

# Texas Ninth Grade Transition and Intervention (TNGTI) Grant Program: Interim Evaluation Report



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## Executive Summary

The Texas Ninth Grade Transition and Intervention (TNGTI) grant program is a statewide initiative designed to reach ninth graders identified as at risk for dropping out of school and prepare them for academic and behavioral success in high school. TNGTI grants provide funding for districts to implement three types of support for identified students: (1) a summer transition program to introduce incoming ninth graders to high school culture and to develop their academic, social, and study skills; (2) an early warning data system to monitor program participants throughout the school year; and (3) fall and spring interventions to provide additional support to struggling students identified through the early warning data system. In 2009–10, 23 districts and 63 campuses are participating in the program.

TEA contracted with Learning Point Associates and its partner, Gibson Consulting Group Inc., to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the initial year of the TNGTI grant program. The evaluation began in June 2009 and is expected to continue through May 2011. The objectives of the evaluation are to

1. Describe and evaluate the implementation of program strategies.
2. Evaluate the impact of the program on student outcomes.
3. Evaluate the impact of the program on teacher and staff effectiveness.
4. Determine the cost effectiveness and sustainability of the program.

The focus of the interim report is to address the first research objective and to describe and evaluate the implementation of program strategies. An initial description is also presented on the perceived impact of the program on students and teachers, touching on the second and third research objectives.

### Data and Methods

This report is based on data collected from participating districts and campuses in August and September 2009. Findings are based on information from four main data sources: the first campus progress report, first student data collection, summer interviews with district and program staff, and observations of summer transition activities. Additional data on participating campuses were obtained from the TNGTI grant applications, district and campus administrative data, and from TEA. A descriptive analysis was conducted on the quantitative data collected from the campus progress report, student upload data, and other available data. The quotes and examples provided are based on the qualitative data collected from the interviews and observations conducted at a sample of eight participating campuses.

### Preliminary Findings

The preliminary findings focus on three topics: district and campus planning for the entire TNGTI program, planning and implementation of the summer transition program, and planning for the early warning data system and related intervention services. A summary of findings follows, along with several suggestions for improvement from campus participants.

## PROGRAM PLANNING

**Program Goals.** Individual campus goals for the TNGTI program varied widely from generic to specific, but the majority of grantees listed academic preparation in core subject areas as the top goal of their ninth-grade transition programs. Less emphasis was placed on parent activities in campus goals.

**High School and Middle School Collaboration.** High school and middle school staff most often collaborated by discussing strategies for identifying program participants and recruiting students into the program. Notably, five campuses reported no collaboration between the high school and middle school staff. In districts with multiple campuses, most high school campuses planned program activities to address the needs of their specific student population (rather than adopt a districtwide approach).

**Student Identification and Recruitment.** Two primary strategies were used by campuses to identify students for the summer transition program. First, most campuses specifically targeted individuals who they thought could benefit from the program on the basis of identified needs, most often academic. Students were identified on the basis of eighth-grade TAKS scores and other sources of data (e.g., core course grades, excessive absences, disciplinary issues). Second, some campuses also broadly advertised the summer transition program so that students (or their parents) could sign up to participate. The recruitment strategy most frequently mentioned was for staff members to communicate with the parents of identified students through telephone calls, letters, and conferences.

**Identified Student Information.** The majority of students who were identified and who participated in the program had met the minimum requirements on the eighth-grade TAKS exams but still had poor overall scores. A low percentage of participating students passed the TAKS in mathematics and science, which may have led to several campuses choosing to offer summer transition activities specifically targeting science and mathematics preparation.

### FINDINGS:

***Collaboration between middle school and high school staff was key to student recruitment.***

Campuses reported the collaboration with the middle schools was most helpful for identifying and recruiting students. Many campuses noted the middle school staff were less involved in other aspects of program planning.

***Some campuses reported problems identifying and recruiting students.*** Some campuses had difficulties identifying and recruiting students from factors such as unavailable test data and lack of cooperation from middle schools. Overlapping summer programs that targeted the same students was also cited as a challenge for recruitment.

### SUGGESTIONS:

***Provide information about grant funding earlier to allow more planning time.*** Several campuses mentioned that they could have done more with the summer program if there had been more time to plan and recruit students. Campuses requested more advance notice of grant timelines and budgets to get an earlier start on planning.

## THE SUMMER TRANSITION PROGRAM

**Program Length and Timing.** The majority of campuses offered a summer transition program for at least two weeks (10 days), and most programs were held in June or August. Nearly half the campuses conducted their programs in conjunction with another program, most often an academic remediation program (e.g., summer school).

**Activities Offered.** The summer transition programs offered a wide variety of activities; common activities were high school orientations and academic instruction, and less common activities were community service and college site visits.

**Student Participation.** Student participation was a challenge for many campuses. Only 67% of students who were identified actually attended at least one day of the summer transition program. Those students who participated in the program attended nine days on average and most often attended sessions in social skills and core subjects (e.g., mathematics, reading, science). Program staff indicated that when student participation was low, it was often due to scheduling conflicts with family plans or other summer programs (e.g., remediation courses).

**Parental Involvement.** Most campuses offered one or more parent outreach activities, such as information sessions, conferences, or classes, but parent participation was low.

**Success Factors and Perceived Impact.** Campuses identified the most effective activities for preparing students for ninth grade as training in study skills, orientation activities, and peer relationship building. Program staff reported the benefit of the program for students was lower fear and anxiety about high school, friendships with classmates, and improvement in academic skills. Teachers also benefited by meeting the students and identifying their strengths and weaknesses before school began. About half the campuses had not offered a transition program before 2009, and even those who had offered a similar program reported the TNGTI grant program offered new and more activities than previous programs. The most commonly mentioned factor associated with a program's success was the availability of staff and their enthusiasm for the program.

### FINDINGS:

**Student participation was a major challenge for many campuses.** Many campuses did not meet their original target numbers for student participation. Participation was affected by overlapping summer programs or by other plans the students had (e.g., vacations, migrant families).

**Campuses reported low parent participation.** Despite efforts to encourage their involvement, parents often were not involved in program activities. Campuses indicated they would like help to increase parent involvement.

**The availability and enthusiasm of staff members are key to program success.** Nearly half the campuses mentioned that having available staff members (e.g., teachers, grant coordinators) was critical for program success. Campuses also mentioned the importance of getting enthusiastic and committed staff members in the program, which was conveyed to students and increased their engagement with the program.

### SUGGESTIONS:

**Continue Summer Transition Program.** Most campuses said the TNGTI program was beneficial and would like to continue activities next summer.

## THE EARLY WARNING DATA SYSTEM AND INTERVENTION SERVICES

**Early Warning Data System.** In their grant applications, almost all schools included measures related to attendance, behavior, and academic performance that would be used to monitor the progress of participating students throughout the year. All but a few campuses indicated that the early warning data system was ready for the fall 2009 semester. The majority of campuses reported that the early warning data system would be used to monitor TNGTI program participants differently from other ninth-grade students, most often by using the early warning data system measures and by assigning specific staff members to monitor TNGTI students. Overall, program staff reported confidence in the system and agreed they were ready to use it for the school year. Additional data on the implementation of this system will be provided in the final report.

**Interventions.** About half the campuses reported the planned interventions for TNGTI participants would be different from those planned for other ninth-grade students. The most common differences would be more frequent parent contact, the use of additional support staff, specific classes offered, additional tutoring, and more frequent student-teacher conferences. Most program staff indicated that clear methods were in place for delivering and evaluating the success of the interventions, staff were assigned and trained to deliver interventions, and a process had been put in place to inform students and parents when the early warning data system identified a need for intervention. The final report will provide additional data on the implementation of intervention services.

### FINDINGS:

**Most campuses had planned for the implementation of an early warning data system and interventions.** Preliminary information on planning for these two components of the TNGTI program showed that campuses were ready to begin monitoring and providing intervention services to TNGTI students. The final report will provide further information on implementation.

### SUGGESTIONS:

**Some campuses would like more support for the early warning data system.** Several campuses offered suggestions such as creating a tool that is more compatible with their current monitoring systems, allowing more time at the beginning of the year to implement the system, and more support from the district to ease data extraction.

### Next Steps

To assess program implementation and to evaluate the impact of the TNGTI program on teachers, the evaluation team will conduct descriptive analyses of additional student participation data, data from campus progress reports, and staff surveys. Thematic analysis of additional interview data also will be conducted. To assess the program's impact on students, two sets of analyses will be conducted: (1) a comparison of the outcomes of students participating in the program with those of similar students who are not participating in program and (2) an analysis of program components and factors associated with greater improvements in student outcomes. Analyses of the cost effectiveness of the program also will be conducted. Findings will be presented in a final evaluation report to TEA in September 2010.

The full report can be accessed on the following web page:  
[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)