

Understanding the Impact of a Ninth-Grade Transition Program in Texas

The **Challenge**

Ninth grade often is considered a make-or-break year in determining whether students will be successful in high school and beyond. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) created the Texas Ninth Grade Transition and Intervention Program to ease the transition of at-risk students into high school and increase the likelihood that they graduate on time and are prepared for college and careers. Prior to rolling out the program statewide, TEA wanted to understand the effect of the program on student achievement.

The **Response**

The comprehensive evaluation conducted by American Institutes for Research (AIR) and its partner Gibson Consulting Group found that the program significantly increased the English and mathematics assessment scores of participating students compared to similar students who did not participate in the program. The results of both the summative evaluation and a formative evaluation regarding program implementation provided the Texas Legislature with nuanced contextual information to understand the impact of the program.

The **AIR Approach**



AIR staff needed to create comparison groups of students with similar backgrounds to accurately determine the effect of the program on student outcomes. Staff accessed five years worth of data on the ninth-grade students, including middle school disciplinary and attendance information. These data were translated into a propensity score to determine the likelihood that students would attend the ninth-grade summer program. Staff then matched participating and nonparticipating students based on their scores. The multilevel propensity score matching approach designed by AIR allowed the evaluators to compare student outcomes even though an experimental study was not feasible.

AIR and its partner also conducted a formative evaluation using a qualitative case study design to provide information regarding how districts implemented the program. Staff created case studies based on focus groups and interviews with students and staff. These case studies illustrated the districts' approaches and provided valuable information as TEA continues the rollout of the program statewide.

About American Institutes for Research (AIR)

Founded in 1946, AIR applies science to address real-world issues. AIR is a national leader in teaching and learning improvement, providing the research, assessment, evaluation, and technical assistance to ensure that all students—particularly those facing historical disadvantages—have access to a high-quality, effective education.

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