

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

CYCLE 1 SUSTAINABILITY SURVEY RESULTS

for the
Texas Education Agency

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In March 2005, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) retained the evaluation team of Gibson Consulting Group, Inc. and Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (Gibson/SEDL) to conduct a third-party evaluation of the Texas High School Completion and Success (THSCS) grant program. A component of the evaluation was to provide TEA with information about the sustainability of the high school interventions in Texas schools that were originally implemented and supported with THSCS, Cycle 1 grants. Grants were awarded in spring 2004 to 129 school districts and open enrollment charter schools, serving a total of 244 campuses located throughout Texas. The majority of grantees were situated in relatively large cities, had an average student enrollment of approximately 1,000 students, and a consistently lower passing rate on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test. The grant period for the Cycle 1 program extended from February 1, 2004 through February 28, 2006.

The following questions guided the evaluation of Cycle 1 sustainability:

- A. To what degree have the THSCS, Cycle 1 intervention activities continued after grant funds ended?
- B. What factors influenced whether the THSCS, Cycle 1 interventions continued after the grant ended?
- C. What changes have occurred as a result of the THSCS, Cycle 1 grant program?

The Gibson/SEDL team administered a survey to 238 Cycle 1 grantees in September 2006 to gather post-grant information regarding the sustainability of the Cycle 1 grant interventions seven months after grant funds discontinued. The surveys were mailed to the campus principals at the Cycle 1 schools who were asked to complete the survey themselves or to redirect it to be completed by someone familiar with the grant-supported activities on the campus. A total of 104 surveys were completed, resulting in a 45% response rate (refer to **Table 1**). A response bias check was conducted to examine whether responses from those who submitted a completed survey differed in any major way from those who did not respond to the survey. Telephone calls were made to a random sample of non-respondents (n=26) who were asked to complete the survey over the telephone. An analysis of their responses, in comparison to those who returned or completed surveys online, revealed no statistically significant differences in ratings on the survey items.

This report summarizes findings obtained from the sustainability survey. The purposes of this survey are to ensure that results of particular interventions are fully recognized and to support and inform the development and implementation of future cycles of funding or new high school initiatives.

Below are major findings from the Cycle 1 sustainability survey organized around the evaluation questions.

A. Key survey findings regarding the degree that THSCS, Cycle 1 intervention activities continued after grant funds ended.

- The majority of interventions implemented with THSCS, Cycle 1 funds were sustained seven months after funding had ceased. Only five of the survey respondents reported that they had completely discontinued Cycle 1 intervention activities at the end of the grant period.
- During the grant period, 52 percent of the Cycle 1 schools used grant funds to pay for additional staff to implement the grant activities. At the time of the survey, 34 percent of the schools reported that the staff positions supported by grant funds still existed at the campus and were being supported by a combination of local, state, federal, and external grant funds. For campuses that discontinued the grant-supported positions, 50 percent noted that intervention activities were either partially or wholly maintained through transferring role-responsibilities to the regular school staff.

B. Key survey findings on factors that influenced whether the THSCS, Cycle 1 interventions continued after the grant ended.

- School leadership, staff buy-in, and evidence of desired program outcomes were perceived as instrumental in maintaining program activities.
- Insufficient monetary resources, insufficient staff resources, and a lack of evidence of desired program effects were factors that influenced decisions not to continue Cycle 1 grant intervention activities.

C. Key survey findings on changes that have occurred as a result of the THSCS, Cycle 1 grant program.

- Overall, 75 percent of the respondents agreed that the Cycle 1 grant program had a positive effect on student achievement. Increased credit recovery and graduation rates were the most frequently cited outcomes. Small to moderate changes were reported with respect to students taking advanced level courses, being ready for college, and attending college.
- In terms of school-level outcomes, respondents perceived the largest influence of the Cycle 1 program was providing increased student support services. A small to moderate impact on instruction and curriculum was noted. Parental involvement in the schools, the schools' professional development programs, and school-wide reform generally were perceived to have been impacted the least.
- Overall, respondents perceived that the grant program worked well for their schools, that the program strategies implemented at their school will continue in future years, and that they would implement the THSCS interventions if they went to another school.
- Finally, by the end of the 2004-05 school year, the mean percent of students receiving individual graduation plans (IGPs) was 83 percent. By the end of the 2005-06 school year, schools reported, on average, a 7 percent increase in the number of graduation plans developed (statistically significant difference: $t = 4.6, p < .001$). When asked how likely IGPs would continue to be developed, 94 percent of survey respondents indicated that it

would be very likely, with the vast majority of them indicating it would be extremely likely.

Limitations of Evaluation Findings

While survey findings indicate that sustainability has occurred to a large degree, either entirely or partially, these findings are based on self-reported data. Inherent biases to survey data exist (e.g., social desirability, evasiveness) and may impact the reliability of the data. To gain a more stable estimate of program sustainability, multiple data sources should be employed allowing for a triangulation of data to support survey findings. Further, survey findings only reflect short-term sustainability as the current school year is the first since funding ended. Additional evaluation data is needed to assess the extent that sustainability of these Cycle 1 programs continues on a long-term basis.

Link to complete report:

http://www.tea.state.tx.us/opge/progeval/HighSchoolCollege/thscs_c1_sustainability.pdf