

# Texas Ninth Grade Transition and Intervention (TNGTI) Grant Program: January 2011 Evaluation Report



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## Executive Summary

The Texas Ninth Grade Transition and Intervention (TNGTI) grant program is a statewide initiative designed to reach ninth graders identified as at risk for dropping out of school and prepare them for academic and behavioral success in high school. TNGTI grants provide funding for districts to implement three types of support for identified students: (1) a summer transition program to introduce incoming ninth graders to high school culture and to develop their academic, social, and study skills; (2) an early warning data system to monitor program participants throughout the school year; and (3) fall and spring interventions to provide additional support to struggling students identified through the early warning data system. In 2009–10, 23 districts and 63 campuses participated in the program, beginning with a summer transition program in summer 2009.

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) contracted with Learning Point Associates, an affiliate of American Institutes for Research (AIR), and its partner, Gibson Consulting Group, Inc., to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the initial year of the TNGTI grant program. The evaluation began in June 2009. The objectives of the evaluation were to:

1. Describe and evaluate the implementation of program strategies.
2. Evaluate the impact of the program on student outcomes.
3. Evaluate the impact of the program on teacher and staff effectiveness.
4. Determine the cost effectiveness and sustainability of the program.

The focus of the January 2011 report is to describe and evaluate the implementation of the three major components of the TNGTI program throughout the course of the 2009–10 school year. Descriptive information also is provided on the perceived impact of the program on students and on teachers and staff. An analysis of impact of the program on student outcomes, specifically scores on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), also was conducted, and a summary of results is included in this report. Finally, the cost effectiveness and financial sustainability of the TNGTI program at participating campuses are discussed.

### Data and Methods

This report is based on data collected from participating districts and campuses during the fall 2009 and spring 2010 semesters. The evaluation relies on a range of quantitative, qualitative, and extant data triangulated to create a full picture of the planning and implementation of the TNGTI program. Findings are based on information from six main data sources: a January 2010 student data collection; January and April 2010 campus progress reports; interviews with district and program staff conducted in February and March 2010; and a spring staff survey administered in March 2010.<sup>1</sup> Additional data on participating campuses were obtained from the TNGTI grant applications, district and campus administrative data, and from TEA.

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<sup>1</sup> Findings from a fall 2009 campus progress report and student data collection and from summer 2009 interviews and observations are included in the *Texas Ninth Grade Transition and Intervention (TNGTI) Grant Program: Interim Evaluation Report* (Hoogstra et al., 2010).

A descriptive analysis was conducted on the quantitative data collected from the campus progress reports, staff surveys, and other available data to inform the evaluation of program implementation. The quotes and examples provided are based on the qualitative data collected from site visits conducted at a sample of nine participating campuses. Descriptions of impact analyses and financial analyses are provided in separate chapters.

## Overall Findings

The overall findings focus on three topics: implementation of the TNGTI program components (summer transition program, early warning data system, and intervention services), the perceived and actual impact of the program on students and teachers, and the financial analysis of the program. Summaries of each topic area are presented below, along with highlighted findings and recommendations for improvement based on feedback from participating campuses.

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION	
<p><b>SUMMARY:</b></p> <p><b><i>Implementation of Early Warning Data System.</i></b> Per program requirements, most campuses were using a system to track the progress of TNGTI students (85%). Of the campuses that reported an early warning data system was in place, the majority indicated that the system had been installed, data had been populated, and that the system currently was being used to identify struggling students. Nine campuses reported that they did not have an early warning data system in place or that the existing early warning data system currently was not being used.</p> <p><b><i>Changes to Early Warning Data System.</i></b> The most frequent differences reported by campuses between this year and last year were that more data were being collected to monitor students, there was one central location for all student data, and the three components of academics, attendance, and behavior were being looked at together. The majority of campuses (88%) indicated that the current system was more effective or much more effective in identifying students compared to last year.</p> <p><b><i>Early Warning Data System Barriers.</i></b> More than two thirds of campuses identified challenges to implementing the early warning data system (72%). The reported barriers included the amount of time it took to enter and update student data, difficulty in understanding the system, the incompatibility of the early warning data system with current school systems, and technical problems.</p>	<p><b>FINDINGS:</b></p> <p><b><i>The early warning data system improved the student monitoring processes at most TNGTI campuses.</i></b> More than three fourths of campuses reported that implementing an early warning data system was more effective in identifying struggling students compared to the processes from the previous school year. The early warning data system was timelier in identifying struggling students and identified at least some students who may not have been identified otherwise.</p> <p><b><i>Behavior and attendance interventions were not needed as much as expected.</i></b> The majority of program staff indicated there were fewer behavior and attendance interventions needed for TNGTI students than expected. Program staff were split on the need for academic interventions; half indicated that more services</p>

## PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION, CONTINUED

**Implementation of Interventions for TNGTI Students.** Two thirds of program staff indicated that the interventions provided at the campus were appropriate for struggling students and that students in need of interventions were receiving them. Students identified for the TNGTI program most often received academic interventions (67%), followed by attendance interventions (41%) and behavior interventions (36%) during the fall 2009 semester.

**Differences in Interventions for TNGTI Students.** Close to 77% of campuses indicated there were different interventions for TNGTI students compared to those available for students who did not participate in the program. Campuses most often reported that the frequency or intensity of the interventions was different for TNGTI students, or that the timing of the intervention services was different for this group of students. When asked to identify any additional supports provided to the TNGTI students that were not broadly available to other ninth-grade students, campuses noted that TNGTI students were usually monitored more closely than other students using the early warning data system or other means.

**Barriers to Intervention Services.** Just under half of campuses identified challenges to providing intervention services to TNGTI students. The most frequently reported barrier was finding the time to provide extra services and activities to this group of struggling students. Other respondents stated that they faced challenges with low student participation in the offered activities and lack of parent support for intervention activities.

were needed and half indicated that fewer services were needed than expected for TNGTI students.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

**Make the early warning data system compatible with other school data programs.** Campus staff reported that the early warning data system's lack of compatibility with other data programs resulted in a lot of time being spent on data entry. If the system was more compatible with other data systems, program staff could synchronize the systems and enter relevant data faster and more efficiently.

**Increase collaboration with feeder middle schools.** In planning for implementation for the next year, the majority of program staff reported that there should be more collaboration with middle schools in identifying and recruiting students for program participation.

## IMPACT OF TNGTI PROGRAM

### SUMMARY:

**The majority of program staff indicated that the TNGTI program components had at least a moderate impact on participating students.** Program staff reported that TNGTI students began the 2009–10 school year with increased confidence (93%), received fewer office referrals than expected (82%), and exceeded their expectations in academic performance (82%). Program staff also reported that TNGTI students are interacting well with other students (82%), are likely to stay in school rather than dropping out (81%), are engaged in school (80%), and are regularly attending school (80%). Teachers who had TNGTI students in class indicated that participating students had higher attendance rates than other ninth-grade students (78%) and were more likely to ask questions in class than other students (72%). Overall, program staff believed that there was a positive impact on the lives of students who participated in the TNGTI program.

**The majority of program staff reported the TNGTI program had a positive impact on teachers.** Over two thirds of teachers involved in the TNGTI program felt they had improved their own teaching abilities, had more positive energy at the start of the school year, and that the TNGTI program provided opportunities to collaborate with other teachers. The majority of respondents also indicated the program improved their work with students; teachers were able to meet incoming ninth-grade students, develop positive relationships with them, and better evaluate their academic background and skills.

**TNGTI had a positive and significant impact on the TAKS scores of participating students.** Ninth-grade students who participated in the TNGTI summer program scored **14.3 points higher on the TAKS-Reading** and **10.8 points higher on the TAKS-Math** compared to students who did not participate. Both effects were **significant at the 0.05 level**, meaning that it is highly unlikely that this difference is a result of chance.

TNGTI did not have a significant effect on the percentage of participating students who met or exceeded TAKS standards on the TAKS-Math or TAKS-Reading.

### FINDINGS:

#### **TNGTI program benefits students.**

Program staff reported that the summer transition program was an effective intervention offered to incoming students who had struggled in eighth grade. The majority of campuses reported the TNGTI grant allowed for the schools to implement transition and intervention activities that had not previously been offered or to supplement some activities.

#### **TNGTI had a positive and significant impact on students' TAKS-Reading performance.**

A significant difference was found between the TAKS-Reading scores of students who participated in the TNGTI program and those who had not participated ( $p < .05$ ).

#### **TNGTI had a positive and significant impact on students' TAKS-Math performance.**

A significant difference was found between the TAKS-Math scores of students who participated in the TNGTI program and those who had not participated ( $p < .05$ ).

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

**Strengthen program interventions and supports for students who are struggling academically** so that they are better prepared to succeed in high school and are college and career ready.

## FINANCIAL ANALYSIS OF TNGTI PROGRAM

### SUMMARY:

**Grant Budgets.** Most campuses expended grant money closely in line with their proposed budget. Grantees tended to spend the largest proportion of grant money on payroll/staffing, followed by supplies and maintenance. On average, grantees spent approximately half of their grant budgets on the summer transition program and half of their budgets on student interventions. It was not common for schools to spend large proportions of their budgets on the early warning data system.

**Supplemental Funding.** Of school districts that reported supplementing the TNGTI grant program with other funds, 75% indicated they supported the TNGTI program with federal funds, 67% reported use of other state funds, 21% reported use of local funds, and 13% reported use of private or other funds. Federal funding for Title I campuses was most commonly used by TNGTI grantee campuses to support the program, followed by American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds.

**Per-Pupil Costs.** Based on data reported on summer program student attendance and program expenditures, per-student costs varied substantially across campuses. These costs ranged from \$25 to \$11,680 with a median of \$781 per student. The majority of grantees had calculated per-student costs of \$1,000 or less based on the number of students attending the summer program (60%).

**Cost Effectiveness.** An analysis of the relationship between program costs and program impact on student TAKS scores revealed that programs that spent a greater portion of their TNGTI funds on the summer transition program than on other aspects of the intervention had the largest impact on student TAKS performance.

### FINDINGS:

**Campus TNGTI budgets varied significantly across participating districts.** Per-pupil costs ranged from \$25 to \$11,680 with a median of \$781 per student.

**Campuses spent most of their funds on the summer programs and intervention services.**

Grantees typically spent about half of their grant budgets on their summer transition program. The other half mostly covered intervention services, with some leftover funds for the early warning data system.

**Programs that spent a greater portion of their TNGTI funds on their summer programs had the largest impact on student TAKS performance.**

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

**Provide additional funding and support.** Encourage campuses to offer strong summer transition programs, supported by the TNGTI grant and available funds from other federal, state, local, and private sources.

### Next Steps

Additional data were collected during the summer and fall of 2010 at eight campuses that chose to continue their participation in the TNGTI program for a second year. Case studies of the eight campuses selected for site visits in July–October 2010 were completed based on interviews, observations, focus groups, and extant data collection. The case studies will be included in a supplementary chapter to this report that will be delivered to TEA in January 2011.