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

CYCLE 1 SUSTAINABILITY SURVEY RESULTS

for the

Texas Education Agency

December 8, 2006

The Evaluation Team of:

GIBSON

SOUTHWEST EDUCATIONAL

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.
-

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

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

During the regular session in 2003, the 78th Texas Legislature, through Rider 67 of Article III of the General Appropriations Act, authorized the Texas High School Completion and Success (THSCS) grants to establish comprehensive high school completion and success initiatives. The THSCS grant program was designed to target under-performing high schools and high schools with low student completion rates through student-focused, competitive grants that provide support services to students in Grades 9 through 12.

In March 2005, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) retained the evaluation team of Gibson Consulting Group and Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (Gibson/SEDL) to conduct a third-party evaluation to examine the sustainability of the THSCS, Cycle 1 grant program. The goal of this evaluation is 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.

The following evaluation questions guided the Cycle 1 sustainability component of the evaluation:

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 grant period for THSCS, Cycle 1 program spanned from February 1, 2004 through February 28, 2006. Approximately $23 million in Cycle 1 THSCS grants were awarded in spring 2004 to 129 school districts and open enrollment charter schools, serving a total of 244 campuses located throughout Texas. At least one Cycle 1 grantee was located within each of the state's 20 Education Service Center (ESC) regions except in Region 9 (Wichita Falls). Over 70% of the grantees were situated in relatively large cities, 22% in non-metro or rural areas, and 16% were charter schools. The average enrollment across all grantee campuses was slightly over 1,000 students. TAKS test performance in 2004 by students at Cycle 1 campuses, in comparison with state-wide passing rates for high schools, showed a consistently lower percent of students passing the tests[1].

The effectiveness of the THSCS, Cycle 1 program was examined by The Evaluation Group at Texas A&M University. This report examines the sustainability of the grant programs as reported through a survey administered seven months after grant funds discontinued.

[1] Texas A&M University, Evaluation Group, February 2005. Evaluation of the Texas High school Completion and success Grant Program: Interim Report.

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

Survey Analyses

Survey data were entered into a standard database and analyzed and summarized using SPSS software. Descriptive statistics were used to compile responses to the survey items across the entire survey sample.

SURVEY RESULTS

A. To what degree have THSCS, Cycle 1 intervention activities continued after grant funds ended?

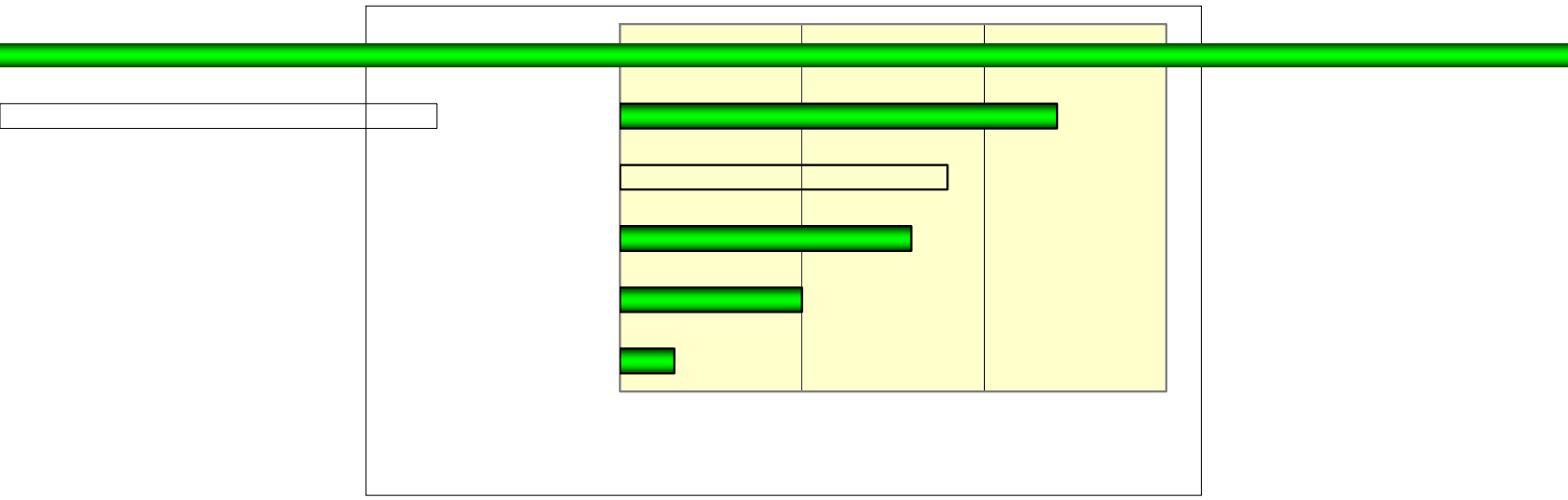
The survey contained questions addressing the extent of sustainability of intervention activities in Cycle 1 schools. Items included identifying the degree to which interventions were still in place at the schools, whether the person who originally put the THSCS grant program in place was still involved in the intervention activities, and staff positions were continued since funding ended.

Table 3 presents the types of intervention activities that Cycle 1 grantees initiated with grant funds and those activities that are either partially or entirely still in place since funding ended. As shown in **Table 3**, most of the respondents indicated that many of the intervention activities remained in place although funding h0sP31easd. 6(wW Tw 13.98 0 0 13.t 1.5 refdents)3(indicated Cdicated

During the Cycle 1 grant period, 52 percent of the survey respondents indicated that program funds were used to pay for additional staff at the school. Thirty-four percent of those reported that the staff hired with grant funds was still in that role even though funding for the grant had ended**. Figure 1** and **Figure 2** show the number of staff hired and those that were still in place.

Figure 1

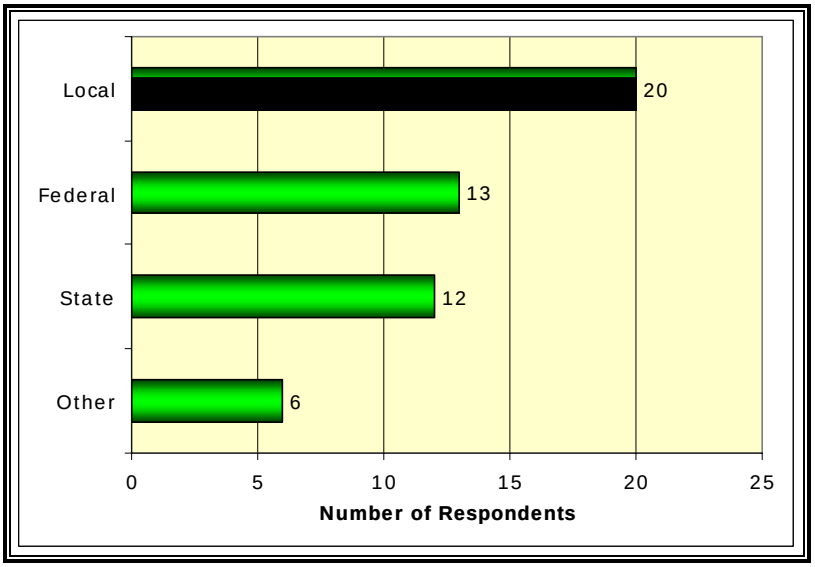
Staff Hired During Cycle 1 Grant Period



Source: Survey of Cycle 1 THSCS Grantees.

For those campuses who maintained staff in their role after Cycle 1 grant funding had ended, funding sources were reported to have been a combination of local, state, federal, and other external entities. Respondents had the option of marking more than one funding source. Of the 35 responses to this item, 20 reported using local funds, 13 federal, 12 state, and 6 used other external funding entities. Some districts reported having multiple sources of funding (See **Figure 3**). On campuses where staff roles were discontinued after funding ended, slightly over 50 percent of the survey respondents commented that the teachers had taken over tutor and mentor roles, regular school counselors absorbed the duties of the program counselors, or volunteers helped out. Sixty-five percent of respondents who reported staff roles being discontinued also stated that their program activities were now more limited in scope since funding ceased, offering fewer opportunities for students to receive services (e.g., tutoring, at-risk programs). Five respondents indicated that they had terminated the program activities altogether.

Figure 3
Funding Sources for Staff Roles
Post Cycle 1 Program Funding



Source: Survey of Cycle 1 THSCS Grantees.

B. What factors influenced whether the THSCS, Cycle 1 interventions continued after the grant ended?

Survey respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which various factors were influential in the continuation of their Cycle 1 interventions. As illustrated in **Figure 4**, school leadership was perceived as instrumental in maintaining program activities. One principal commented, "The key to sustained change at the campus will be stable campus leadership that is committed to improving student performance for all students."

Further, buy-in and support by school staff as well as gaining evidence of desired program outcomes were also highly rated as important factors contributing to the continuation of Cycle 1 intervention activities. Several of the survey respondents noted that the grant funds helped get the interventions started and were used to purchase initial resources such as equipment and software. After funding ended, intervention activities were partially or wholly maintained through transferring role responsibilities to the regular school staff. As one respondent indicated, "We miss the money, but have been able to keep a lot of things working." Another, discussing the implementation of dual credit courses, stated that the "funds pointed us in the right direction to build a strong relationship with the local college to implement and maintain these courses."

Figure 4
Mean Ratings by Survey Respondents
Factors Influencing Continuation of Cycle 1 Grant Interventions

Figure 6
Mean Ratings of Survey Respondents
Factors Influencing Cycle 1 Grant Program on Student Outcomes

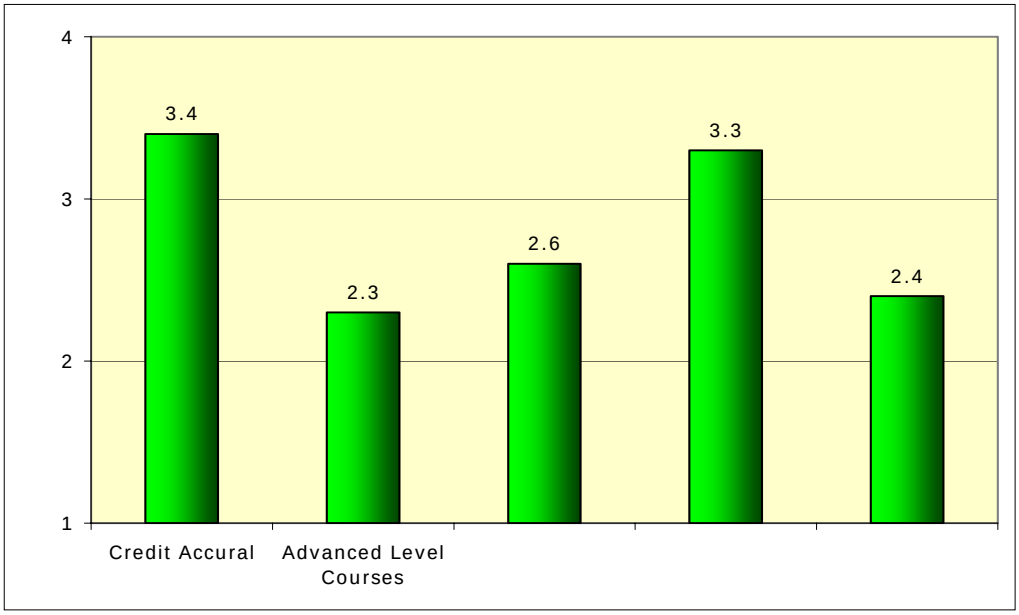
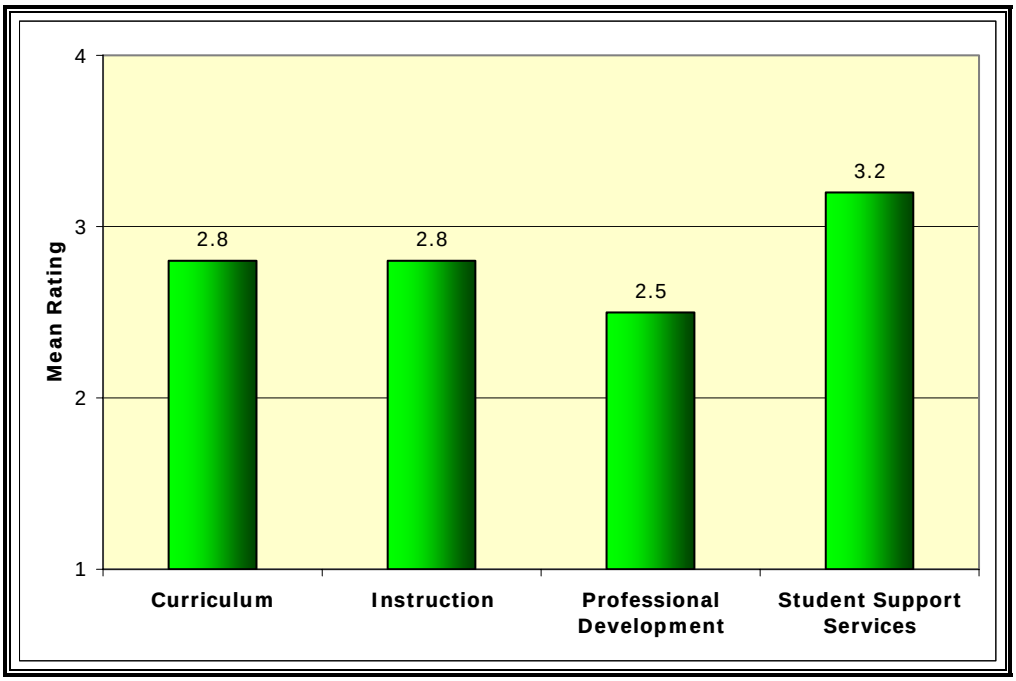


Figure 7
Influence of Cycle 1 Grant Program on Changes in Schools



Source: Survey of Cycle 1 THSCS Grantees.
Note. Rating Options: 1 = Not at All, 2 = A Little, 3 = Moderately, 4 = To a Great Extent.

The survey respondents also rated their level of agreement with a number of statements regarding the Cycle 1 grant program. As shown in **Table 4**, approximately over 70 percent of the respondents held the opinion that their THSCS program elements should be implemented in other similar schools, that the THSCS grant program worked well for their school, that the program strategies implemented at their school will continue in future years, and that they would implement the THSCS interventions if they transferred to another school. While the survey respondents perceived some influence from the THSCS program on teacher professional development, school-wide reform, and a little on parental involvement, the majority held the opinion that the program had the largest impact on student achievement.

Table 4
Survey Respondents' Level of Agreement
Statements about THSCS, Cycle 1 Grant Program

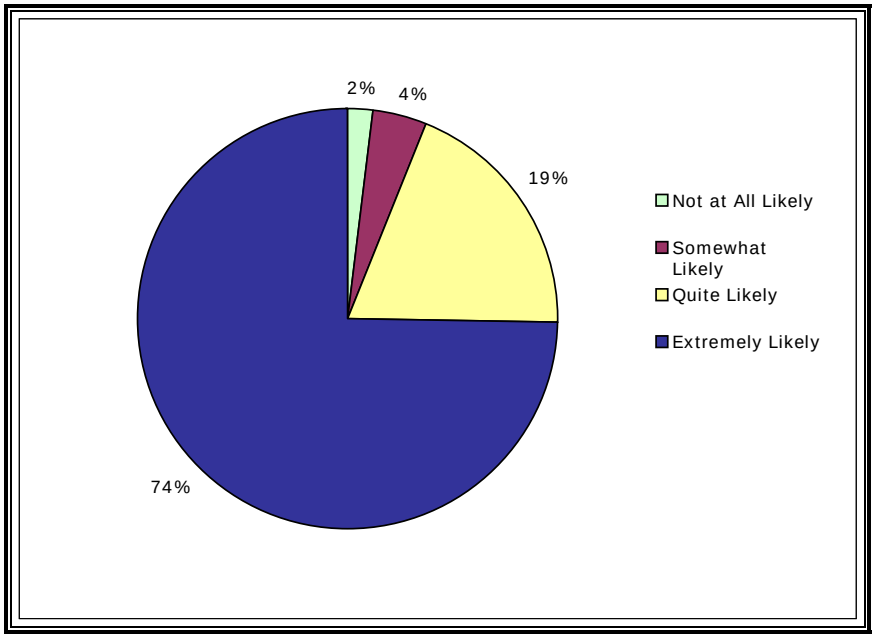
Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements about your THSCS, Cycle 1 grant program:	Strongly Disagree (1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	Strongly Agree (5)	M	*sd*	N
a. The components of the THSCS program should be implemented in other similar schools.	3	4	18	33	45	4.1	*1.02*	103
b. The THSCS interventions have spread to other schools in my district.	11	19	27	20	19	3.2	*1.28*	96
c. The THSCS interventions have spread to other schools in nearby districts.	16	22	33	14	8	2.7	*1.17*	93
d. I would implement the THSCS interventions if I went to another school.	3	6	21	35	38	4.0	*1.04*	103
e. In retrospect, I think this THSCS grant program worked well for this school.	2	4	20	31	47	4.1	*.98*	104
f. I think the THSCS program strategies implemented in my school will continue to be implemented in future years.	3	10	18	29	43	4.0	*1.12*	103
g. The program spent all of the money awarded to implement the THSCS grant program at my school.	6	3	15	23	52	4.1	*1.16*	99
h. I believe that having the THSCS grant funds had a positive effect on:								
Á Student achievement	1	2	13	40	48	4.3	*.83*	104
Á Parental Involvement	13	34	25	15	11	2.8	*1.20*	98
Á Professional Development	15	21	26	18	20	3.1	*1.34*	100
Á School-Wide Reform	7	18	29	24	21	3.3	*1.23*	99

Source: Survey of Cycle 1 THSCS Grantees.
Note. M=mean; sd=standard deviation; N=number of respondents.

students. The mean percent of students receiving individual graduation plans was 90 percent. This increase was statistically significant ($t = 4.6$, $p < .001$). When asked how likely it was that IGPs would continue to be developed, approximately 74 percent of survey respondents indicated that it would be extremely likely. **Figure 8** shows these results.

Figure 8

Likelihood of Developing Individual Graduation Plans in the Future



Source: Survey of Cycle 1 THSCS Grantee

CONCLUSIONS

Survey findings suggest that the majority of THSCS, Cycle 1 grant interventions were sustained, either partially or entirely, seven months after grant funding ended. Only a few respondents reported completely discontinuing intervention activities. While the lack of THSCS funding was cited as an important issue to sustaining intervention activities, approximately half of the grantees continued to support the program through local, state, federal, and/or external funding. In schools where program staff positions were discontinued, role responsibilities were frequently transferred to regular school staff.

Factors that influenced the continuation of program activities included strong school leadership, staff buy-in, and visible program effectiveness. Where programs were discontinued, insufficient monetary and staff resources, as well as little evidence of program effects were cited as contributing factors.

The findings also suggested that outcomes from Cycle 1 grant intervention activities were primarily student-oriented. Many grant interventions focused their activities more on providing increased support services that addressed the immediate needs of their students and less on school professional development, parent involvement activities, and college readiness programs.

While these findings provide a positive view of the sustainability of Cycle 1 grant interventions, it must be remembered that these findings are based on self-reported data. Their reliability, as a true measure of sustainability, is subject to a number of inherent biases such as *social desirability* – the tendency to respond in conventional rather than truthful ways; *acquiescence* – the tendency to always agree with statements; *evasiveness* – the tendency to respond to the middle alternative or the "not sure" response item.[2] To gain a more accurate sense of the extent that intervention activities are sustained, triangulated data sources incorporating survey, interview, and observational methods might prove more useful. In addition, while the Cycle 1 program ended in February 2006, the current school year is the first in which the Cycle 1 interventions have not been funded. Thus, long term sustainability is still in question and future evaluation in this regard is needed.

[2] Smith, M.L., & Glass, G.V. (1987). *Research and evaluation in education and the social sciences* (pp. 82-120). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

APPENDIXES

A. Cycle 1 Sustainability Survey
B. Survey Cover Letter

APPENDIX A

The primary purpose of this survey is to determine the extent to which high school programs that received THSCS, Cycle 1 funds during the grant period (February 1, 2004 through February 28, 2006) are still in place after grant funds ended. THSCS programs refer to any activities, interventions, or strategies implemented or put into place with funds from the THSCS, Cycle 1 grant.

1. What was/is your role in the THSCS, Cycle 1 grant funded program at your school? (Mark all that apply)

- O Project Director/Grant Coordinator
- O Campus Principal
- O Other_____

2. Is the person who originally put the THSCS grant program in place still involved with the program on a regular basis? (Mark one response only)

- O Yes
- O No
- O Don't know

3. Please indicate in the table below, which of the following programs were implemented with THSCS, Cycle 1 grant funds at your school during the grant period (February 1, 2004 through February 28, 2006) and for each type of program/intervention, answer the questions to the right.

- First, mark to the left all of the THSCS programs/interventions that your school implemented using **THSCS, Cycle grant funds** (Column A). *See attached list of program descriptions.*
- Next, **for each program/intervention marked in Column A**, please respond to the items on the right in Columns B and C **as to the extent to which the programs/interventions are still present at your school** and **have been effective**.
- **If no programs/interventions funded by the THSCS, Cycle 1 grant are still in place**, please mark "none" at the bottom of this table, and continue to question #4.

4. **During the grant contract period,** were THSCS, Cycle 1 funds used to pay for additional staff at your school? O Yes O No

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Counselor	O	O		O	
Lab technician	O	O		O	
Other? (Please specify)	O	O		O	

6. For those positions that were sustained, what funding sources pay for these positions in 2006-07?

(Check all that apply)

Local funds	State funds	Federal funds	External grants	Other?
O	O	O	O	O

For staff positions that have not continued since the grant ended:

(a) what effects have occurred, if any, as a result of the lost position(s)? **Please explain:**

(b) what adjustments or accommodations, if any, were made or are planned, to compensate for the lost position(s)? **Please explain:**

7. Of the THSCS, Cycle 1 grant-supported programs that have been **CONTINUED** and are in place at your school for the 2006-07 school year, **what factors influenced the decision to continue them? If no programs/interventions funded by the THSCS Cycle 1 grant are still in place**, **please skip to Question 8.**

Factors that influenced the decision to continue the THSCS, Cycle 1 programs at your school.	No influence	A little influence	Somewhat influenced	Strongly influenced
District support	O	O	O	O
Other grant funds	O	O	O	O
School leadership	O	O	O	O
School staff support and buy-in	O	O	O	O
Community/parent involvement	O	O	O	O
Commitments with other schools, higher education, or community/parent organizations	O	O	O	O
Evidence of program outcomes	O	O	O	O
Alignment of programs with school activities	O	O	O	O

c. College readiness	O	O	O	O	O
d. Graduation	O	O	O	O	O
e. College attendance	O	O	O	O	O

11. We are interested in your opinion regarding the THSCS, Cycle 1 grant program in your school. Please indicate your agreement to the following statements:	Strongly disagree 1	2	O 3	4	Strongly agree 5
a. The components of the THSCS program should be implemented in other similar schools.	O	O	O	O	O
b. The THSCS interventions have spread to other schools in my district.	O	O	O	O	O
c. The THSCS interventions have spread to other schools in nearby districts.	O	O	O	O	O
d. I would implement the THSCS interventions if I went to another school.	O	O	O	O	O
e. In retrospect, I think this THSCS grant program worked well for this school.	O	O	O	O	O
f. I think the THSCS program strategies implemented in my school will continue to be implemented in future years.	O	O	O	O	O
g. The program spent all of the money awarded to implement the THSCS grant program at my school.	O	O	O	O	O
h. I believe that having the THSCS grant funds had a positive effect on:	O	O	O	O	O
Student achievement.	O	O	O	O	O
Parental involvement.	O	O			

(Use the back of the page as needed).

THSCS Program Names and Descriptions

Parental involvement
May include programs that provide parent or guardian volunteers and mentors and/or training for parents.

Teacher professional development
May include professional development programs from district trainers, Education Service Centers, private providers, online courses.

Accelerated instruction
Structured academic enrichment learning programs that assist students who do not pass TAKS. Programs may include remedial courses, tutoring, and out-of-school activities.

Advanced Placement/ International Baccalaureate
Programs that prepare students to successfully pass Advance Placement and/or International Baccalaureate exams.

Child care
Programs that provide on-site licensed child care facilities and/or financial support for students to have licensed professional care and supervise their children while they complete high school courses.

Credit accrual activities (credit recovery, online courses and software, flexible entry

socially and academically to succeed in school. Programs may include mentors from business and community organizations.

Programs for academically at-risk students
Programs designed for students identified as academically at-risk such as students who have been truant, suspended, or expelled, migrant students, limited English proficient, and/or economically disadvantaged students.

Test preparation (PSAT, SAT, ACT)
Programs designed to prepare students to take college entrance exams for admission, placement, and scholarships into post-secondary education.

Tutoring
Programs that provide high quality tutoring services to students. Tutoring services may include individualized instruction of specific subjects by highly qualified teachers, peers, community volunteers, parents, etc.

Work study programs
Programs that enable students to gain work experience and earn an income while continuing their studies. May also include internships and career path courses.

Other interventions
Other THSCS grant-supported programs not listed above.

DUE: September 15, 2006