

**Texas Education Agency
Charter School Program Grant Impact Report
School Years 2021–22 through 2023–24**

Prepared by McREL International

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Charter School Program Grant Impact Report

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Executive Summary

Background

In 2020, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) was awarded a five-year, \$90 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education under the Expanding Opportunity Through Quality Charter Schools Program (CSP). With this grant, TEA offers competitive and non-competitive subgrants to provide financial assistance for the planning, program design, and initial implementation of charter schools that support the growth of high-quality charter schools in Texas, especially those focused on improving academic outcomes for educationally disadvantaged students. These subgrants assist eligible applicants in opening and preparing for the operation of newly authorized charter schools and replicating/expanding high-quality charter school campuses. CSP funding allowed TEA to fund approximately 54 charter school campuses across four cohorts serving students from early childhood through Grade 12 across a variety of specialized foci.

This report provides results of the impact of the CSP grant on indicators hypothesized to predict academic success. Although not inclusive of all possible predictors of student success, the current study focused on the outcomes of attendance, discipline, mathematics achievement, and reading language arts achievement. The study was limited to the first cohort of CSP grantees (Cohort 1), to allow for sufficient time for outcomes to be observed. Outcomes were chosen based on TEA policy relevance and alignment with educational outcomes prioritized by The What Works Clearinghouse (WWC; 2024). The study addressed two research questions (see insert).

Research Question 1:

Did students in the CSP subgrantee schools show more positive final evaluation year (2024) outcomes of academic achievement, attendance, and discipline as compared to similar students in traditional (non-charter) campuses?

Research Question 2:

Did students in Cohort 1 CSP subgrantee campuses demonstrate a more positive growth trajectory in academic achievement, attendance, and discipline from school year 2021–22 to school year 2023–24 as compared to similar students in traditional (non-charter) campuses?

The Study

To evaluate impact, the McREL study team employed a research design that meets the highest level of standards feasible, **a matched-comparison, quasi-experimental design controlling for pre-existing biases that may be due to baseline differences between CSP subgrantees and non-grantees**. Pre-existing differences between these groups were controlled with a rigorous matching strategy called propensity score matching. Outcome and demographic data from CSP subgrantee campuses as well as comparison campuses were acquired from TEA to increase analytic precision. The study team collected student-level data from both CSP and traditional campuses annually from school year 2020–21 through school year 2023–24. **For each impact analysis, subgrantee campuses were matched with a comparison group of comparison campuses at both the student and school levels to allow researchers to provide an unbiased estimate of the impact of the CSP grant on multiple student outcomes across various Texas public school districts.** After establishing baseline equivalence, researchers examined outcomes.

Analytic Sample

The final analytic sample included six CSP schools for the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) outcome analyses (456 CSP students STAAR-Mathematics and 548 CSP students for STAAR-Reading/Reading Language Arts) and 11 schools for attendance and discipline outcomes (1,357 CSP students for both outcomes). The number of matched comparison schools and students also varied, depending on the outcome (the number of comparison schools for STAAR-Mathematics was 161 and included 1,803 students; the number of comparison schools for STAAR-Reading/Reading Language Arts was 176 and included 2,343 students; the number of schools for the attendance outcome was 523 and included 7,538 students; and the number of schools for the discipline outcome was 530 and included 7,786 students).

Findings – Research Question 1

Analyses for the first research question revealed **no statistically significant differences** for any of the outcomes:

1

Attending a CSP grantee campus for three years did not impact attendance, discipline, STAAR-Reading Language Arts or STAAR-Mathematics, as indicated by p -values that did not approach statistical significance. Hedge's g effect sizes were small.

2

CSP students showed lower average attendance rate in the outcome year (2023–24) than their matched comparison peers; however, the Hedge's g effect size was small and the difference was not statistically significant.

3

CSP students showed, on average, more disciplinary instances in the outcome year (2023–24) than their matched comparison peers; however, the Hedge's g effect size was small and the difference was not statistically significant.

4

CSP students showed, on average, higher scores in the outcome year (2023–24) than their matched comparison peers on STAAR-Reading Language Arts but lower scores, on average, on STAAR-Mathematics outcomes. However, neither of these differences were statistically significant and Hedge's g effect sizes were small.

5

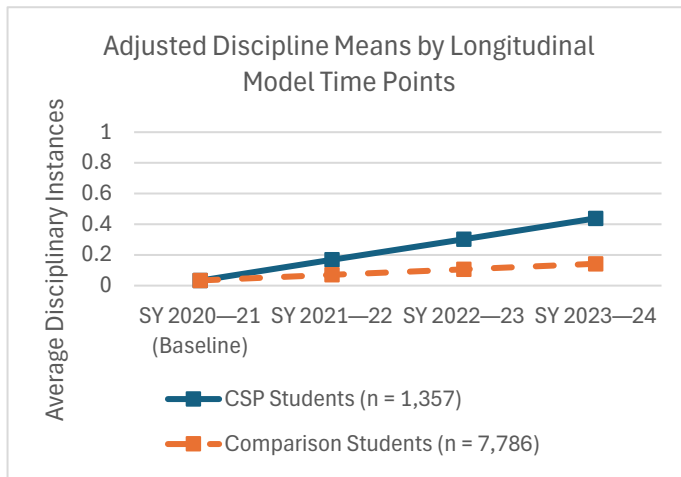
Attending a CSP grantee campus did not differentially impact students identified as economically disadvantaged versus students not identified as economically disadvantaged.

Findings – Research Question 2

Analyses for the second research question revealed the following (graphs are provided only for statistically significant findings):¹

1

Both CSP and comparison students showed slightly negative growth in attendance rates over time (school year 2020–21 through school year 2023–24) (no significant difference between the two groups).

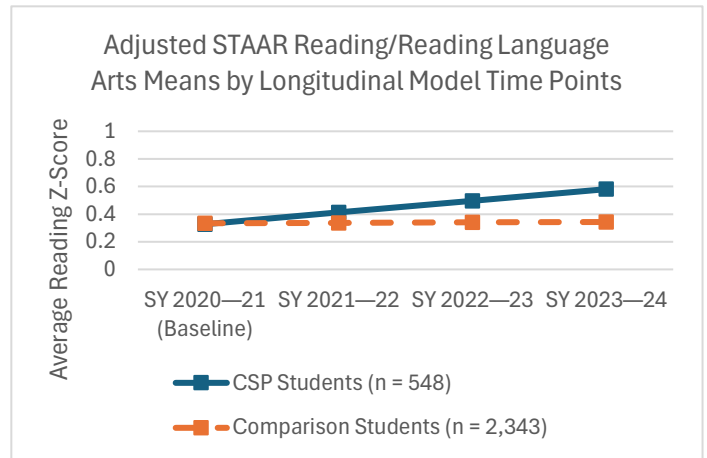


Both CSP and comparison students showed an increase in disciplinary instances over time; however, the increase was significantly greater for CSP students than their matched comparison peers as indicated by a statistically significant interaction (time X CSP).

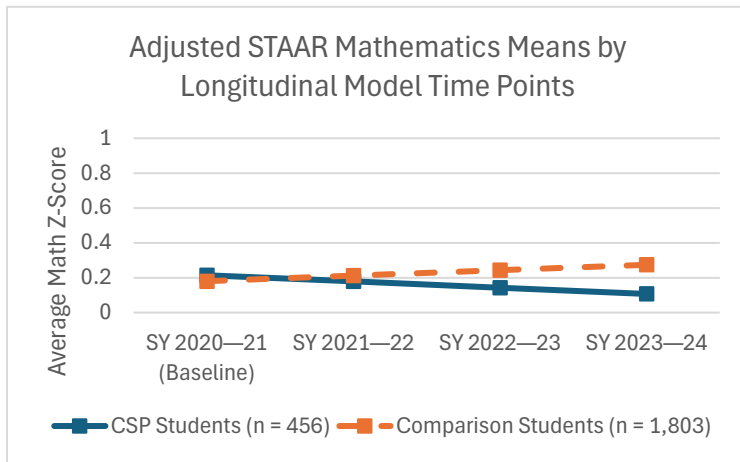
2

CSP students showed significantly more growth over time in STAAR-Reading/Reading Language Arts than their matched comparison peers (statistically significant).

3



¹ For more information on the source of the graphs, please see Figures 1-3 of the report.



CSP students showed significantly less growth over time in STAAR-Mathematics than their matched comparison peers (statistically significant).

4

5

Attending a CSP school did not differentially impact the growth of students identified as economically disadvantaged versus students not identified as economically disadvantaged.

Conclusions and Implications

The impact analyses show **mixed results** regarding the efficacy of the TEA CSP grant on student outcomes. The following provides conclusions and implications of this study.

Effects on Attendance. Neither of the analytic models showed a statistically significant effect of CSP grantee campus on the attendance outcome. Indeed, both groups showed a slight decrease in attendance rates over time.

Effects on Discipline. Both models showed a difference between CSP and comparison students on discipline, where comparison students had fewer disciplinary instances. This result was not statistically significant in the baseline controlled final year outcome model (Research Question 1; RQ1), however when examining individual growth over the course of the four-year period, the longitudinal growth model (Research Question 2; RQ2), revealed a statistically significant growth difference, with the average number of disciplinary instances for CSP students increasing over time. The reason this effect was observed is not clear. There is insufficient evidence to support an assertion that students in CSP campuses have more *actual* disciplinary instances—rather researchers can only say that CSP students have more *recorded* disciplinary instances. It is possible that CSP campuses have a greater focus on discipline and are more diligent in documenting discipline instances or it may be that CSP campuses operationally define disciplinary infractions differently.

Effects on Student Achievement Outcomes. For STAAR-Mathematics, there was also an observed difference between CSP and comparison students on their ultimate outcome, where CSP

students performed lower than comparison students. This was only statistically significant in the longitudinal growth model.

On the other hand, CSP students showed higher STAAR-Reading/Reading Language Arts performance than their comparison counterparts. Again, however, this difference was only detected as statistically significant in the longitudinal growth model that modeled performance over four years of testing. The opposite effects on STAAR-Reading/Reading Language Arts and STAAR-Mathematics suggest that CSP campuses may be effective in supporting student success in reading, more so than traditional public school campuses but not as successful compared to matched traditional schools in mathematics. Researchers recommend follow-up studies to determine whether this effect is generalizable to other cohorts and perhaps leveraging qualitative data to explore the possibility that CSP campuses have a greater focus on reading/reading language arts and less of a focus on mathematics and whether teacher qualifications and experience at the CSP schools—especially in mathematics—may differ from those evident in their traditional school counterparts.

Finally, the CSP grant funded (1) opening and preparing for the operation of newly authorized charter schools and (2) replicating high-quality charters. Because replication campuses are able to rely on existing models and structures, these campuses may have advantages that contribute to their successes. Future studies should examine whether replication campuses outperform newly authorized campuses.

Limitations

Although the rigor of the study design and analyses provides confidence in the findings, the final sample of CSP schools in Cohort 1 was admittedly small. The study was limited to an examination of the first cohort of grantees and further limited to those schools that had the required student-level data for addressing the research questions. This resulted in a total of six schools that were eligible to be included in the examination of achievement outcomes and 11 schools that were eligible to be included in the examination of behavioral outcomes. Moreover, the study was limited in the total number of years that this first cohort was observed. As it is unclear how much time it takes for student outcomes to change at a charter school once they leave an underperforming school, it may be of interest to model a time by enrollment interaction. Furthermore, because the study was limited to a single cohort over just four years, differences among CSP cohort outcomes as well as longer term outcomes associated CSP attendance were unable to be examined. As such, researchers advise replication of these analyses with other cohorts of grantees as well as tracking the outcomes of each cohort and of students over time.

Key Analytic Terms:

Baseline equivalence-A measure of the similarity between the intervention and comparison groups at the baseline of a study. When two groups are similar at baseline it is reasonable to conclude that any differences in the outcomes that are measured at the end of a study (follow-up) are caused by the intervention.

Effect size- A measure of the strength or magnitude of the effect of a program on an outcome (or the strength or magnitude of the association between a program and an outcome) relative to a benchmark.

Hedges' g- An effect size metric as a standardized measure of intervention effects. This metric represents the mean difference between intervention and comparison groups in standard deviation units. That is, the raw mean difference is divided by the variability within the groups, placing effect sizes on a common scale.

Longitudinal data analysis- A research design that measures the same variables of interest repeatedly over a period of time for the same group of participants. This design allows researchers to examine change within individuals and contextual factors that account for interindividual differences.

Propensity score matching-A quasi-experimental design that allows units receiving a treatment (e.g., students; schools) to be matched with and compared to units not receiving a treatment based on the probability that a unit received a particular treatment, given a set of researcher-identified variables related to self-selected treatment participation. Propensity scores are used to adjust outcome analyses to account for self-selection bias, thereby mimicking a randomized controlled study.

Significance- Statistical test that indicates the probability that a relationship among variables as large or larger as that found in a sample could have been drawn randomly from a population in which there is no relationship.

Quasi-experimental design- A research design that attempts to test the causal impact of an independent variable without utilizing random selection and/or random assignment of participants. Families in Texas choose whether their child attends a CSP or a traditional public school; the assignment was not determined by researchers.

Definitions for key analytic terms based on [The SAGE Encyclopedia of Educational Research, Measurement, and Evaluation](#) and the [What Works Clearinghouse Procedures and Standards Handbook, Version 5.0](#).