

**The Texas Investment Capital Fund, Cycle 12:
Evaluation of Activities Funded
May 2003 through July 2004**

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Executive Summary

The Investment Capital Fund (ICF) is a state-funded competitive grant program created to improve student achievement through implementing policies and procedures consistent with deregulation and school restructuring. To achieve their program goals and address areas of local educational need, grantees must establish partnerships with school staff, school district officials, parents, and a non-profit, community-based partner. It is anticipated that through these partnerships grantees will build a constituency of teachers, parents and community leaders to hold schools and school districts accountable for achieving high academic standards.

This report provides an evaluation of Cycle 12 of the ICF grant program. Cycle 12 grantees were the first to be required to provided detailed data on program goals, strategies and activities, and student performance results that could be used by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to evaluate the effectiveness of the ICF program in improving student achievement through deregulation and school restructuring. This report profiles Cycle 12 grantee programs and evaluates their self-reported progress toward achieving the goal of building a constituency of teachers, parents, and community leaders to hold schools and school districts accountable for achieving high academic standards. Previous research has shown that restructuring efforts that involve parent and community participation can have a positive impact on student performance by improving local educational practices.

The typical Cycle 12 ICF campus is an elementary school and a first time participant in the ICF grant program. Over two-thirds (67%) of the students served by Cycle 12 programs were enrolled in Kindergarten through Grade 5. More than three-fourths (77%) of projected teachers were involved in ICF projects and the typical Cycle 12 ICF campus emphasized teacher training and staff development, partner involvement, and improvement in ELA ability among students as core areas of focus in their ICF projects.

The findings presented in the report suggest that grantees have made progress toward achieving the important goal of building a constituency of teachers, parents, and community leaders to hold schools and school districts accountable for strong academic performance. For example:

- Over three-fourths (80%) of the ICF campuses reported that they had fully achieved or mostly achieved the goal of training school staff, parents and community leaders to understand academic standards.
- Nearly all of the ICF campuses (95%) reported that they had fully achieved or mostly achieved the goal of developing and implementing effective strategies to improve student achievement.
- Most of the ICF campuses (85%) reported that they had fully achieved or mostly achieved the goal of engaging in ongoing planning to help ensure the success of the grant program.
- Overall, ICF grantees reported that they had met most (82%) of their ICF objectives by the end of the grant period.
- On average, ICF grantees reported that the percentage of estimated parents at each campus that participated in school activities increased by 80% during the grant period.
- Each Cycle 12 campus received an average of \$5,160 in financial and in-kind contributions from their non-profit, community-based partners, in addition to an average grant award of \$40,546, to help them implement their ICF program.

A substantial number of grantees reported that there were challenges and obstacles to successful implementation of their grant program. For example:

- Just under two-thirds (60%) of the ICF campuses reported that they had fully achieved or mostly achieved the goal of organizing a large constituency of parents and community leaders to hold the campus and school district accountable for achieving high academic standards.

- The most commonly cited obstacle grantees encountered was a lack of parental and/or community leader interest in ICF projects.
- Budget constraints, due to such factors as unforeseen costs and delays in the receipt of grant funds from TEA, were also identified as a common obstacle.
- Some grantees cited the challenge posed by changing academic standards, specifically changes to TAKS passing standards, as one reason they did not achieve some of their objectives.
- Conflicts with existing district policies or programs were also cited by grantees as an obstacle to successful program implementation.

Besides these self-reported indicators of program success, this report also examines the change in the percentage of students that met Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) passing standards for reading and mathematics between the 2003 and 2004 test administrations. The 2003 TAKS test administration occurred one month prior to the beginning of the Cycle 12 projects and the 2004 TAKS administration occurred approximately 11 months after the Cycle 12 projects had been implemented. Examining the change in the percentage of students that met TAKS passing standards is one objective measure that can be used to assess the possible effects of ICF projects on student performance.

The results show that there was no statistically significant difference between grantee and comparison group campuses in the change in the percentage of students that met TAKS passing standards across this period. It should be noted, however, that the effects of campus deregulation and restructuring on student performance likely take several years to become evident. As more data is collected on future cycles of the ICF grant program, it will be possible to conduct longitudinal, comparison-group analyses of the effect of ICF projects on student performance.

Grantees also reported on the lessons they had learned during the grant period. Suggestions for program improvement included providing variable times for school activities to reduce scheduling conflicts, and offering on-site daycare services. These

were identified as important measures that could improve parental and community participation in school activities. Grantees also identified the importance of timely receipt of grant funds, and the importance of continual awareness of existing district policies and changes to academic standards, to successful program implementation. These suggested solutions comprise important information that should be considered by future grantees and TEA program staff when ICF campus programs are designed in future grant cycles.