on program strategies and activities funded by the TXDPG program across four semesters of the grant period: Summer 2004, Fall 2004, Spring 2005, and Summer 2005.

A total of 61 campuses in 12 districts received a TXDPG award to provide services to targeted students. The majority of districts served high school students only, while three districts also served Grade 8 students on 14 campuses. Progress reports completed by grantees at the end of each semester documented the activities that were conducted at each campus and the number of students served by each activity.

### **Activities Implemented during the 2004-2005 Regular School Year**

Campuses offered an average of about 10 different activities during the regular school year semesters, a wider range of choices than was offered during the summer sessions. The most commonly funded strategies across both terms were Computer-Aided Instruction, Expanded Learning Opportunities, Professional Development for Teachers, and Tutoring, while the least commonly funded strategies were Work Study programs and Dual High School/College Course Credit programs. Student participation rates were higher in the spring semester for all but one grant activity. Staff participation was also higher in the spring term, especially among teachers. Also, a higher percentage of staff was TXDPG-funded during the spring term than the fall term. These patterns of activity may reflect that the majority of campuses had had enough time to achieve high levels of grant implementation by the Spring 2005 term.

### **Activities Implemented during Summer 2004 and Summer 2005**

In 2004, 39% of awarded grantees conducted TXDPG-funded summer programs while in 2005, two-thirds (67%) of campuses submitting progress report data indicated that they had a TXDPG summer school program. During both summer terms, campuses served an average of about 70 students. The most common strategy implemented in both summer sessions were Credit Recovery programs and Computer-Aided Instruction.

Several activities were implemented less frequently in Summer 2005 than in Summer 2004. The use of support activities such as Tutoring, Guidance, and Mentoring decreased significantly in Summer 2005. College/Career Planning activities and the expansion of the Ninth Grade Success Initiative (NGSI) also decreased. Decreases may indicate a perception by the schools that these activities were not successful, or that they were too costly relative to other strategies.

Four groups of school staff provided direct and indirect services during each summer program: 1) Highly Qualified Teachers, 2) Paraprofessionals or Instructional Assistants, 3) Administrators, and 4) Counselors. More staff participated during the Summer 2005 term but a smaller percentage was funded by the grant.

### **Most/Least Effective Strategies as Rated by Grantees**

Over one-third of campuses identified Tutoring/homework help as the most effective allowable activity. Summer school and Plato software (used in accelerated credit accrual programs) were identified by some campuses as the most effective allowable activities, but were identified by other campuses as the least effective activities allowable under the TXDPG grant program. The fact that the perceived effectiveness of several activities varied widely across campuses suggests that some campuses experienced problems implementing certain activities and may require assistance with these activities in the future.

### **Conclusions**

In general, projects began slowly as the first term of the project year, Summer 2004, saw the smallest number of students served. Delivery of TXDPG-funded services seemed to peak during the Spring 2005 term as large numbers of students were served and staff were funded. This rate

of increase in activity availability and student participation over the course of the school year may reflect the time needed for campuses to fully implement new grant-funded programs.

The overall emphasis on Credit Recovery and Computer-Aided Instruction suggests that project campuses focused on providing direct services that address the first goal of the TXDPG program, to increase the number of students who graduate from high school. Project campuses did not tend to emphasize the indirect services that target the second goal of the grant, i.e., to proactively address the underlying factors that cause some students to drop out of school prior to receiving a high school diploma.

The number of campuses supporting some activities believed to be effective (both in the literature and by the grantee schools), such as Tutoring and Mentoring, decreased toward the end of the grant. It is of concern that these activities were not sustained throughout the TXDPG program.