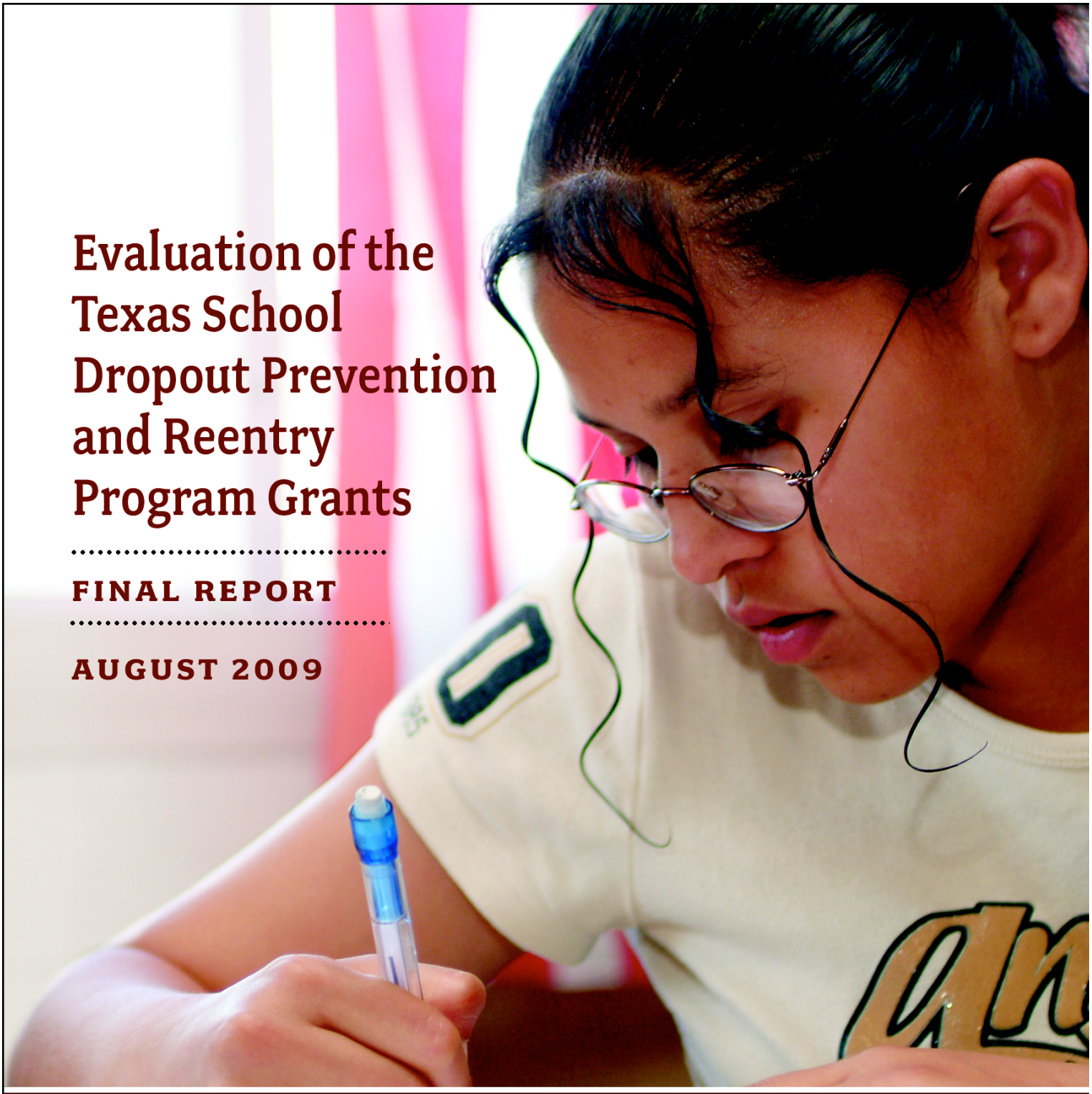

Evaluation of the Texas School Dropout Prevention and Reentry Program Grants

FINAL REPORT

AUGUST 2009

SUBMITTED TO:

Texas Education Agency

SUBMITTED BY:

WestEd

4665 Lampson Ave. • Los Alamitos, CA • 90720

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

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DIR researchers conducted the on-site data collection for this evaluation.

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Research Funded by:

Texas Education Agency

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EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

This Final Report presents the details of the evaluation of the Texas School Dropout Prevention and Reentry Program (TSDPRP) Grants. TSDPRP is a comprehensive effort to reduce the dropout rate in Texas and improve student outcomes. Three tasks comprise TSDPRP: 1) Task A–Impact of the Expansion of the Communities In Schools (CIS) Case Management Model; 2) Task B–Assessment of the *Dropout Recovery Resource Guide*; and 3) Task C–Impact of the statewide training of education professionals. The Executive Overview provides a summary of the evaluation, including the project background, evaluation plan, methods for addressing the evaluation objectives, and findings, as they relate to each TSDPRP task.[1]

Project Background

To be considered for employment in today's competitive job market, certain levels of academic credentials and technological skills are needed. As dropouts look for employment, their options are restricted by their limited knowledge and ability, as demonstrated by their lack of a high school diploma. In addition to not being considered for many jobs, those without high school diplomas are at risk of experiencing other severe disadvantages, as dropouts are more likely than high school or college graduates to experience poverty, health problems, and incarceration (Lehr, Clapper, & Thurlow, 2005).

The number of young people facing this harsh future remains high. In Texas during the 2006-07 school year, the statewide annual high school dropout rate was almost 4%, which means that over 52,000 students in the state dropped out of high school that academic year alone[2] (Texas Education Agency, 2008).

To improve the educational system and address the dropout problem, the federal government enacted the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) to improve educational outcomes by ensuring all students achieve academic proficiency, acquire the educational

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[1] All work associated with Task C was conducted in the first year of the evaluation. A summary of the evaluation findings of this TSDPRP objective can be found in the section titled *Summary of Findings from the Interim Report*. See the Interim Report located at http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/opge/progeval/DropoutPrevention/TSDPRP_Interim_0709.pdf for further details.

[2] Under the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) definition, a dropout is a student who is enrolled in public school in Grades 7-12, does not return to public school the following fall, is not expelled, and does not graduate, receive a GED, continue school outside the public school system, begin college, or die. The annual dropout rate is calculated by dividing the number of dropouts in grades 9 through 12 by the number of grade 9-12 students who were in attendance at any time during the school year.

skills necessary to succeed in life, and graduate within four years of beginning high school. In working toward these objectives, NCLB made schools accountable for student progress using indicators of adequate yearly progress (AYP), including measures of academic performance and rates of school completion set by individual states (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

In an effort to help states with the dropout problem, in the fall of 2005, the U.S. Department of Education awarded TEA a $2.5 million School Dropout Prevention Program grant. With this funding, TEA developed TSDPRP to create an effective and sustainable system of providing services to students at risk of dropping out and those who had already dropped out and were reentering the school system.

State agencies that received federal School Dropout Prevention Program funding were guided by two priorities. The first priority involved state education agencies (SEAs) partnering with other agencies to identify at-risk students early in high school and providing a comprehensive, tailored set of services. The second priority involved working with local education agencies (LEAs) to use eighth-grade assessment and other data to identify students who could benefit from dropout prevention services (U.S. Department of Education, 2005).

To address the first priority, TSDPRP extended the existing state CIS program to other schools and students in Texas by establishing CIS campus programs at 10 high schools with a high percentage of students at risk of dropping out. For the second priority (i.e., SEAs working with LEAs to use eighth-grade assessment data to identify students who could benefit from dropout prevention services), TSDPRP planned for the increased application of personal graduation plans (PGPs) that were already currently required for at-risk, incoming ninth graders by including the use of eighth-grade assessment data in the development of PGPs. TSDPRP focused on the following four primary objectives in order to address the stated priorities:

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

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

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

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

With TSDPRP funds, TEA contracted with local CIS programs to work with 10 high schools, with some of the highest annual dropout rates in the state, to develop and establish CIS campus programs. As CIS is the nation's largest dropout prevention organization, TEA worked with select CIS local programs to identify schools that were not currently receiving CIS services and could fulfill the requirements of the federal grant (i.e., making a commitment to secure additional funding to sustain the program after grant funding ceased). In addition, school selection was also dependent on the campus being willing to partner with local CIS programs. Based on these criteria, local CIS programs worked with local school districts and narrowed the list to 10 specific campuses to be the new CIS sites. TSDPRP funding was used to establish these 10 CIS campus programs, beginning in September 2006 and ending in August 2008.

The newly established CIS campus programs used their allocated funds to support the delivery of CIS case management services to students. As part of TSDPRP, the focus of these 10 CIS campus programs was on the assessment of needs and the subsequent delivery of services to at-risk, incoming ninth-grade students, including expanding the development of comprehensive, personalized service plans and PGPs using eighth-grade assessment data–the first TSDPRP objective.

Expanding the CIS program to the 10 new campuses also addressed the second TSDPRP objective of increasing partnerships among high schools and outside organizations, as establishing community partnerships is a distinctive feature of the CIS model. In addition, TEA drew on TSDPRP funds to contract with Big Brothers Big Sisters of North Texas (BBBSNT) to provide mentoring services at six of the participating high schools in the North Dallas region. BBBSNT worked with the CIS campus programs to identify at-risk, ninth-grade students enrolled in CIS services at the participating high schools and match these students with mentors.

To address the third objective, TSDPRP directed grant funds toward the development of statewide capacity to address the needs of students most at risk of dropping out of high school and to help recover students who already dropped out. TEA developed statewide capacity by providing training on dropout prevention strategies to education professionals across the state and developing a comprehensive guide to assist schools and districts in the implementation of dropout recovery strategies.

Evaluation Plan

To address the fourth TSDPRP objective, the assessment of program effectiveness to continually improve its services, TEA contracted with an external evaluator on a two-year evaluation contract, ending August 31, 2009. As specified by TEA, three separate components of the TSDPRP effort were addressed in the evaluation:

A) Analysis of the impact of the CIS case management model on student outcomes at the 10 campuses receiving CIS services;

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

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

With the use of mixed methods and data sources, the external evaluator collected data to inform the evaluation. The following evaluation questions (Table 1) were developed to address the three components of TSDPRP:

Table 1

Study Tasks and Corresponding Evaluation Questions

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

The first year of the evaluation, as presented in the Interim Report, addressed Tasks A, B, and C. Progress on the evaluation tasks during the first year varied, as work for Task C was completed, while the evaluative work for Task B did not begin until the second year of the evaluation (when the *Dropout Recovery Resource Guide* became available). Therefore, the Interim Report presented findings for Tasks A and C, and data collection plans for Task B.

With the Task C work complete, this Final Report presents the complete methodology and results for Tasks A and B, and a brief overview of Task C. Details regarding methodology, data collection, data analysis, and findings are in each sub-section of this report – *Task A–Impact of the Expansion of the CIS Case Management Model* and *Task B–Assessment of the Dropout Recovery Resource Guide*. The brief overview of *Task C–Impact of the Statewide Training* is presented in the section titled *Summary of Findings from the Interim Report*.

For Task A, data were collected on the development and implementation of the CIS program at the 10 campuses involved in this grant. Researchers also analyzed student-level secondary data to assess the impact of TSDPRP on student outcomes. For Task B, a content review and interviews with campus leaders were conducted to assess the comprehensiveness and potential impact of the *Dropout Recovery Resource Guide*. For Task C, a survey was administered to education professionals (i.e., education service center [ESC] staff) who participated in the August 2007 statewide training to assess the impact of the training on participants' thoughts regarding establishing partnerships with community organizations.

Task A: Impact of the Expansion of the Communities In Schools (CIS) Case Management Model

In the following section, the evaluation objective and research questions related to Task A are outlined. This is followed by a description of the methodology, the data analysis plan, and subsequent findings as related to each evaluation question.

Evaluation Plan

The impact of the expansion of the CIS case management model was assessed with the use of data from site visits to the 10 campuses and secondary student- and school-level data. To address Task A–Impact of the Expansion of the CIS Case Management Model, the following central evaluation question and sub-questions were developed:

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

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

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

1.3 What students are participating in the CIS program?

1.4 How does the level of implementation of the expansion affect student outcomes?

Data Collection Methods

TEA and CIS supplied the student-level secondary data for this evaluation. Specific variables from the Communities In Schools Tracking Management System (CISTMS), the CIS data collection and management system, and the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) datasets were selected to provide information to answer the outlined research questions.

School-level secondary data were retrieved from the TEA Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS)[3]. School-level data were obtained for CIS campuses and non-CIS campuses to compare trajectories for selected student outcomes. The outcomes included the school dropout rate, the school completion rate, and the percent of students who met the standard on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). Data were obtained for these variables for the 2003-04 through the 2006-07 school years. Data for the percent of students who met the standard on the TAKS was also available for the 2007-08 school year and were included in those analyses.

TEA supplied *CIS Campus Service Delivery Plans*[4] (Campus Plans) for the 10 CIS campuses for the 2006-07, 2007-08 and 2008-09 school years. Researchers reviewed these Campus Plans to gain a better understanding of the context surrounding these 10 CIS campuses. As detailed further in the main report, two of the sections from two separate years were reviewed more in-depth to extract information used for other evaluation activities. First, the service plans for each of the six CIS components were reviewed to determine the number of CIS activities planned at each campus in the 2007-08 school year[5]. This number served as a factor in the calculation of the level of campus implementation for the student-level analyses. Second, the areas identified as high priorities in the needs assessment from the 2008-09 school year were used to tailor the interviews with CIS staff conducted during the site visits.

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

[4] A copy of the CIS Campus Service Delivery Plan can be found in *Appendix A – CIS Campus Service Delivery Plan.*

[5] Data from the 2007-08 school year were used as opposed to the 2006-07 school year, as some schools had not begun implementing the CIS program until the 2007-08 school year. Therefore, the 2007-08 data best captures the newness of some campus programs (i.e., that began in the 2007-08 school year) and the experience of the other sites (i.e., that began in the 2006-07 school year).

Researchers visited each of the 10 CIS campuses twice during the evaluation, once in January and February of 2008 and again in January and February of 2009. The first round of site visits included in-depth interviews and focus groups with CIS staff; school staff, such as teachers, counselors, and administrators; community partners; and students. During the second round of site visits, researchers interviewed a campus CIS staff member and the personal graduation plan (PGP) manager (i.e., the person on each campus who had the most involvement in the development of PGPs). Interviews were conducted to assess further development and changes in implementation since the first round of site visits.

Data Analysis

Quantitative analytic methods were utilized to analyze the student-level secondary data. Descriptive analyses were conducted to describe the students who participated in the program, how they were referred to the program, and the services they received. Inferential analyses were conducted to determine what impact, if any, participation in the CIS program had on student outcomes.

Several comparisons were made of CIS students to other students to assess impact. First, CIS students were compared to other CIS students who have been in the program for a different length of time (i.e., a dosage approach). Next, students in the CIS program were compared to matched students who were not in the program (i.e., through the use of propensity score matching[6]). Finally, CIS students were compared to CIS students at the other campuses involved in this grant based on level of campus implementation (i.e., number of CIS activities on campus, number of students on caseload[7], and number of months implementing the program).

School-level data were analyzed for the CIS campuses and 25 campuses that did not have a CIS program, using data for the school years of 2003-04 through 2006-07. Time series graphs were then created to compare CIS and non-CIS campuses on the following student outcomes: school-level dropout, completion, and TAKS percent proficient rates.

Information from the CIS staff and PGP personnel interviews were analyzed using the constant comparative method (CCM) of qualitative analysis. The basic CCM process involves breaking the narrative data into units of information that become the basis for

[6] Propensity score matching is a statistical technique used to locate a one-to-one match for each CIS student from the pool of non-CIS students based on demographic and baseline outcome similarities.
[7] Number of students enrolled in CIS.

defining categories, and then bringing units back together that relate to the same content (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, as cited in Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998).

Background Information on the CIS Schools

As discussed, TEA worked with local CIS programs to identify 10 eligible high schools to partner with in the development of campus-based CIS programs. Of the 10 schools selected, the majority of the schools (n = 6) are located in Dallas. The remaining schools are located in Houston, Texas City, San Antonio, and Corpus Christi. According to AEIS data, the number of students the schools enrolled during the first year of the intervention (i.e., 2006-07) ranged from 536 to 2,228 students, with an average of 1,624 students. Among the 10 schools, the percentage of students at risk of dropping out ranged from approximately 60% to 87%. The annual dropout rate reported for these schools ranged from 1.7% to 12.2%. All 10 schools were predominantly Hispanic or Hispanic and African American. Finally, at the start of the intervention, 4 of the 10 schools were considered academically unacceptable based on the TEA AEIS rating scale.[8]

Key Findings

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

    - **Impact of time in the program.** Results of the analyses based on CIS program dosage (i.e., time in the program) revealed significant differences between students based on years of participation in the CIS program with students in the program for *less* time improving on more outcomes (i.e., attendance and disciplinary occurrences). One possible explanation is that students who continued in the program may be inherently different than those who left the program after one year in areas that cannot be assessed with the data available (i.e., unmeasured contextual variables not available in the TEA datasets). In addition, using dosage as a variable limits the results due to the fact that implementation changed from year to year and varied by campus. The evolving nature of the CIS campus programs over these crucial, start-up years makes any analyses based on dosage difficult to interpret with confidence.

[8] For definitions of *at-risk*, *dropout*, and *academically unacceptable*, see footnotes 36-38 that correspond to this section in the main body of the report.

- **Impact on an anecdotal basis.** During both rounds of site visits, CIS staff at all schools reported improvement in student outcomes as a result of CIS participation. CIS staff were confident that the program has been meeting its goals and impacting the targeted student outcomes in terms of academics, attendance, and behavior. In addition, school administrators and teachers from all 10 CIS campus programs generally believed that program effectiveness was strong.

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

- **Caseload.** At the time of the second round of site visits (January-February 2009), 8 of the 10 CIS campus programs were at least halfway to their enrollment goals for the 2008-09 academic year. Ultimately, all CIS campus programs met or exceeded their targeted recruitment numbers—required by the grant.

- **Recruitment.** CIS campus staff utilized school administrators, counselors, teachers, service providers, and students already in the program to increase enrollment and raise awareness of CIS on the campuses.

- **CIS programs and services.** The CIS activities implemented on each campus varied by the needs of the students on caseload. All programs targeted issues related to academics, attendance, and behavior; however, providing mental health services was a higher priority on some campuses than others.

- **Fidelity of implementation.** The development of CIS Campus Service Delivery Plans (which included the needs assessment and interviews with relevant personnel) seemed to effectively guide the implementation of needed services. Across all 10 sites, CIS campus programs implemented their CIS Campus Service Delivery Plans, providing service provision with an emphasis on their identified high-priority areas.

- **Attendance.** In addition to monitoring students' attendance by working with the teachers, registrars, counselors, and truancy clerks, CIS staff also reported calling students' homes if they had missed too many days of school and monitoring campus hallways to encourage students to go to their classes.

- **Mentoring.** Through the BBBS initiative, a challenge was identified early on in establishing effective lines of communication

among different service providers on campuses (i.e., CIS and BBBS). Recognizing this significant challenge, TEA ended the contract with BBBS for this grant and instead had the local CIS programs establish mentoring programs on these campuses. Success with mentoring varied by campus. Some campuses were successful with their mentorship programs (e.g., partnering with local businesses to find mentors), while others experienced difficulties finding mentors willing to commit, which resulted in some programs dissolving their mentorship programs altogether.

- **Partnerships.** Several schools noted the increased use of partnerships with external service providers and community organizations over the course of the grant. This increase was in direct relation to CIS staff becoming more familiar with the community and available resources.

- **Follow-up with external providers.** Consistent with data collected during the first round of site visits, CIS staff across the sites agreed that while they all followed-up with students who received services from external providers, no standard procedure existed for following up, and that it was more on a case-by-case basis. Some CIS staff said that when they attempted to follow up with the service provider directly, confidentiality concerns usually prohibited CIS staff from obtaining information on student progress.

- **Other campus responsibilities for CIS staff.** In addition to the services that CIS typically provided to students, CIS campus staff at five of the six CIS programs in Dallas also reported that they were responsible for various campus-wide tasks or initiatives, including scheduling parent-teacher conferences for teachers and developing a curriculum for the school mentoring program. None of the CIS staff at the other four campuses reported being assigned to perform any campus-wide activities that extended beyond the scope of CIS' services. This finding was similar to the first round of site visits; at that time, several CIS campus staff noted the campus staff's general lack of understanding of CIS's role on campus and the request from campus administration to take on more tasks.

- **School resources and support.** Most CIS staff reported improvements in the resources provided to CIS since the first round of site visits (e.g., office space, access to data). Often, resources provided to CIS were a reflection of school administrators' support (or lack of support) for the CIS program.

CIS schools that enjoyed administrative support had more access to students, student data, and other resources, thus allowing them to provide services more effectively to more students than those schools without this support.

- **Field trips.** During both years, field trips served as an incentive for students enrolled in CIS to attend and remain engaged in school; however, only two schools reported offering field trips on a fairly regular basis in the 2008-09 school year. In addition, for some campuses, district requirements for field trips made it difficult to conduct this CIS activity.

- **Referrals.** During the 2007-08 school year, the majority of CIS students were referred to the program by parents and CIS staff. Although many CIS students were referred to the program by their parents both years, more referrals were made by administration (i.e., assistant principal, principal) during the 2006-07 school year than by CIS staff. During both years (in smaller numbers), teachers also referred students, and the students referred themselves to the program.

- **CIS eligibility.** Free and reduced lunch status and academic deficiencies (i.e., not meeting assessment standards, course failure in two classes, retention) were the reasons most students were considered eligible to participate in the program for both the 2006-07 and 2007-08 school years.

- **Student issues.** Most student issues were classified as academic (e.g., need for more academic support, homework completion, college readiness) and behavioral (e.g., absences, classroom participation, tardiness) concerns for both years of the program.

- **Services targeted by CIS.** The services targeted by CIS staff varied by the type of issue presented. CIS staff exclusively provided services for over 90% of all reported behavioral issues. In 2007-08, CIS staff directly targeted fewer social service and mental health issues than in the 2006-07 school year. This reduction most likely reflects the increased utilization of community partnerships during the second year of implementation. The trend to outsource was also seen in the data regarding academic issues, as academic service provision was targeted by external providers (e.g., tutors) for a large percentage of students during both years.

- **Student progress reported by CIS staff.** CIS staff made note of student progress. In 2007-08, students made the most progress for behavioral (65%) and academic issues (64%). In addition, a greater proportion of students showed improvement in social services and mental health issues in 2007-08 compared to 2006-07. In regard to progress with behavior, huge improvements were seen in terms of delinquent conduct, classroom conduct, and social skills from one year to the next.

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

- **Collaboration between CIS campus staff and school staff.** Collaboration between CIS staff and school personnel has improved somewhat during the course of this evaluation. Although only 2 of the 10 campuses were collaborating in the development of PGPs, the processes they employed in this collaboration strengthened over the past year and became more of a standardized procedure on these campuses.

- **Use of eighth-grade data.** The two CIS campus programs that were collaborating with school staff in developing PGPs for incoming ninth-grade students were both utilizing eighth-grade achievement and attendance data. The data were used for two purposes – to develop instructional plans to address academic concerns and to monitor student progress with attendance.

- **PGP follow-up.** As a result of the findings from the first year of this evaluation, TEA staff provided further information to all TSDPRP CIS programs that included guidance in developing and using PGPs.

1.3 What students are participating in the CIS program[9]?

- **Number and gender.** There were 1,300 students (57% female, 43% male) who participated in the CIS program in 2007-08, increasing more than threefold from the year prior (N=400). Of the students who began the CIS program in the 2006-07 school year, 42% continued in the program during 2007-08. Across both years, there were 1,603 students who participated in the program at the 10 CIS campuses.

[9] CIS student characteristics in 2007-08. Data Source: 2006-07 and 2007-08 CISTMS

- **Ethnicity.** For both years of the program, the majority of students participating in CIS were Hispanic (61% for both years) and African American (31% in 2006-07 and 32% in 2007-08).

- **Living situation.** For the 2006-07 and 2007-08 school years, the vast majority of CIS students lived at home with members of their immediate family (92% in 2006-07 and 94% in 2007-08). For most of these students, the immediate family member they lived with was either their single parent mother (45% in 2006-07 and 36% in 2007-08) or both biological or adoptive parents (32% in 2006-07 and 37% in 2007-08).

- **Language.** For both years of the program, CIS students primarily spoke English (80% in 2006-07 and 63% in 2007-08) or Spanish (19% in 2006-07 and 37% in 2007-08) in the home.

- **Public assistance.** Fifty percent of CIS students received two forms of public assistance in the 2007-08 school year, which included reduced-price or free lunch (76%) and TANF (56%). This differed from the 2006-07 data, in which the majority of students were only receiving one form of (38%) or no public assistance (25%).

- **Plans after high school.** Forty-three percent of students were planning to acquire additional education post-high school in the 2007-08 school year (i.e., 4-year college, 2-year college, trade/technical school). This differed greatly from the 2006-07 data, in which only 9% of students were planning to obtain additional education after high school. This large difference was most likely due to the lack of data for students in the CISTMS database in the 2006-07 school year for this outcome.

1.4 How does the level of implementation of the expansion affect student outcomes?

- **Impact of level of campus implementation on student outcomes.** Campus level of implementation was calculated using three, equally-weighted indicators of implementation. These indicators included the number of months implementing the CIS program, number of students enrolled in CIS, and number of CIS activities planned on campus. Campuses were then designated as high, medium, or low implementation campuses and student data were compared across campuses based on implementation level. Results showed significant differences, with students at the high and medium implementation campuses generally faring better than

those students attending the low implementation campuses. These findings suggest that level of implementation of the CIS program can have a notable impact on attendance, TAKS scores, course completion, and disciplinary issues.

Task A Synthesis

In this section, findings are presented as a synthesis of data from different sources (i.e., student-level secondary data, site visit interview data) used to evaluate Task A. These findings are used to inform both program implementation and impact.

Challenging role of CIS staff on campuses. Helping students graduate and preparing them to achieve their educational and career goals after high school is the responsibility of both CIS and the school. With this shared goal, the expectation would be that the CIS program would be welcomed by school staff. However, this is not always the case, as CIS is often seen as an external provider and not part of the campus itself. This is evident from the school-based challenges many CIS case managers reported, including need for space and facilities, lack of administrative support, and teacher reluctance to refer at-risk students to the CIS program. CIS staff at some campuses were able to address these challenges by collaborating with school administration to secure additional resources. In other cases, CIS staff continued to experience challenges. While school staff may show some reluctance toward any new campus-based provider, especially one that they may not have experience with, the discrepancy between the responsibility of CIS campus program staff to achieve their stated goals (i.e., keeping students in school and helping them improve academically) and their lack of authority on campus may limit the potential success of the CIS program.

The importance of support from and collaboration with school personnel. CIS staff noted the lack of school support as a challenge in delivering services. This lack of support was seen in different ways, including denying permission to offer group services, not allowing CIS staff to pull students from elective classes, and preventing field trips by pulling transportation funding. As the resources provided to CIS are often a reflection of school administrators' support or lack of support for the CIS program[10], support and collaboration with school administration and teachers becomes critical to program success. In some cases, CIS staff were able to obtain support from school staff and administration by collaborating with them in the development of PGPs and providing services to students. It appears that CIS programs with support from the school were able

[10] Resources provided could also be the result of district funding patterns, and may not have to do with support or lack of support for the CIS program specifically.

to provide services more effectively and efficiently to more students than those without this support.

The importance of consistent staffing. Interviews with CIS staff suggested that while serving as students' advocates and liaisons, they sincerely care about the students and their futures. CIS staff reported that establishing strong and caring relationships with their students and holding them accountable were essential to achieving student success. However, at several of the sites, there was high turnover among the CIS staff, as many (7 of the 10) CIS campus programs had new staff this year (2008-09). Although all personnel were experienced CIS staff members, they were new to the campus and the students. Having new staff seemed to impact student recruitment efforts, as during the second round of site visits (in early 2009), almost all of the schools that reported fewer students on caseload as compared to the previous year had hired new CIS campus staff this academic year. Staff turnover also seemed to impact general organization of student files, as one school with all new CIS staff had no previous record of the students on caseload. The need for consistent guidance from one source (i.e., one case manager) coupled with the impact of staff turnover on recruitment and general organization suggests the need to keep the same CIS staff on the same campus.

CIS presence on campus. At campuses where CIS staff reported higher levels of school support, the CIS campus programs seemed to progress in the development of comprehensive service provision for at-risk students. Progress was seen by the increased caseload, strengthened collaboration with school staff in the development of PGPs (at the campuses that implemented this component), and increased use of partnerships with external service providers (e.g., social service agencies) over the course of the grant. To some extent, this progress was a product of more time on the campus to recruit students and establish program activities. The analyses of student-level data demonstrated that campus programs that enrolled more students, planned more CIS activities, and implemented the program for a longer time showed significantly more positive student outcomes. These findings support the fact that it takes time to develop a CIS presence on campus by recruiting students and implementing CIS activities, and the development of this presence may lead to the desired student results.

Too early to assess impact. The defining features of a program need to be considered when deciding if a program is ready for impact assessment. These features include its capacity for data collection and how long it's been in operation (Hauser-Cram, Warfield, Upshur, & Weisner, 2000). Conducting performance assessments too early in a program's growth can produce inaccurate results (Chen, 2005). As noted, it took time to implement the CIS program and obtain support from school staff in order to implement a

high level of CIS programming on some of the campuses. The implementation data presented in this report, as well as CIS and school staffs' anecdotal perceptions of impact, point to the potential of the program to improve the targeted student outcomes. And while some CIS campus programs may be ready for an assessment of program participation on student outcomes, others need more time before a valid assessment can be made.

Task B: Assessment of the Dropout Recovery Resource Guide

To achieve the TSDPRP objective of building statewide capacity for implementing dropout reentry interventions, TEA contracted with an outside vendor to develop the *Dropout Recovery Resource Guide* (Guide)[11]. The Guide was developed to provide information to school and district personnel regarding the implementation of best practices in dropout recovery, with materials, references, and resources to assist in the implementation of dropout recovery strategies.

Evaluation Plan

The evaluation of the Task B component of TSDPRP involves a thorough assessment of the Guide. This evaluation includes investigating the extent to which the Guide is comprehensive, is based on best practices and current empirical research, is transferable to multiple campuses, and may lead to improved student outcomes. Evaluation questions 2 and 3 address the assessment/content review of the Guide:

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

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

Data Collection Methods

The data collection methods for the assessment of the Guide included a review of the Guide with the use of an inventory of promising practices and interviews with Guide users. During the first year of the evaluation, researchers developed an inventory of promising practices (based on current dropout recovery literature) as a tool to review the

[11] See the *Dropout Recovery Resource Guide* online at http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/ed_init/PDF/dropout_recovery_resource_guide.pdf for additional details.

Guide. After the Guide was available for review (January 2009), researchers used the inventory to assess the comprehensiveness of the Guide and the extent to which the Guide included practices considered effective in the dropout recovery literature. In addition, in March and April 2009, interviews were conducted with 12 campus leaders to gauge their use of the Guide and any subsequent changes in policy and practice.

Data Analysis

As previously mentioned, the Guide was reviewed with the use of the inventory of promising practices. For each item on the inventory, researchers marked whether or not the Guide included that piece of information about dropout recovery (*Yes* or *No*). For each *Yes* response, researchers provided a page reference in the Guide. Percent agreement between the three researchers was calculated. The *Yes/No* results were then analyzed to determine what important components the Guide included and where any deficiencies existed.

Data from the interviews were analyzed using the constant comparative method (as referenced in the *Data Analysis* section of *Task A–Impact of the Expansion of the CIS Case Management Model*). Participant responses were reviewed and coded and all significant trends were identified, providing a description of the Guide's strengths and suggestions for improvement.

Key Findings

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

    - **Research-based practices.** The Guide includes a broad range of strategies identified in the dropout recovery literature as promising practices.

    - **Users of the Guide.** According to interview data with Guide users, the Guide provides a useful presentation of dropout recovery in a step-by-step format for those new to dropout recovery, as well as for those more experienced in the field looking to validate the interventions already in place.

    - **Further area to be covered.** There was one area that was not sufficiently addressed in the Guide - information about specific

special populations (i.e., Special Education students and English language learners).

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

- **Use of the Guide.** Leaders from diverse campuses are using (or planning to use) the Guide to improve student outcomes. The research outlined in the Guide will be used to inform workshops, presentations, task forces, and education councils across the state.

- **Impact of the Guide on student outcomes.** Campus leaders are confident the Guide will impact student outcomes, specifically noting mentoring, recovering credits, and tracking students as important additions that will improve dropout recovery and increase student success.

- **Impact of the Guide on policy and procedure.** The majority of participants envisioned the Guide having an impact on campus and district policies and procedures. Several leaders have already made changes to campus and district improvement plans to include strategies outlined in the Guide, such as a mentoring program and adding the title of Dropout Recovery Administrator to an administrative position.

Task C: Impact of the Statewide Training

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

Evaluation Plan

The evaluation objective for Task C was to examine the impact of the August 2007 statewide training on education professionals' perceptions of and attitudes toward the establishment of partnerships with community-based organizations[12]. Evaluation questions 4 and 5 addressed this objective:

[12] All work associated with Task C was conducted in the first year of the evaluation. A summary of the evaluation findings of this TSDPRP objective is provided here. See the Interim Report for further detail.

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

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

Data Collection Methods

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

Key Findings

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

- **Increased awareness.** The training seemed to increase participant awareness of the importance of establishing partnerships with external organizations and how such partnerships could be a key element in a dropout prevention program. All respondents noted that they would recommend to district and campus leaders the establishment of school and community partnerships as a dropout prevention strategy.

- **More training needed.** Although the August 2007 training seemed to increase participant awareness of establishing partnerships, participants were not adequately prepared to connect with partners and utilize resources available in their communities and schools or to teach others in their school system to work with partners.

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

- **More time needed.** At the time the survey was developed and administered, not enough time had elapsed since the training for participants to establish new partnerships. However, these data

may be collected in the future to find interesting local project activities and examples of promising practices in developing partnerships.