



# Charter School Program Grant Implementation Report, 2023–24 and 2024–25

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# Executive Summary

In 2020, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) secured a five-year, \$90 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education under the Expanding Opportunity Through Quality Charter Schools Program (CSP) Grants to State Entities. With this grant, Texas offered non-competitive and competitive, two-year grants of up to \$900,000 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 students identified as educationally disadvantaged. These grants assist eligible applicants in opening and preparing for the operation of newly authorized charter schools and replicated high-quality schools.

TEA contracted with McREL International (McREL) and Gibson Consulting Group (Gibson) to conduct an evaluation of CSP grant cohorts over a four-year period. The evaluation work began in spring 2022 and continued through fall 2025. Data collected for this evaluation, including annual surveys of CSP grantee principals and data gathered during site visits (comprising principal interviews, teacher focus groups, and classroom observations), describe grantees' experiences establishing new charter school campuses during the two-year grant period. The CSP campus administrator survey and the site visit data collection examined an extensive range of campus establishment activities. CSP principals and staff described the development of a clear mission and vision for their campus, establishing a positive culture and climate for staff and students, recruiting, hiring and retaining teachers, as well as building connections to the community and recruiting students to the campus. They also provided information about implementing essential campus instructional practices, supporting diverse learnings, and establishing systems to support positive student behavior. Site visits also included classroom observations which describe, on average, some of the instructional strengths and areas for growth among these new campuses.

This report focuses on the experiences of CSP Cohort 2, Cohort 3, and Cohort 4 grantees during the initial years of the grant.<sup>1</sup> The findings are divided into two chapters. The first chapter focuses on CSP Cohort 2 and Cohort 3 grantees during the 2023–24 school year. The second chapter focuses on CSP Cohort 2 grantees, that continued to receive funding, as well as Cohort 3 and Cohort 4 grantees 2024–25 school. Although this evaluation examines the experiences of campus by their funding cohort, there were few consistent trends within or across cohorts; each of these newly established campuses was on their own unique journey. Some were headed by experienced principals, while others had leaders who

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<sup>1</sup> A previously published report describes the establishment experiences of Cohort 1: [Charter School Program Grant Implementation Report, 2021–22 and 2022–23](#).

were newer to the role. Some campuses were true “start-ups” with an innovative approach, mission, and vision for serving the community, that were developing all their practices from the ground up. Other campuses were replicating established, effective charter models with the support of the founding organization, well established systems and curricula, and the benefit of colleagues running similar schools. Other CSP grantee campuses were implementing innovative approaches with a community partner within an established independent school district.

Although it is not possible to describe typical CSP grantee campus establishment experience, during the process of writing the first CSP Implementation Report, the evaluation team identified three aspects of development that seemed particularly timely, relevant, and important to campus long-term success creating campuses where students and teachers would thrive: recruiting and retaining teachers, establishing a positive campus culture and climate, and establishing instructional best practices.

## Recruiting and Retaining Teachers

In both school years examined in this report, most CSP principals agreed that they had been able to recruit high quality teachers to their campus. Although hiring high-quality teachers was one of the most consistent challenges CSP principals faced; fewer than one-third indicated that any aspect of recruiting, hiring, and retaining teachers was easier than in the year prior to the study. There were some consistent trends in the methods principals used to recruit teachers to their campus. Across school years and cohorts, CSP principals were most likely to report that word-of-mouth recruitment, and current teachers recruiting colleagues were particularly effective methods for attracting high-quality educators to their campus. Most CSP principals also agreed that they had established strong induction processes for their newly hired teachers.

*I make sure to give teachers voice and choice in the things that they are a part of. So, in that sense, they feel valued and respected and seen...And so anything that they bring to me, it doesn't fall by the wayside. Because to me, that's making deposits into that trust bank and to continuing to build a positive school culture. And hence they stick around*

- Principal

The leaders of new charter school campuses also had showed consistency in their hiring priorities. As you might expect in campuses with unique or innovative instructional practices and the goal of serving students who might be transferring from lower performing campuses, CSP principals focused on hiring teachers who were a “fit” for the educational mission of the campus, who had a passion for teaching, and who had demonstrated instructional effectiveness. These characteristics were prioritized over teachers’ years of experience or their previous experience teaching in charter school campus. CSP principals and teachers highlighted some of the instructional leadership practices and aspects of campus culture that encouraged teachers to stay on their new campus. These activities were often investments in educators as professionals, such as coaching and mentoring, providing access to roles as teacher leaders, or opportunities to explore options for growth as aspiring administrators.



Like other campus leaders across the state, CSP principals face some systemic barriers to recruiting and retaining high-quality educators. Non-competitive salaries, the lack of sufficient funding for facilities, and the lack of a robust teacher preparation pipeline all contribute to a constrained hiring pool for these newly established charter campuses.

## Establishing a Positive Campus Culture and Climate

Quickly establishing a positive campus climate and culture is a critical task for any newly launched school, which has far-reaching implications for staff recruitment and retention, student recruitment and retention, building trust with parents, and establishing a solid reputation in the community. For many CSP principals, this process started with developing a clear vision for the campus that is safe, that has high expectations for students and teachers, and a culture of shared success.

CSP principals and teachers spoke to the importance of building relationships with students and families as the foundation of accomplishing high academic expectations for all. Principals noted the value of open-door policies and prioritizing that all staff or all administrators know every student's name. Systems and routines that supported staff and students getting to know each other across grade levels were seen as valuable aspects of this work, as were setting expectations for mutual respect and belonging among staff and students. Setting clear behavior expectations, rewarding positive behavior, and activity building students' interpersonal skills were other key components of developing a positive culture for students.

CSP principals created a positive climate for the adults in their community in several ways. Teachers consistently valued principals who listened to their feedback on campus processes, invited them to contribute to decision-making, and who trusted them as professionals. CSP built a positive culture for families by seeking and responding to their feedback from families, engaging them in campus activities and events, and valuing them as partners in their students' educational journey.

*I think it's that we don't only focus on academics. We want them to learn, but we want, first, for them to be happy. We know that if they're happy kids, they'll be good learners. So, I like that flexibility, that the focus is not only on academics, but also on the whole child."*

- Teacher

## Establishing Instructional Best Practices

One of the main objectives of the CSP grant is to help launch new charter school campuses for students in traditionally underserved communities and who may need additional support and resources to meet their highest potential. For this reason, quickly establishing a strong instructional team and effective

instructional practices is critically important. Among the practices that were consistently well established across new CSP campuses were frequent opportunities to meet in professional learning communities, dedicated time to during the school day to collaborate with colleagues and providing teachers with the flexibility to modify the curriculum or lesson plans to adjust to student needs. CSP principals also prioritized implementing systems in which administrators provided mentoring, direct instructional coaching, or modeling lessons. Teachers greatly valued direct, timely feedback, that allowed them to quickly adjust their instruction.

*"We also offer student hours. All of us have to offer extra, support, academic support, academic support outside of [class]. It's really nice to have that hour to really get to work one-on-one with kids that you're not able to within the school day."*

- Teacher

For some CSP campuses, curricular and instructional innovations were tightly aligned to the mission of the campus. For example, some campuses had a focus on project-based learning or integrated real-world applications as a way of challenging and engaging all learners. Many CSP campuses reported implementing evidence-based Tier I instruction during the school day and providing students with additional instructional time, through before- or after-school tutoring opportunities or additional small-group instruction during the school day if it was needed to help students achieve rigorous learning objectives. Many campuses made progress in establishing their instructional practices in the early years, and most reported they were using evidence-based practices in their Tier I classrooms. However, some campuses were still building the data-driven multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) they needed to best meet the needs of their special education students and other students who were not yet up to grade-level standards.

Across school years, cohorts and grade levels, there were some common trends in observed instructional practices. CSP classrooms tended to have higher observation ratings on teacher emotional support and classroom organization structures than on the use of instructional strategies that encourage higher-order thinking skills and encourage students to discuss their understanding. This is due, in part, to the fact that these campuses were still early in their development of strong instructional systems, and because nationally schools have lower average ratings on the sorts of teacher-student interactions that are associated with rigorous instruction.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Looking across the 2023–24 and 2024–25 school years and three CSP cohorts, it's clear that most CSP grantees made strides in establishing their charter school campuses. New CSP campuses prioritized establishing a clear mission and vision for their school and building strong, collegial relationships among staff, and with students and families. These CSP campuses opened their doors during a time when it is somewhat difficult to recruit and retain high-quality teachers, but campus leaders were clear in their vision about the teacher skill sets and mindsets that will best serve their school communities and

leveraged their campus and collegial networks to find strong candidates. The processes of establishing strong Tier I instructional practices also were underway, as was the development of systems and structures for supporting students who need additional support to achieve their highest goals.

If there are future opportunities to administer CSP grants, we encourage TEA to consider ways to structure the grant application process and grant support in ways that are aligned with the learnings from this evaluation. For example, future grant applications could request information about plans for developing the campus instructional leadership practices, recruiting teachers, or about implementing MTSS and student behavior management systems. Application materials could also encourage grantees to use the planning period for their grant to fully develop teacher and student support systems prior to serving students.

This descriptive portion of the CSP evaluation focused on differences between funding cohorts and described the “average” CSP campus establishment experience; however, we see some opportunities to tell a more differentiated story in future evaluations. For example, it may be valuable to ask evaluation questions about the establishment process for campuses that have experienced leaders compared to those who are earlier in their career, or to compare the experiences of the campuses that replicated existing or high-quality charter school models to those that are implementing a new framework. The small number of grantees within each cohort and year constrained the types of comparative analyses that could be conducted in this report; however, in future reports it may be possible to examine campuses with different characteristics if they are pooled across funding cohorts.

## Findings Highlights

This report summarizes the experiences of charter school campus leaders and teachers across two school years and three cohorts of CSP grantees. Because there were few discernible differences among the cohorts, these highlights focus on the aspects of charter campus establishment that were consistent across the spring 2024 and spring 2025 surveys and site visits, with an emphasis on three facets of implementation that emerged as important during in the first two years of the CSP grant: *teacher recruitment and retention, the establishment of a positive school culture and climate, and the implementation of strong instructional practices and the leadership actions that support these practices*. These highlights also include a few notes on sources of support for these new charter school campuses including some of the common uses of CSP grant funds.

## Teacher recruitment and retention

The first CSP cohort, which established their charter campuses during the 2021–22 and 2022–23 school years, recruited and hired teachers during the challenging post-COVID period which was marked by high rates of teachers leaving the profession and teacher shortages across all types of public schools.<sup>2</sup> Although conditions have improved for the CSP cohorts examined in this study, principals were more likely to *agree* than *strongly agree* that they were able to recruit highly qualified teachers to their campuses. Among those CSP campuses that have been open for more than one school year, few principals reported that it was easier to recruit high quality candidates, or that they have had more high-quality candidates compared to prior years.

However, many principals agreed that they had established effective practices for selecting and hiring qualified teachers. CSP principals reported that the most effective recruiting practices were word-of-mouth communication about the campus, current teachers recruiting colleagues, and online advertisements. When recruiting and hiring, CSP principals prioritized finding teachers with content area expertise, evidence of instructional effectiveness, and teacher fit with the mission of the campus, over years of experience or prior experience teaching or teaching on a charter school campus.

## Establishing a positive school climate and culture

During the first two years of charter campus establishment, most CSP principals believed that they had effectively established a campus vision focused on a safe environment, set high expectations for students and staff, developed a culture of shared success, and ensured that campus staff shared a common set of beliefs about student learning. Most principals also believed they had created a safe and healthy work environment for teachers and that they provided teachers the support they needed to be successful. Principals were less certain they had provided a healthy work-life balance for their teachers.

Some of the ways in which CSP principals created a positive environment for teachers was through regular celebrations of teachers and their work (e.g., Teacher of the Month), regularly soliciting staff feedback, and by having an open-door policy for staff to bring their questions and concerns. Teachers also valued working in an environment where their perspectives and experiences were valued, where they had opportunities to provide regular feedback on campus processes, and where they were able to contribute to decision-making.

*Findings highlights continue on the next page.*

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<sup>2</sup> This finding is documented in the previously published [Charter School Program Grant Implementation Report, 2021–22 and 2022–23](#).



## Establishing a positive school climate and culture (continued)

Establishing a positive culture and climate for students is critically important in the early years of launching a campus. Most CSP principals were confident they had established clear behavior expectations for students and that they had developed a culture of respect among students. Some of the practices that supported positive student behavior and respectful relationships included incorporating social and emotional learning into the curriculum and providing incentives and rewards for positive student behavior.

In the early years of campus establishment, CSP principals also focused on the climate they created for parents and guardians as well as the broader community around the school, although principals were less likely to report that they had implemented those aspects of campus climate *to a great extent*. Some of the engagement practices that were well-established during the first two years were interacting with parents and guardians during student-related conferences and providing regular communication about their students' progress.

Many CSP campuses encouraged parent and guardian engagement through open houses and other campus events; engaging them in fundraising activities or through formal parent organizations was somewhat less common. Principals and teachers emphasized the importance of communicating with parents and guardians frequently as partners in their students' academic growth. Principals also noted the importance of building trust with the parent and guardian community and described community events as positive ways to draw parents and guardians into the building to strengthening those relationships. For example, school staff had many examples of planning events that were aligned to the needs of their community (e.g., parent workshops, food pantry).

## Strong instructional practices and support

In the first two years of campus establishment, just over half of CSP principals reported that strong classroom routines and instructional practices were in place *to a great extent*. The practices that principals reported as occurring most frequently were:

- providing dedicated time for teachers to collaborate,
- providing time for professional learning community meetings,
- allowing teachers flexibility in the way they used curricula and lesson plans, and providing coaching support for teachers.

Formal observations, instructional rounds, and reviewing student data occurred less frequently.

*Findings highlights continue on the next page.*

## Strong instructional practices and support (continued)

CSP principals and teachers highlighted the importance of regular classroom walkthroughs and providing timely – ideally immediate – feedback to teachers, particularly for those who were new to the campus or to teaching. Teachers particularly valued when administrators or instructional coaches took the opportunity to model lessons and instructional strategies to make their expectations clear. Some principals noted that one of the most important aspects of developing instructional leaders was building internal consistency within the leadership team, so that teachers would receive similar feedback regardless of which member of the team conducted classroom walkthroughs or provided coaching.

In addition to implementing practices to support ongoing teacher growth and development, CSP campuses established many student-focused systems and processes. Around two-thirds of CSP principals reported that their campus implemented evidence-based Tier I practices in their classrooms and most reported that their campus provided differentiated and small group instruction in their classrooms for students who needed it.

Other aspects of instructional practice, like multi-tiered systems of support were underway, but in some cases had not been implemented *to a great extent*. Some of the less consistently implemented practices included the use of universal screeners, progress monitoring procedures for at-risk students, and the implementation of Tier 2 push-in or pull-out services. In focus groups, some teachers expressed concerns about their ability to address students' individualized needs if they lacked tools and strategies to be effective or in cases where there was an insufficient number of instructional staff. Offering before- or after-school tutoring was one common way of providing additional small-group instruction using the current levels of staff.

During the first two years of campus establishment, CSP campuses showed consistent trends in observed instructional quality across cohorts and grade levels as measured by the CLASS® observation tool. On average, classrooms had the highest ratings in the *classroom organization* domain which indicates that most classrooms were orderly, productive, and that student behavior management was effective. The *student emotional support* and *student engagement* ratings were next highest, indicating that on average, newly established CSP classrooms have a moderately-high positive climate, and that teachers were sensitive to students' needs and perspectives. *Instructional support* was the lowest rated domain in the first two years; however, it's important to note that this domain historically yields the lowest scores nationally due to its rigorous emphasis on support for higher-order thinking skills, language modeling, and instructional dialogue between students and teachers.

*Findings highlights continue on the next page.*

## Sources of support and uses of CSP grant funds

Establishing a new charter school campus is a challenging undertaking and principals relied on numerous sources of support during this time. CSP principals most frequently reported relying on their district central office for support establishing their new campus, although more than a quarter indicated that they relied on TEA charter school division staff and TEA grants staff during the early stages of implementation. CSP principals also emphasized the support received from their own collegial networks such as other charter school campus principals, central office staff, and other types of professional mentors and coaches. They greatly valued the informal support and guidance from colleagues who had similar experiences and who had faced similar professional challenges.

CSP grant funds were another important source of support during the campus planning and early implementation periods. Two of the most frequently cited uses of CSP grant funds were paying for instructional materials and for campus technology purchases. Once CSP students were serving students, smaller numbers of CSP campuses used their grant funds to create community awareness for their charter school campus, to cover costs associated with student recruitment, or for the short-term coverage of teacher and other staff salaries or for paying for building renovations or rent.

