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Interim Report
Qualitative Analysis of Cycle 1 Programs

January 2007

Executive Summary

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The evaluation was guided by the following objectives:

- **To document grant implementation**
The evaluation describes grant implementation through assessing school context and elements important to school change, such as capacity, support, focus, pedagogy, outcomes, and school climate.
- **To extract preliminary indications of effective components and promising practices**
The evaluation identifies schools associated with strong overall implementation and provides preliminary analysis of promising practices and effective redesign components.

The evaluation was based on the following questions:

1. **H 414 9n(-2747e)-4-3(a)-30(l)17454eyions:**

The evaluation findings include:

descriptive statistics across various indicators, such as elements of school change, school climate, overall implementation, and assessment of TAP support.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Summary of early aspects of grant implementation including case studies and qualitative analysis at twelve Cycle 1 schools, which received their grant funds in April 2005, is the focus of this Interim Report. Also included is School 5, a site non-competitively funded by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) as a part of a multi-school THSP redesign project in a major urban district, for a total of 13 schools. Key study components included case studies of the Cycle 1 schools and a cross-site analysis summarizing qualitative findings. Quantitative findings will be presented in the Final Report in December 2007.

Evaluators used all data points available to assess the strength of implementation with a 53-point overall scale that covers important HSRR components by breaking each component into sections that focus on measurable standards. After reviewing grant applications, budgets, school documents, progress reports submitted to TEA by the schools, site visit data, and survey data, evaluators assigned an implementation score to each school on each of the implementation components (USDE, 2003b). (See Appendix A for protocol.) Scores on each of the components were then summed, and an overall implementation score was assigned to each school that corresponds with one of five school reform implementation levels (Bodilly, 1998). Schools were then categorized into three implementation-level groups. Clear differences arose for one group of schools, which included the three charter schools and which served student populations very unlike the students in the other nine schools. This group included a residential facility and three other schools that are assessed under the TEA Alternative Education Accountability. Although their implementation scores are quite high, the circumstances at these schools, such as small number of teachers needing to be trained, make them difficult to compare to the regular public schools.

The implementation level and type of school are listed in Table E.1 for each of the sites.

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For the ve schools identi ed for inclusion in the high implementation

Self-assessed implementation levels from school progress reports were then compared to the overall implementation categories assigned by evaluators. Results from the self-reported implementation levels contradicted the implementation category scores. Schools with high levels of implementation on the 53-point scale used by evaluators averaged 2.83 on a scale of 5 for the self-assessed school implementation score. Schools with middle-level implementation had an average score of 3.04, while schools with low levels of implementation rated this construct an average of 3.14. (See Table E.2 for mean self-assessed implementation score by group.)

The discrepancy between overall implementation score calculated by evaluators and the self-assessed implementation score may result from low-implementing schools lacking a thorough understanding of the HSRR grant requirements, and therefore not fully comprehending what high levels of implementation should look like. Rather the influx of money is used to fill badly needed gaps in basic services and supplies, which is greatly appreciated by staff.

School 1 is part of a rural school district in East-central Texas. Student enrollment in 2005–06 was 330 students. Sixty-two percent of students are African American, 29% Latino/Hispanic, and nine percent White. Seventy-six percent of students are economically disadvantaged, and 63% are at risk. Student mobility is 15%. The school has adopted Accelerated Schools (AS) as its HSRR program.

School 2 is part of a large urban school district in East-central Texas. Student enrollment in 2005–06 was 2,678 students. Ninety-one percent of students are Latino/Hispanic, six percent African American, three percent White, and one percent Other. Eighty-nine percent of students are economically disadvantaged, and 82% are considered at risk. Student mobility is 24%. The school has adopted Schools for a New Society (SNS) as its HSRR program.

School 3 is part of a large urban school district in Central Texas. Student enrollment in 2005–06 was 735 students. Eighty-one percent of students are Latino/Hispanic, 18% African American, two percent White, and one percent Other. Eighty-three percent of students are economically disadvantaged, and 87% are at risk. Student mobility is 40%. The school has adopted High Schools at Work (HSTW) as its HSRR program.

reported supporting the model once it was implemented. It was less common in middle-level implementation schools. Locally developed plans varied widely in terms of unified vision, specificity, and support structures. About a third of grantees implemented some form of smaller learning communities.

Redesign funds equipped needy schools with basic materials and enabled them to develop credit recovery options, facilitate teacher collaboration, and increase professional development.

High-level implementation schools allocated the largest portions of their grant funds to professional salaries or contracted services, as did middle-level implementation schools. However, the middle-implementers tended to budget higher proportions of funds to categories such as capital outlay or supplies. Low-level implementation schools had a higher score on this construct than either of the other groups, which may indicate staff appreciation of the influx of money into the school, without a real understanding of the requirements of the redesign program.

Perceived effectiveness of Technical Assistance Providers varied, as did the intensity and depth of support provided by professional development. School districts generally provided little support.

Due to the wide variation in redesign approaches, schools used a variety of TAPs. Focused, intensive professional development was often associated with an external model provider, with local efforts being less cohesive and intensive. High-level implementation schools report strong support, while middle-level implementation schools indicate a weak level of TAP support. Low-implementers report varying levels of support and varying quality of the support received.

Most schools had limited initial staff involvement and staff buy-in, with limited staff understanding of redesign. Schools also faced pressure resulting from their accountability ratings.

Campus or district officials often developed the HSRR application and selected the design plan with minimal staff input. Turnover in administration resulted in limited understanding of the HSRR program by new school leaders, which impeded the garnering of staff support. While staff

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and staff in low-implementation schools reported a “wait and see” attitude. Teachers in these schools were