

**THE TEXAS RURAL
TECHNOLOGY
(R-TECH) PILOT
PROGRAM**



**THE TEXAS RURAL TECHNOLOGY (R-TECH)
PILOT PROGRAM**

SECOND INTERIM EVALUATION REPORT

Executive Summary

February 2010

**Prepared for
Texas Education Agency**

**Prepared by
Texas Center for Educational Research**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2007, the Texas Legislature (80th Texas Legislature, Regular Session, 2007) authorized the creation of the Texas Rural Technology (R-Tech) Pilot program, which provides \$8 million in funding to support rural districts in implementing technology-based supplemental education programs. To be eligible for funding, districts must have served fewer than 5,000 students and must not have been located in a metropolitan region of the state in 2007. Districts with limited course offerings and low accountability ratings received priority in grant awards. R-Tech funding is intended to support supplemental educational programs, including online courses, offered outside of students' regularly scheduled classes (e.g., before or after school). Districts that receive funding will be able to use the funds for a variety of purposes, including:

Supplemental vs. non-supplemental programs. Although RTech was intended to support districts' efforts in implementing supplemental educational programs offered outside the regularly scheduled schoolday, a substantial proportion of Cycle 1 districts (40%) implemented RTech as part of classroom instruction (i.e., non-supplemental programs). Many districts used RTech funding to update their computer labs, and teachers scheduled class time in the lab

Implementation challenges and supports. Principals and R-Tech facilitators indicated that most implementation challenges resulted from the need to clearly communicate program goals to parents and staff, as well as from insufficient planning time and from program reporting requirements. Many principals and R-Tech facilitators also noted the challenges of implementing a technology program in districts with outdated computer hardware and insufficient infrastructure to support technology resources. Principals and program facilitators reported that strong administrative support, the additional revenue provided through the grant, as well as staff were factors that contributed to successful implementation.

Research Question 2: What is the Level of Student Participation in R-Tech?

Across Cycle 1 districts, most students were identified for services because of weak academic performance, including poor Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) scores, failing grades, and prior academic failure. The number of students participating in R-Tech increased across the program's first year as districts implemented their programs more fully. While less than half of grantee districts (47%) offered R-Tech as part of the 2008 summer session, nearly all districts (92%) had implemented the program for students in spring 2009. Comparisons of the level of participation between students receiving services in summer school and students receiving services as part of the regular school year (i.e., fall 2008 and spring 2009) suggest differences in how resources may be used during the regular school year and summer school.

resources may have been at greater academic risk, requiring more remediation time than students who used R-Tech for briefer periods. If this was the case, then the lack of effect for time spent accessing R-Tech may reflect the characteristics of the students identified for more intensive support rather than the effects of the support itself.

Program type. The small number of districts offering one-to-one tutoring with online instructional support, technology immersion programs, and iPods loaded with instructional content prevented their inclusion in the statistical analysis of program type. Therefore, analyses were limited to students participating in self-paced programs and dual credit courses. Students participating in self-paced programs experienced reduced TAKS scores in reading/ELA relative to R-Tech students who participated in other program types. g1fno.011 s ; g1fno.014(ti)11(n)KS scos ip02 Tw [(i)-3-3(t)8(ed).848 -1.141 (at)8(h

funding (67%) was allocated to “supplies and materials” and about 10% of funding was spent on “capital outlay.” In grant budgets, districts indicated purchases of laptop and desktop computers, projectors, printers, furniture for computer labs, and instructional software in both expenditure categories.

Districts implementing self-paced and technology immersion programs spent more on “supplies and materials” and “capital outlay” as did districts that implemented R-Tech as part of the regular school day (i.e., nonsupplemental programs). While districts’ average first-year expenditures on “supplies and materials” and “capital outlay” were \$29,338 and \$4,378, respectively, districts implementing self-paced programs spent about \$29,830 on “supplies and materials” and about \$4,443 on “capital outlay.” Districts implementing technology immersion programs spent about \$67,650 on “supplies and materials” and did not allocate funds for “capital outlay.”⁴ Districts implementing nonsupplemental programs spent about \$36,890 on “supplies and materials” and \$6,625 on “capital outlay.”

About 15% of state grant funding was spent on “professional and contracted services.” Districts’ first year. Expenditures in this category included tuition and fees for dual credit courses, payments for professional development, technical support services, and educational software. Districts implementing dual credit and distance learning courses and one-on-one tutoring and online support spent more in this category. Only 8% of first year grant funding was spent on “payroll costs.” Payroll expenditures covered the costs of salaries for newly hired computer lab facilitators, extra pay for teachers who worked before or after school to provide R-Tech services, and the costs of substitutes to enable teachers to participate in professional development. Districts did not spend any state funding for “other operating costs.”

The cost effectiveness of program configurations. In spite of substantial start up costs in terms of investments in technology resources, districts that implemented R-Tech for larger numbers of students experienced the lowest per student program costs. Across Cycle 1 districts, the average student cost of providing R-Tech services during the program’s first year was \$420. Districts that implemented programs serving 500 or more students experienced average student costs of \$111, while districts that served fewer than 500 students experienced average student costs of \$420. Districts that implemented R-Tech for larger numbers of students experienced the lowest per student program costs. Across Cycle 1 districts, the average student cost of providing R-Tech services during the program’s first year was \$420. Districts that implemented programs serving 500 or more students experienced average student costs of \$111, while districts that served fewer than 500 students experienced average student costs of \$420.

172 students during R-TECH's first year, while districts implementing no supplemental programs served an average of 350 students.

Sustainability. Nearly half (48%) of principals responding to the spring survey reported that insufficient financial resources created a moderate or substantial barrier to continuing R-TECH after grant funds expire in May 2010. Most principals (55%) indicated that R-TECH would be offered as part of classroom instruction rather than as a supplemental program at the conclusion of the grant. During interviews conducted as part of spring site visits, several principals said they would only continue R-TECH after the grant period if the program demonstrated positive effects on students' TAKS scores.



Texas Center for Educ