

Interim Report

THE EVALUATION OF THE TEXAS HIGH SCHOOL COMPLETION AND SUCCESS GRANT INITIATIVE

CYCLE 2

for the

Texas Education Agency February 16, 2007

The Evaluation Team of:



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A. Executive Summary

Introduction

Over the last several years, Texas has instituted a number of initiatives designed to improve the quality of high school programs and increase graduation rates and success of high school students. According to the Texas Education Agency (TEA) 2004-05 Academic Information Excellence System (AEIS) report, approximately 85 percent of Texas high school seniors graduated in the class of 2004. However, certain groups of Texas students fare better than others, with almost 90 percent of White students graduating, compared to 78 percent of Hispanic and 83 percent of African American students completing high school and graduating.

During the 78th session of the Texas Legislature in 2003, Article III, Rider 67 of the General Appropriations Act authorized the Texas High School Completion and Success (THSCS) Program. The THSCS Program was designed to target under-performing high school campuses through campus- and student-level interventions. In 2003, THSCS Cycle 1 grants were awarded to 129 school districts and charter schools. A separate evaluation report for Cycle 1 was prepared for TEA by Texas A&M University.

In 2004, Cycle 2 grants were awarded to 106 school districts and open enrollment charter schools. Cycle 2 programs, or interventions, were implemented at 173 campuses within these districts. The grant period was originally scheduled for October 2004 to August 2006. However, TEA extended the end date of the Cycle 2 Grant to February 2007. This Interim Report presents findings on the progress and impact of THSCS Cycle 2 as of the fall of 2006

TEA identified eight guiding principles for applicants to use in designing THSCS Program strategies and activities: high expectations and performance-based accountability; personalized learning environment; common focus and shared values; staff development and time to collaborate; learning partnerships with parents and the community; support and networking; technology as a tool; and coordinated resources. Schools were free to design and select their own interventions based on these principles. The evaluation team grouped the interventions into 26 categories. Eight of the categories were campus-level interventions that affect the entire school, and 18 of the categories were student-level interventions that directly affect targeted students in the school. A complete list of intervention categories, along with descriptions, is provided as *Appendix A*.

Implementation of THSCS, Cycle 2 Interventions

Of the 173 campuses participating in the THSCS Program, 102 campuses, or approximately 60 percent, submitted student participation data as part of this study. A total of 17,884 students participated in THSCS interventions at these 102 campuses during the 2005-06 school year. Participating students represented approximately 14 percent of the total enrollment of the campuses reporting.

Campuses reported the number of contact hours each student received for a particular intervention, such as tutoring or *accelerated instruction in mathematics*. The interventions with

the highest number of contact hours per student were *credit accrual in mathematics* (32.3), *credit accrual* in ELA and *accelerated instruction in mathematics* (27.8 each), and *accelerated instruction in ELA* (24.7). Thirty-seven percent of students who took part in THSCS, participated in two or more interventions funded through this grant program.

The implementation of specific interventions varied from campus to campus. Of all of the possible student-level interventions, grant funds were used most frequently for *tutoring*, *credit accrual*, *accelerated instruction*, *early interventions*, and *programs for the academically at-risk*. More students participated in math-focused interventions than ELA-related interventions. A larger proportion of students participated in *accelerated instruction* (21.6 percent) and *credit accrual* (13.2 percent) in mathematics than *accelerated instruction* (11 percent) and *credit accrual* (5.8 percent) in English language arts.

A total of 114 campuses reported information regarding campus-level interventions as of spring 2006. Of the campus-level interventions, the most common were increasing *parental involvement*, *developing partnerships with colleges*, offering *teacher professional development*, and hiring *additional instructional support staff*.

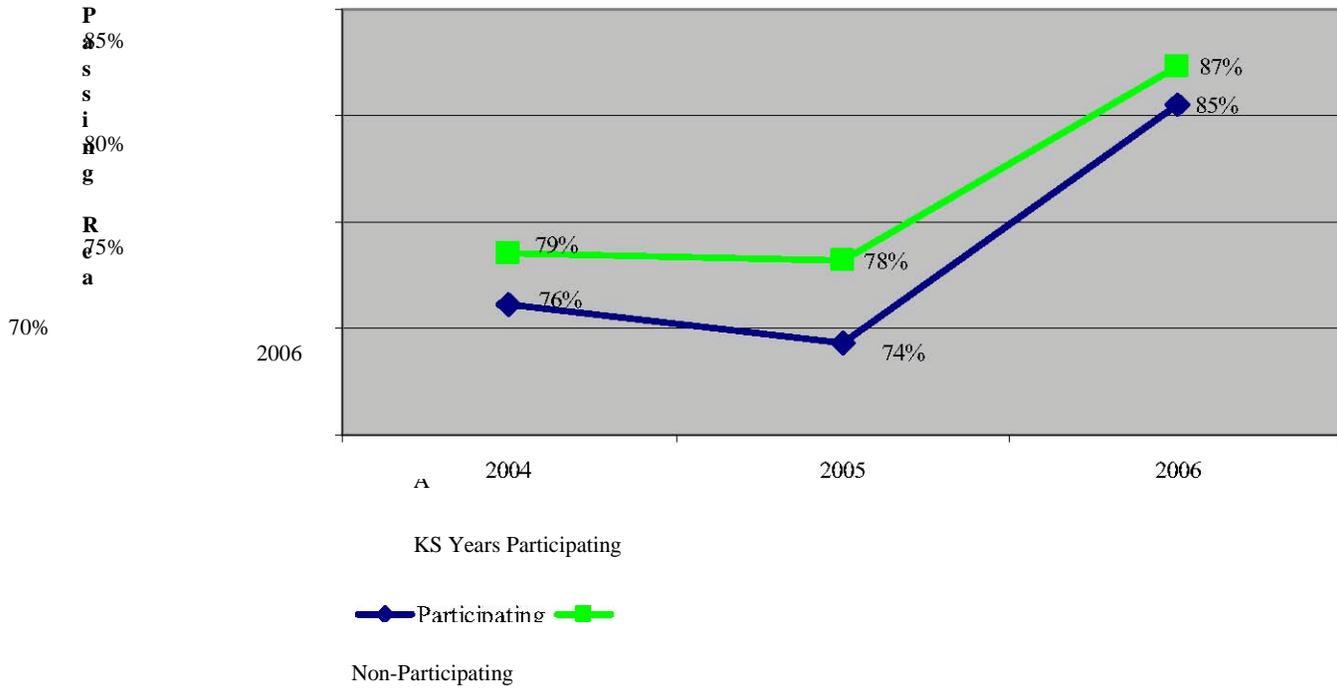
Impact of THSCS Cycle 2 on TAKS Performance

Because the THSCS Grant Program was not established as an experimental or quasi-experimental design, it cannot be determined whether the interventions directly caused an increase in student performance. However, it is possible in some cases to show that participation in the program is correlated with certain student outcomes. While there are some exceptions, students who participated in THSCS interventions showed improved Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) performance to a degree that was statistically significant. This is a major finding of this Interim Report.

Exhibit A-1 shows the change in TAKS Reading performance between 2004 and 2006 for students at THSCS campuses who participated in interventions and those who did not. Since the interventions were implemented in 2004-05, 2003-04 is considered to be the baseline year; 2004-05 is considered to be the first year of the program; and 2005-06 is considered to be the second year of the program. Only students who had valid TAKS scores in each of the three years were included in this analysis, so that change over time could be tracked for each student.

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Exhibit A-1 TAKS Reading Performance over Three Years



Source: SEDL database (participation), TEA Student Assessment

*Note: N for participants = 8,996
*Note: N for non-participants = 84,469

Those students who would eventually be included in one of the student level interventions initially showed a 3-percentage point deficit to the other students at their schools in 2004. This increased to a 4-percentage point deficit in 2005. In 2006, the second year of THSCS Cycle 2 implementation, the gap in TAKS Reading decreased to 2-percentage points. While passing rates for participants did not reach the level of non-participants, the smaller gap indicates that participation in the THSCS Program may have led to improved TAKS performance.

The results are similar for TAKS Mathematics. **Exhibit A-2** presents the same trend of TAKS passing rates for participating and non-participating students.

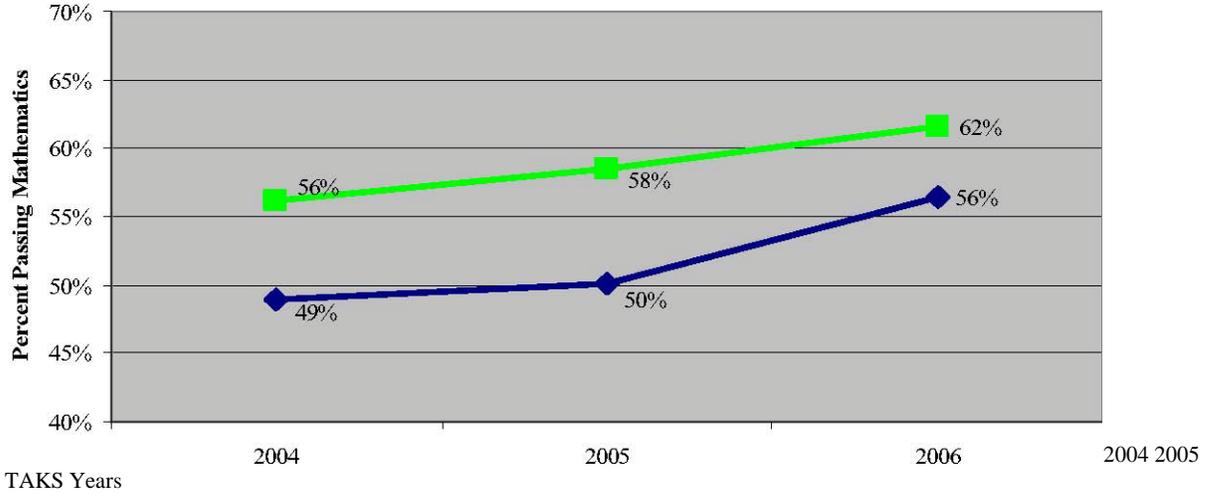
Participating Non-Participating

Source: SEDL database (participation), TEA Student Assessment

*Note: N for participants = 8,913

*Note: N for non-participants = 83,469

Exhibit A-2 TAKS Mathematics Performance over Three Years



In 2004, the students who later participated in one of the student-level THSCS interventions initially had a TAKS passing rate that was approximately 7-percentage

points behind nonparticipating students. This increased to an 8-percentage point deficit in 2005. In 2006, the deficit decreased to 6-percentage points. Although the performance gap was not closed to the extent seen in reading, the initial differences were greater. This data suggest that the interventions had a positive impact on student performance in mathematics.

TAKS performance of participating students was also analyzed by student ethnicity for reading and mathematics. **Exhibit A-3** presents TAKS Reading passing rates for African-American, Hispanic, and White students in the THSCS program from 2004 through 2006.

95% 90% 85% 80%

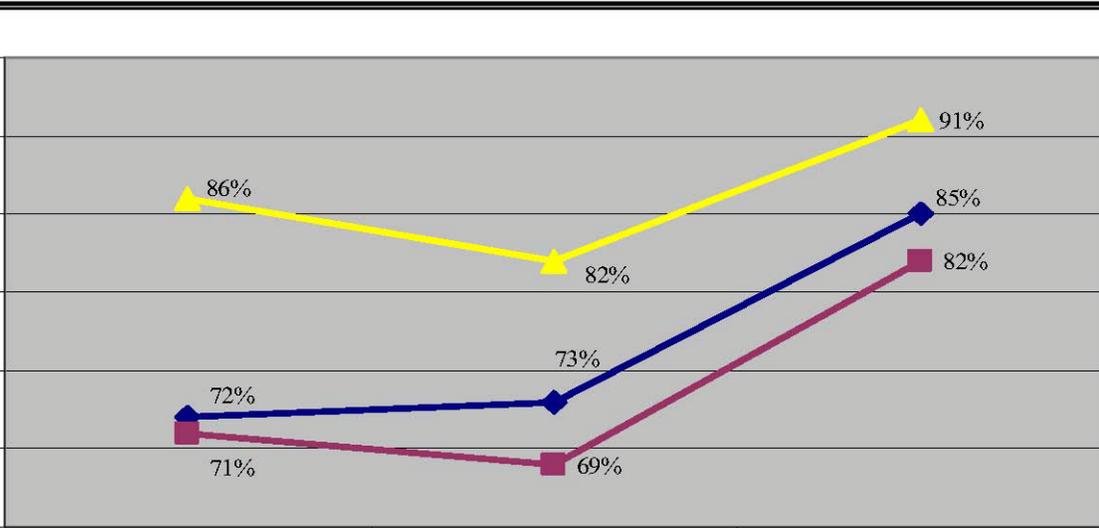
Exhibit A-3

TAKS Reading Performance by Ethnicity for Three Years

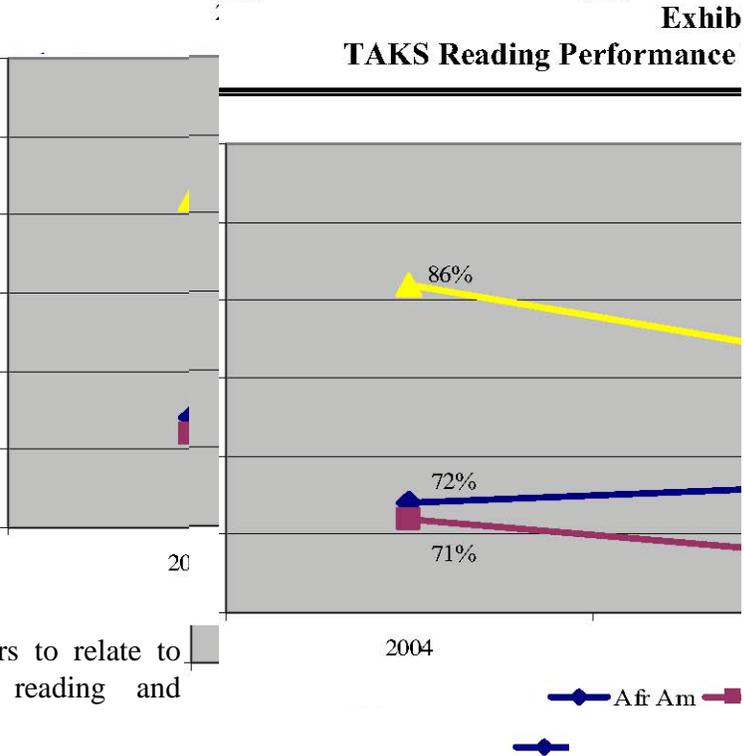
75% 70% 65%

Source: SEDL database (participation), TEA Student Assessment
 *Note: Number of participants = 8,996

These results show a closing gap between African-American and Hispanic student passing rates and TAKS Reading passing rates for White students in 2006. In 2004, the TAKS



Reading passing rates for White students (86 percent) was 14-percentage points higher than African-American students (72 percent), and 15-percentage points higher than Hispanic students (71 percent). By 2006, the gap had closed to 6-percentage points for African American students and 9-percentage points for Hispanic students. White students participating in the THSCS Program also showed gains in 2006. Unlike TAKS Reading, TAKS Mathematics passing rates did not show any discernible closing of performance gaps among student ethnicity groups.



Additional statistical analyses show that participation in THSCS interventions appears to relate to improved TAKS performance in both reading and mathematics.

Program Implementation

Through a combination of on-site visits and a survey to Cycle 2 grantees, the evaluation team assessed the degree to which interventions were implemented, the factors that contributed to or hindered implementation, and the degree to which the implementation affected school environment and culture.

Overall, these findings tend to show that the most successfully implemented Cycle 2 grant interventions were created or designed to address immediate student needs related to high school retention and graduation. Programs aimed at college readiness and later enrollment in college were either not addressed or not successfully implemented in these schools.

The data indicated that the frequently implemented programs (*tutoring, credit accrual, accelerated instruction, early interventions, and programs for the academically at-risk*) were mostly to fully implemented, and that they were being effectively implemented. Programs experiencing more difficulty in implementation included *dual credit courses, advanced placement programs, work study, mentoring, and parental involvement activities*. A review of interview responses from grantees that were highly successful in implementing their interventions indicated that their success was in large part due to the fact that they proposed and implemented relatively small and manageable scopes of work directed at addressing existing needs of the schools. Inappropriate staffing and/or resources, as well as lack of time were frequently reported as reasons for failing to implement program activities.

Factors that facilitated the successful implementation of program activities included district support, strong school leadership, and school staff support and buy-in. Site visit data confirmed that strong leadership and a coordination between the district and staff responsible for implementing the interventions were characteristics of successfully implemented interventions.

From survey data, the factor most frequently identified as hindering program implementation was a lack of time. However, in addition to the time factor, site visit participants noted that hindering factors were also associated with poor planning, over-commitments, lack of staff buy-in, insufficient resources, and inadequate staff development and training. Further discussions with site visit participants revealed the importance of planning and having program staff contribute to the planning process.

With respect to outcomes of the grantee interventions, survey data focused primarily on school environment and culture. Findings indicated that students received more personalized learning opportunities and access to technology/instructional resources, and that school staff had increased levels of common values for high expectations in their students than prior to the grant interventions. Interview and focus group participants reported an increased ability to identify and address student weaknesses and instructional needs, primarily due to grant activities such as developing and using *Individual Graduation Plans (IGPs), targeted counseling services, and early intervention programs*. Across the sites, interviewees commented on how the grant program had positively impacted students in a number of ways including improved attendance, recovery of course credits, increased graduation rates, and higher TAKS performance. Students themselves spoke of higher levels of motivation to complete high school and confidence that they could attain that goal.

Many of the THSCS grant interventions, such as *credit recovery, accelerated instruction, and tutoring*, enhanced the ways schools addressed the needs of students in at-risk situations (dropping out of school, failing courses, or failing TAKS). This was exemplified by school staff working together to provide students with individualized learning opportunities that addressed their particular needs and by holding high expectations for achievement. These changes occurred largely as a result of strong leadership, careful planning, and an organized, committed staff who held a common vision for student achievement in the school.

Cost Analysis of THSCS Cycle 2

Amounts awarded to school districts through THSCS Cycle 2 ranged from \$15,000 to \$600,000. Overall, school districts spent approximately 78 percent of the total Cycle 2 grant funds that were awarded as of May 31, 2006. TEA extended the grant period from August 31, 2006 to February 28, 2007. The largest percentage of expenditures to date is salaries and benefits at 48 percent followed by supplies and materials at 32 percent.

Expenditures at the intervention level are not available because the program did not require expenditures to be tracked at this level. The evaluation team plans to reconstruct intervention level costs of selected Top 20 High Performing Schools on site visits in early 2007 and will report findings in the Final Report in the summer of 2007. Full report text: http://www.tea.state.tx.us/opge/progeval/HighSchoolCollege/THSCS_Cycle2_interim_report.pdf