

2007–2008 FIRST THINGS FIRST EVALUATION: YEAR ONE IMPLEMENTATION



Austin Independent School District  
Department of Program Evaluation

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

from the engagement, alignment, and rigor (EAR) observation protocols during the 2007–2008 school year. This evaluation generated several key findings:

- x The responsibility for conducting EAR protocol visits was not evenly shared by staff within and outside campuses. Often, only a handful of observers on campuses accounted for the majority of classroom visits. Distributing observation duties across members on and outside campuses will bolster the reliability of the findings generated by the data collection tool.
- x As the school year progressed, a greater percentage of classrooms met the EAR thresholds. However, among classrooms selected for observation, fewer than 30% satisfied the rigor requirement.
- x Overall, approximately 85% of students surveyed at FTF schools could identify their family advocate.
- x More than half of the students surveyed at LBJ and Travis indicated they had not participated in a conference with their parents/guardians and family advocate, whereas only 22% of Reagan students reported no conferences had taken place.
- x One-third of students at FTF campuses reported having met with their family advocate at least once a week, outside of formally scheduled class periods.
- x Students who felt more comfortable discussing personal issues with their family advocate also were more likely to interact frequently with their advocate.
- x The percentages of students at FTF campuses who met the passing standard on the math TAKS increased sharply and significantly from 2006–2007 to 2007–2008. However, these gains were not symmetric across ethnic groups, nor did they remain when controlling for student- and school-level charactero3 TwTc-.0017 Tw(across ethnic groups, no

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## **PROGRAM OVERVIEW**

ensuring students are engaged in class, the curricula are aligned with state and district standards, and the classroom instructional strategies are rigorous. These interconnected goals were monitored through frequent classroom observations using the engagement, alignment, and rigor (EAR) protocol, a rubric that allowed instructional coaches, school administrators, and district staff to identify and quantify the hallmarks of a successful classroom, according to the FTF initiative.

## **METHODS**

### **EVALUATION OBJECTIVE**

The Department of Program Evaluation (DPE) staff provided information for decision makers about program participation and outcomes to facilitate decisions about program implementation and improvement.

### **DATA SOURCES AND RESEARCH DESIGN**

The evaluation of FTF examined four student outcomes: (a) math and reading Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) performance in FTF and non-FTF campuses, (b) self-reported student attitudes and evaluations of their family advocate, (c) disciplinary referral patterns across FTF and non-FTF campuses, and (d) results from the EAR observation protocols during the 2007–2008 school year.

Data for these outcome variables were collected from various district sources. Math and reading TAKS performance data were pulled from the district records for the 2007 and 2008 test administrations. For students tested more than once, the highest score for a particular subject test and grade was taken. Only the scores for students who were classified as active according to district records were analyzed; thus, the student-level data were unbalanced due to student attrition.

In Spring 2008, students at th



Whether a particular school was chosen as a site to implement FTF was not determined randomly. Thus, comparing student outcomes across FTF and non-FTF schools would generate unreliable inferences and undermine the validity of the recommendations stemming from the quantitative analyses because much of the variance in student performance across these schools could be attributable to underlying student characteristics within these campuses (e.g., the percentage of economically disadvantaged students enrolled, the pervasiveness of disciplinary problems, the ethnic composition of the school, and students' past scores on standardized tests). To avoid this pitfall, the research design adopted for this evaluation was quasi-experimental, whereby the outcomes of FTF schools over time were compared with outcomes for schools with comparable enrollment profiles. As Quint, Bloom, Black, Stephens, and Akey (2005) noted, these comparison schools represent

## **RESULTS**

### **DESCRIPTION OF THE SLCs ON FTF CAMPUSES**

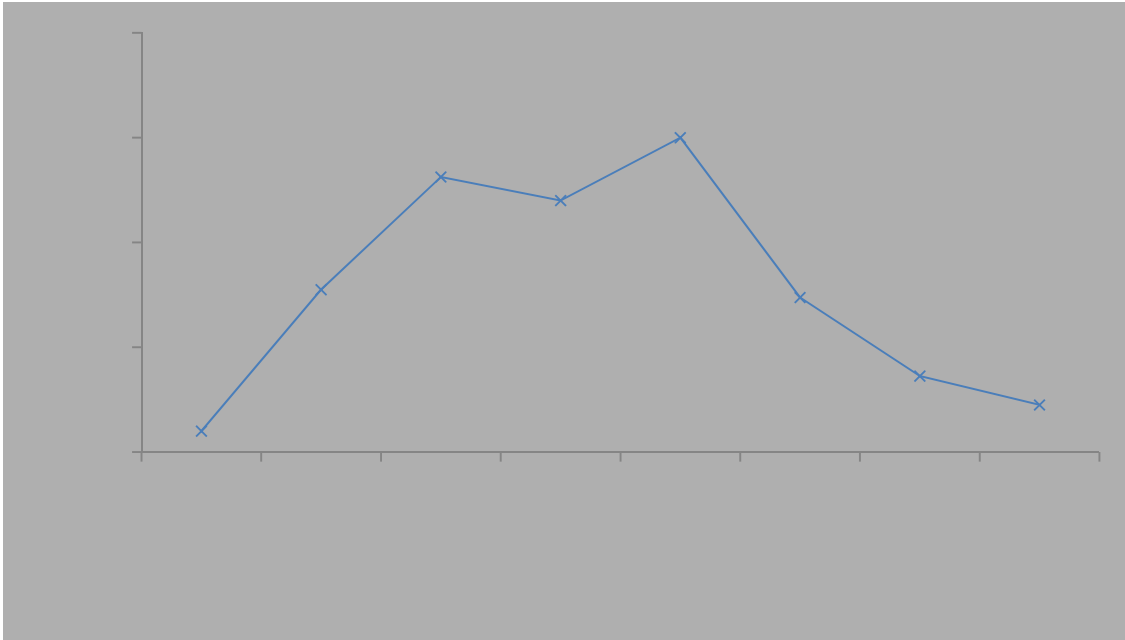
plan development. We expected the results of the teachers' professional learning time to be evident in observed instructional practices and student outcomes.

In the teacher focus groups conducted in Spring 2008, teachers discussed the professional learning taking place within their SLCs and identified practices that benefited their instructional improvement. Teachers appreciated opportunities to share their lesson plans and to provide recommendations about strategies and content. Teachers reported the peer review was helpful and constructive with respect to improving their practice. They liked learning about the different content areas and learning from the different practices. They also reported that observing their peers provided them with ideas for their own classes and models to emulate. They expressed hopes that these practices would increase rigor in their individual classrooms and inter- and intra-departmental.

- x Engagement: “Students being actively involved—emotionally, behaviorally, and cognitively—in their academic work”
- x Alignment: “Students being asked to do and doing work that reflects academic standards deemed to be important by their district and state and having opportunities to master the methods used on their state’s high stakes assessments”
- x Rigor: “Reflects the common sense notion that students will only achieve at high levels if that level of work is expected and inspected for all students”

To support these instructional improvements, district, campus, and external staff engaged in a rigorous series of train-the-trainer sessions. What Matters focused on classroom instruction and student learning. Trained individuals periodically assessed classroom instruction and student learning at FTF schools throughout the school year. Classrooms were observed using the EAR protocol developed by IRRE. The instrument provided the observer with a detailed rubric containing a series of prompts asking observers to describe the degree of student engagement, curricular alignment, and academic rigor in the classroom. Observers determined whether the observed classroom met the required threshold

Figure 1: Monthly EAR Protocol Observations, by Campus, 2007–2008



Source. IRRE, November 2008

Note. Classroom observations spanning October 1, 2007 to May 1, 2008 are included.

A variety of persons observed the FTF classrooms, including district curriculum and program administrators, campus-level instructional specialists, and campus-level administrators. Broad participation is encouraged by the MWM framework to avoid the introduction of systematic and chronic biases in EAR protocol completion. To assess fidelity to this objective, classroom observations from the 2007-2008 school year were disaggregated by campus and illustrated on a boxplot conveying several key pieces of information (Figure 2). For our purposes, we are interested in extreme characteristics in the data, particularly the existence of a few individual observers conducting a large proportion of the total number of classroom visits, in addition to determining the average number of visits per observer.

Campus EAR protocol data show differing patterns of data collection by campus and



To discern whether these trends were consistent within the schools, EAR threshold performance by SLC membership was examined (Figure 4). Within-school differences between the percentages of classrooms meeting threshold appeared across SLCs. However, fewer classrooms at each school met the rigor threshold than met any ot

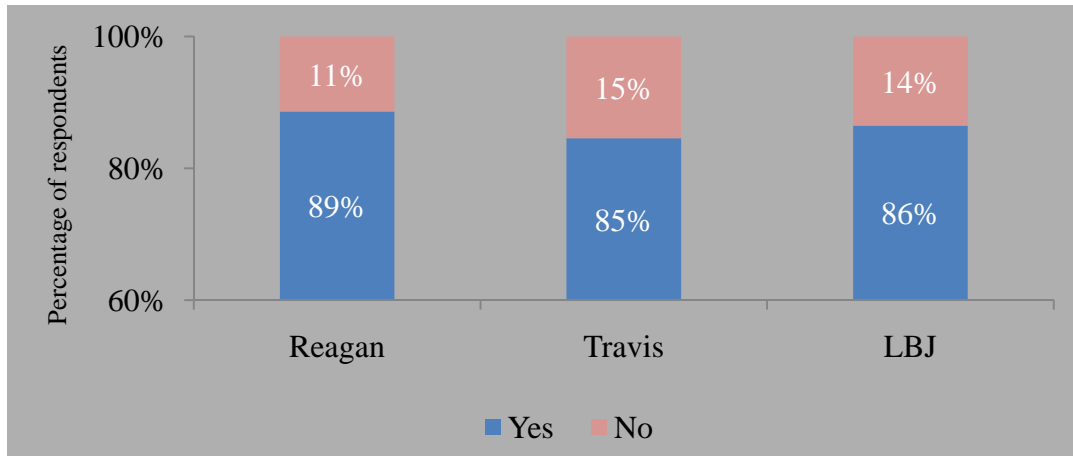


**SUMMARY OF FTF'S FAMILY ADVOCACY IMPLEMENTATION IN 2007-2008****Teacher Perceptions of Family Advocacy Implementation**

During teacher focus groups, teachers discussed the implementation of the family advocacy component of the FTF initiative. Many of their comments highlighted the importance

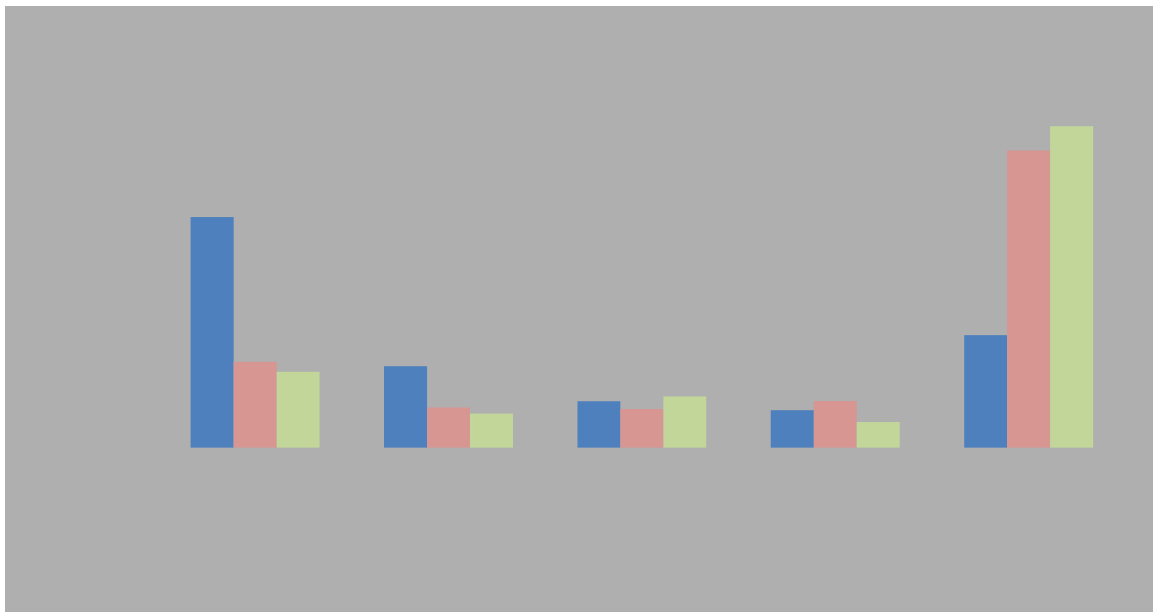


Figure 5: Students Reporting They Knew Their Family Advocate, by Campus, 2007–2008



Source. FTF Student Survey, prepared by the DPE, October 2008

Figure 6: Students Reporting an Advocate Met With a Parent/Guardian, by Campus and Frequency of Meeting, 2007–2008



Source. FTF Student Survey, prepared by the DPE, October 2008

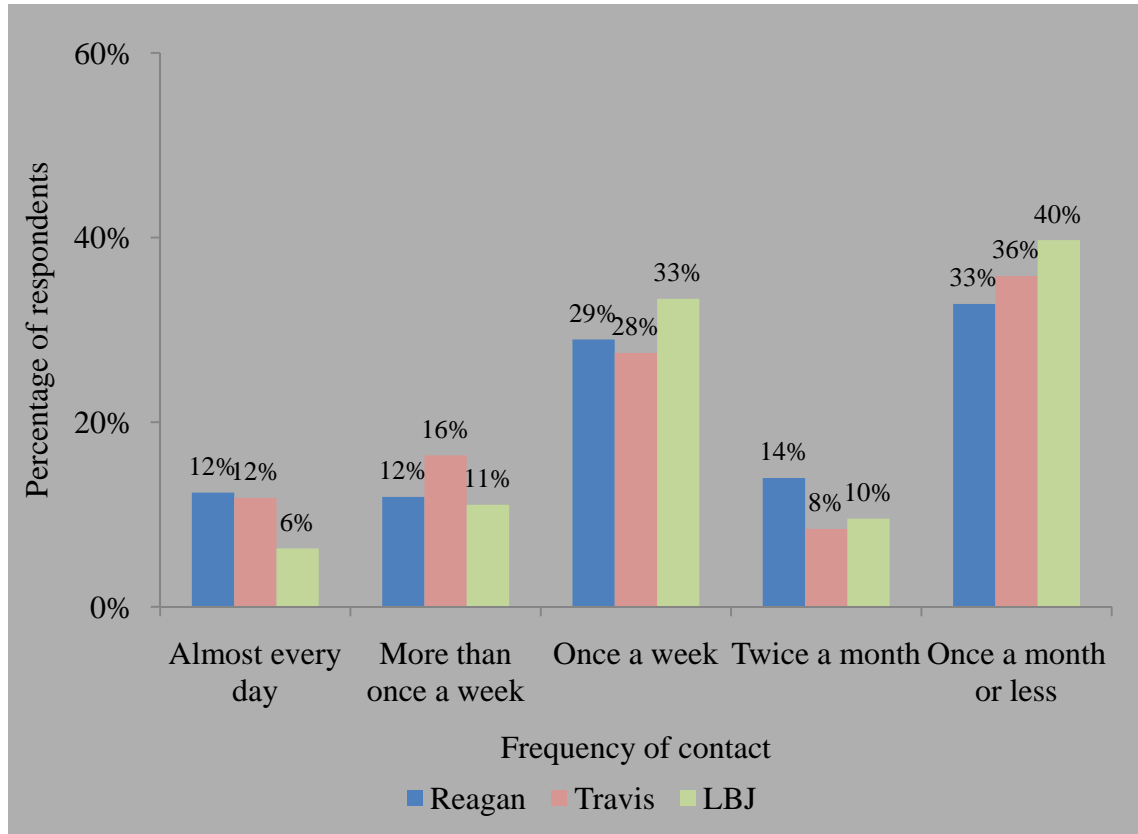
The patterns of parent/guardian, student, and family advocate meetings showed variation across grade levels within schools (Figure 7). At Reagan, freshmen respondents (49%) were the most likely of the student groups to report having participated in one family advocate meeting with a parent/guardian, while 11<sup>th</sup> grade respondents were the least likely (41%). Conversely, among Travis respondents, 25% of 10<sup>th</sup> grade respondents indicated their family advocate had conducted a parent/guardian conference once during the school year, compared with 19% of 9<sup>th</sup> grade respondents and 14% of 11<sup>th</sup> grade respondents.

Focus group interviews with advocates at FTF schools revealed that advocates had persistent difficulties reaching parents to secure greater involvement. According to one family



indicated meeting once a week during the first full year of implementation.

Figure 8: Student Reports of Frequency of One-on-One Contact With an Advocate, by Campus, 2007–2008



Source. FTF Student Survey, prepared by the DPE, October 2008

Students' willingness to discuss academic, social, and family difficulties may be conditioned by whether they feel comfortable interacting with their family advocate. Figure 9 provides tentative empirical support for this proposition. Fifty-six percent of respondents who considered the statement "I feel comfortable talking with my family advocate" to be "sort of or very true" reported having spoken with their advocate at least once a week outside of a formal advisory period setting. In contrast, students who did not agree with this statement were 10 percentage points less likely to report meeting once a week or more. These findings should be interpreted with care because the data did not indicate whether students were reluctant to approach an advocate because they felt uncomfortable discussing personal issues with an advocate, or whether they gradually become more comfortable as the frequency of interaction increased.

Figure 9: Student Reports About Whether They Felt Comfortable Talking With a Family Advocate

*Source.* FTF Student Survey, prepared by the DPE, October 2008

#### **THE IMPACT OF FTF ON TAKS PERFORMANCE**

According to IRRE's (2003) "theory of change," structural reorganization through the creation of SLCs and family advocacy periods, in tandem with continuous instructional monitoring and refinements using the Measuring What Matters (MWM) toolkit, is expected to improve student outcomes. IRRE posited and investigated a direct link between FTF implementation and gains in student performance on state assessments. The comprehensive high school reform initiative advocated by IRRE was "designed to help schools raise their students' achievement to levels needed for postsecondary education (without remediation) and high-quality employment" (p.2). This section analyzes the impact of FTF initiation on one dimension of student achievement: TAKS performance.

differences in student characteristics between FTF and non-FTF campuses presented difficulties in determining the effect of FTF implementation on student outcomes across time.

Table 2: TAKS Performance and Economically Disadvantaged Status, by FTF Status, 2006–2007 and 2007–2008

|                       |          | 2006–2007      |                   |                                       | 2007–2008      |                   |                                       |
|-----------------------|----------|----------------|-------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------|-------------------|---------------------------------------|
|                       |          | Mean TAKS math | Mean TAKS reading | Percentage economically disadvantaged | Mean TAKS math | Mean TAKS reading | Percentage economically disadvantaged |
| FTF campus            | Reagan   | 2034           | 2142              | 86%                                   | 2034           | 2139              | 89%                                   |
|                       | LBJ      | 2093           | 2157              | 77%                                   | 2077           | 2169              | 82%                                   |
|                       | Travis   | 2066           | 2159              | 83%                                   | 2100           | 2172              | 87%                                   |
| FTF-comparison campus | Lanier   | 2088           | 2181              | 82%                                   | 2090           | 2194              | 88%                                   |
|                       | Johnston | 2023           | 2114              | 88%                                   | 2044           | 2147              | 92%                                   |
| Other campus          | Austin   | 2214           | 2281              | 29%                                   | 2224           | 2279              | 33%                                   |
|                       | McCallum | 2215           | 2281              | 34%                                   | 2237           | 2289              | 38%                                   |
|                       | Crockett | 2129           | 2212              | 52%                                   | 2120           | 2218              | 59%                                   |
|                       | Anderson | 2334           | 2326              | 17%                                   | 2342           | 2338              | 21%                                   |
|                       | Bowie    | 2287           | 2312              | 7%                                    | 2306           | 2325              | 11%                                   |
|                       | Akins    | 2128           | 2216              | 56%                                   | 2127           | 2217              | 62%                                   |
|                       | LASA     | 2425           | 2382              | 25%                                   | 2460           | 2402              | 27%                                   |

Source. AISD student records, prepared by the DPE, October 2008

Note. TAKS scores represent the mean of the highest valid score received by a student on any test administration during the 2006–2007 and 2007–2008 school years.

Figure 10: Students Meeting Math and Reading TAKS Standards, by Campus, 2006–2007 and 2007–2008

*Source.* AISD student records, prepared by the DPE, October 2008

*Note.* TAKS proficiency represents the highest valid score deemed proficient that was received by a student on any test administration during the 2006–2007 and 2007–2008 school years.

To attribute the impact of FTF intervention to student performance outcomes, we had to determine what student outcomes could have been in the absence of FTF program implementation. This “counterfactual



FTF-comparison schools, and all other AISD high schools. The increase in the percentage of students meeting the TAKS standard at FTF campuses, particularly for the math test, was sizeable (4.07 percentage points) and was approximately twice that at the FTF-comparison schools (2.29 percentage points). The remaining campuses improved minimally (<1 percentage point).

Figure 11: Students Meeting Math and Reading TAKS Standards, by FTF Status, 2006–2007 and 2007–2008

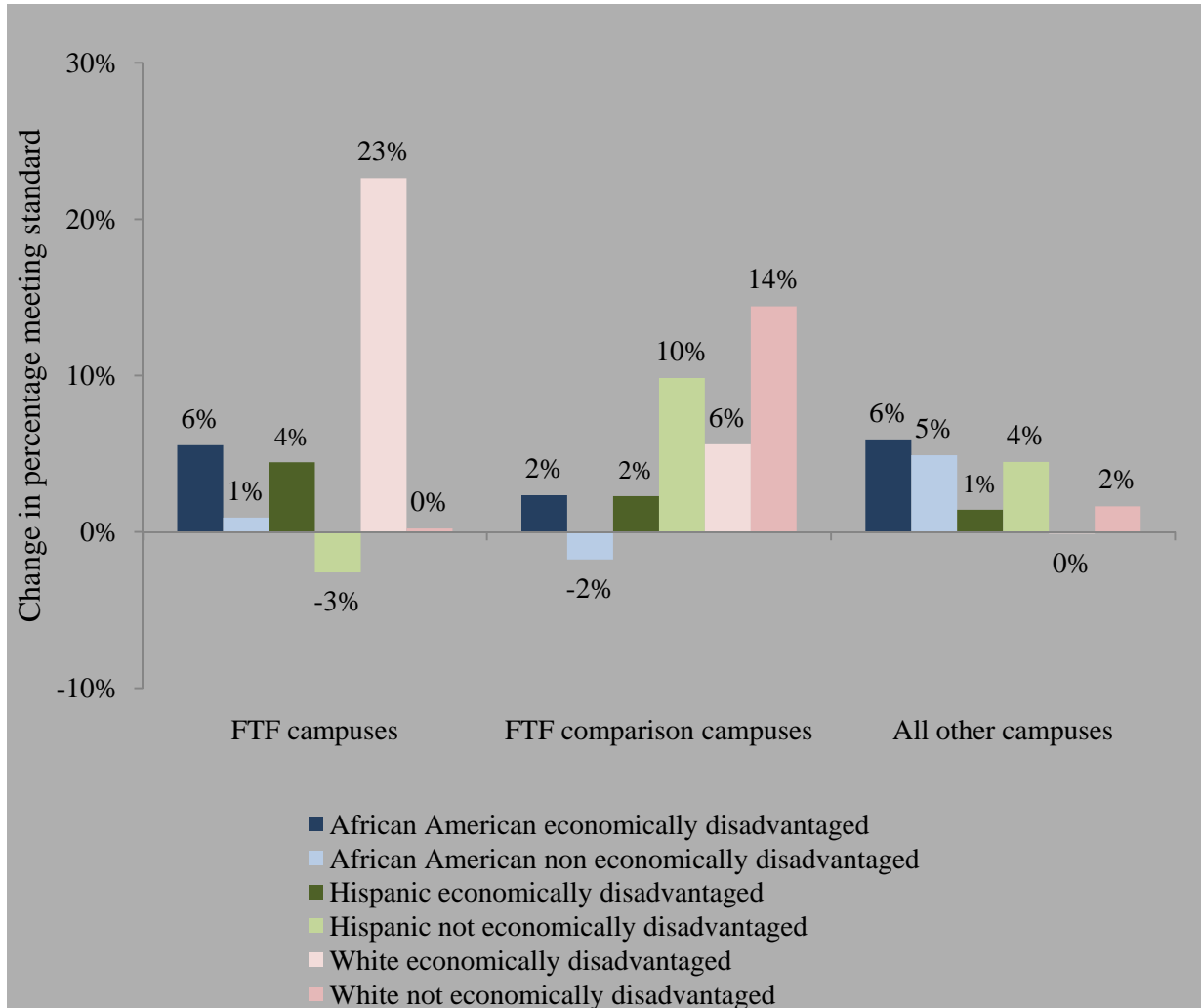
*Source.* AISD student records, prepared by the DPE, October 2008

A principal objective of national, state, and district educators is the narrowing of achievement gaps across students with different demographic backgrounds. Although FTF campuses experienced a sharp increase in the percentage of students satisfying the math TAKS passing standard between 2006–2007 and 2007–2008, the improvements were not symmetrically distributed across ethnic groups (Figure 12). For instance, White students at FTF campuses showed the most dramatic improvement in passing rates between 2006–2007 and 2007–2008 (15 percentage points), compared with gains for African American and Hispanic students (4 percentage points).

Figure 12: Students Meeting Math TAKS Standards, by FTF Status and Ethnicity, 2006–2007 and 2007–2008

*Source.*

Figure 13: Students Meeting Math TAKS Standards, by FTF Status, Ethnicity, and Economic Disadvantage Status, 2006–2007 and 2007–2008



Source. AISD student records, prepared by the DPE, October 2008

To account for school- and student-level factors and to better determine whether the improvement resulting from FTF intervention was meaningful and not generated by sampling or measurement differences, multivariate logistic regression procedures incorporated a host of variables to explain the probability a given student would meet the required TAKS score during a given administration year (for a more technically detailed explanation about the multivariate estimation procedure, see Appendix C). The following variables were included: gender, economic disadvantage status, ethnicity dummy variables, special education status, grade point average (GPA), limited English proficiency (LEP) status, and campus dummy variables to adjust for intra-school clustering.

To separate the impact of FTF implementation at FTF and FTF-comparison schools, we constructed and estimated a series of models that progressively incorporated variables potentially related to whether a student satisfied the math TAKS standard. First, and most

naively, we estimated the change in the predicted probability from 2006–2007 to 2007–2008 that a student at a FTF campus or FTF-comparison campus met the math or reading minimum

#### **Method**

To illustrate the impact of specific variables on student outcomes, vertical bar graphs are displayed throughout the report. The taller the vertical bar, the more decisive the impact of the factor on the graduate's outcome.

The height of the vertical bar is determined by comparing the difference in the likelihood of a student outcome between two students who are alike in most respects, but who show substantial differences in one characteristic. For our purposes, that substantial difference is time, which captures the improvement in student performance from the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 academic years. Of primary substantive interest in this report is whether the improvement, or decline, in performance between school years was large enough to constitute a statistically significant difference from the prior year, particularly at FTF campuses.

Using an example from Figure 14 below, the probability that a student met the math TAKS standard in 2007-2008 showed strong improvement (4 percentage points) from 2006-2007. This difference was statistically significant. The strength of this improvement (1 percentage point) weakened considerably after student and school-level characteristics were taken into consideration.

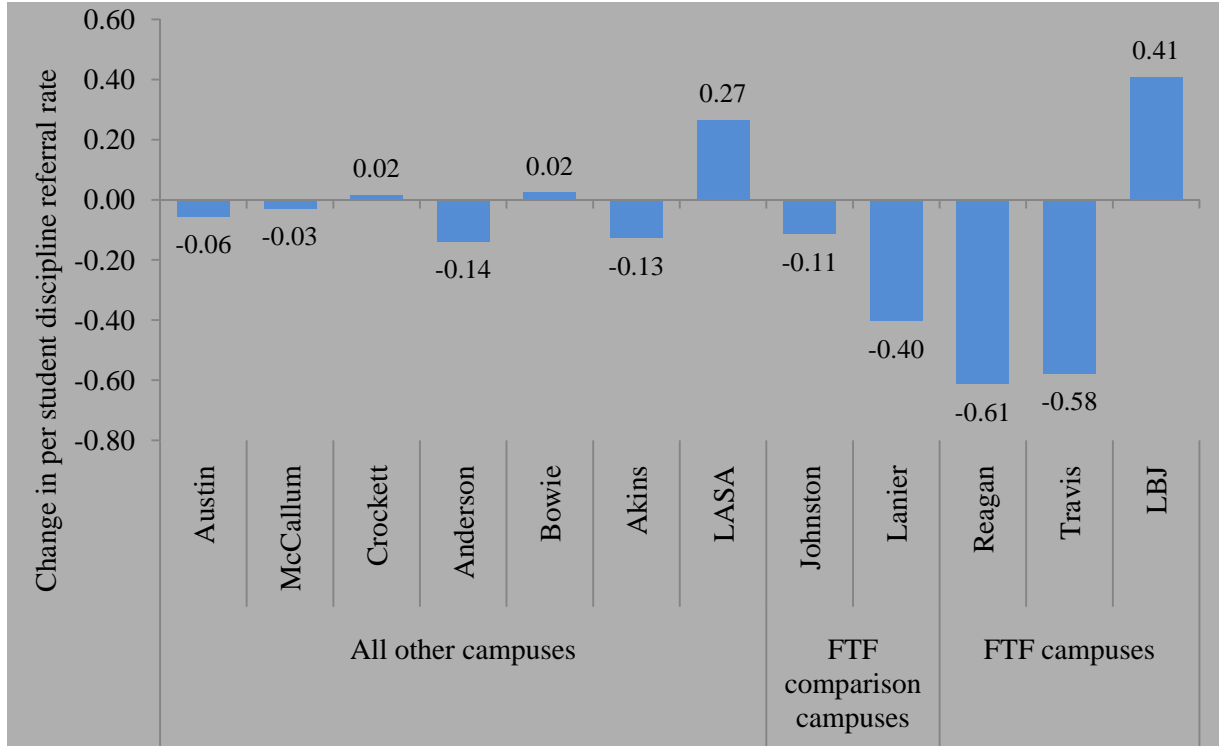
However, these gains were not symmetric across ethnic groups, nor did they remain when controlling for student- and school-level characteristics.

Although students at FTF campuses demonstrated a 1 percentage point increase in the likelihood of meeting the math TAKS standard in 2007–2008, compared with 2006–2007, and this gain exceeded the increase observed for FTF-comparison campuses, this improvement was not statistically significant. It is important to note that Quint et al. (2005) did not find statistically significant differences during the first implementation year in scores on state-mandated reading or math tests for most school districts they examined. Moreover, the impact of FTF implementation varied across individual campuses, even after controlling for alternative explanations. This was not fully captured by the modeling strategy adopted. Thus, drastic revisions to the FTF intervention model based upon our results may not yet be warranted.

**THE IMPACT OF FTF ON DISCIPLINARY REFERRALS**

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Figure 15: Per Student Discipline Referral Rate, by Campus and FTF Status, 2006–2007 and 2007–2008



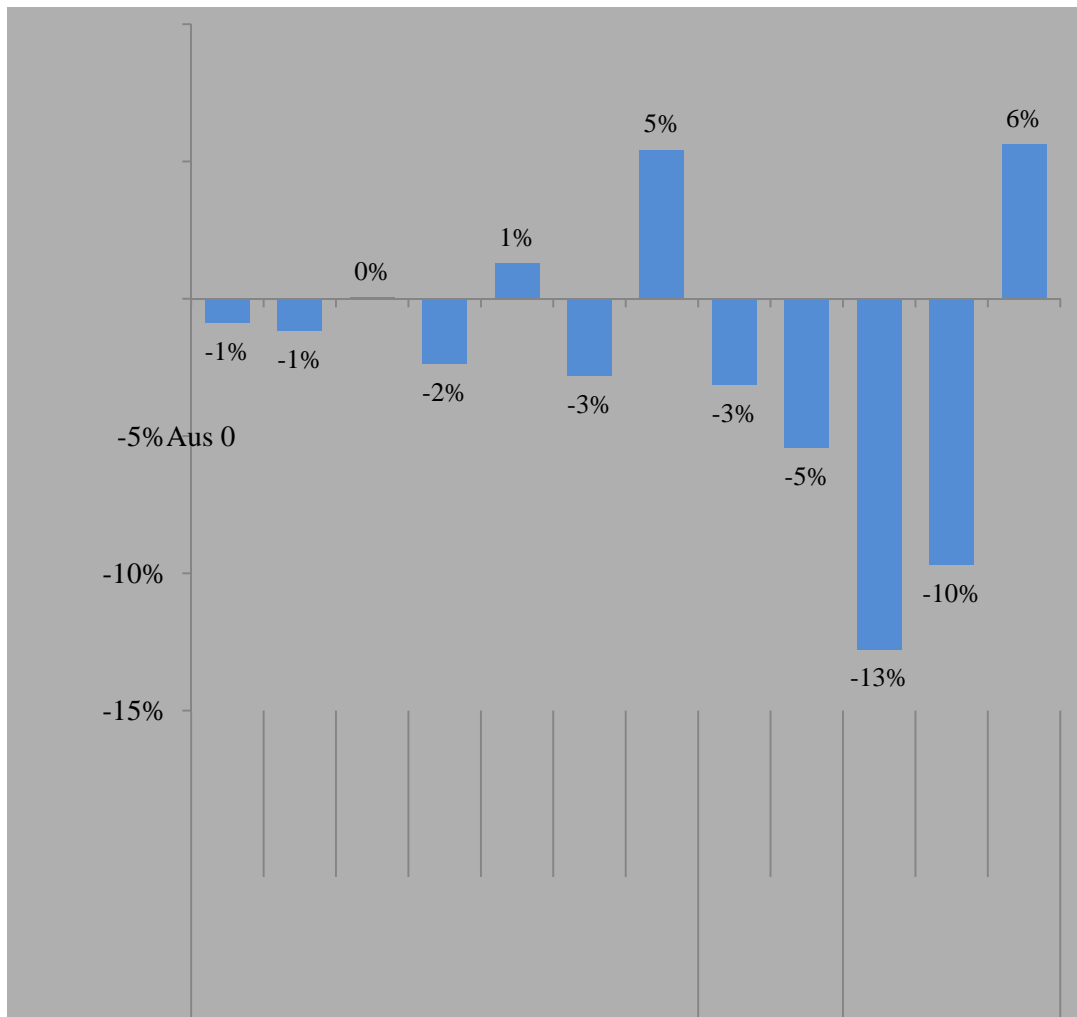
Source. AISD student discipline records, prepared by the DPE, October 2008

The reduction in the per student discipline referral rate at Reagan and Travis was accompanied by a decrease in the percentage of enrolled students who had at least one referral and who had multiple referrals (Figures 16 and 17). At Reagan, the share of students with at least one referral declined from 36.8% to 21.9% (15 percentage points). Travis also showed a sharp decline (9 percentage points), although this was less than the decrease at Lanier (11 percentage points). Furthermore, the percentage of students with multiple referrals decreased at Travis (10 percentage points) and Reagan (13 percentage points). Once again, these improvements exceeded those that occurred at the FTF-comparison campuses.

Figure 16: Students With at Least One Referral, by Campus and FTF Status, 2006–2007 and 2007–2008 Status



Figure 17: Students With Multiple Referrals, by Campus and FTF Status, 2006–2007 and 2007–2008



Source. AISD student discipline records, prepared by the DPE, October 2008

Whether the decreases in referrals represent an actual reduction in the type of behaviors precipitating referrals on campuses is unclear. The frequency of student misbehavior at school may have remained steady; however, campus staff may have become more tolerant of this behavior and less likely to initiate referrals that would have prompted disciplinary action in preceding years. Researchers examining disciplinary referral patterns continually grapple with this dilemma, including the challenges of identifying the disproportional disciplinary treatment of ethnic groups (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). One approach to address this problem is to control for staff perceptions of student misbehavior on campuses.

If referral rates declined in response to improvements in student behavior, staff perceptions of safety on campuses should reflect this phenomenon, with reports of campus safety becoming more favorable. School safety is a composite measure of subscale items







individual characteristics, the magnitude of the change between 2006–2007 and 2007–2008 was modestly larger at FTF comparison schools compared to FTF schools (.03 student referrals) at FTF-comparison campuses. These results are encouraging for district programs because the findings indicate high schools experienced a widespread decline in referral frequency even in schools not chosen for FTF implementation.

Figure 20: Predicted Discipline Referrals, by FTF Status, 2006–2007 and 2007–2008

The AISD Positive Behavior Support (PBS) model establishes behavior support systems at different levels of student intervention to promote pro-social behaviors and to limit disruptive student behaviors. Although implementation has been concentrated among middle school campuses, six district high schools were designated to receive, and have accepted, PBS support. Even schools that have not received formal district support for PBS implementation may have incorporated many of the tenets and strategies of the model, or may have preexisting staff behaviors that are hallmarks of the PBS philosophy.

Students in schools with higher PBS implementation scores have lower per student discipline referral rates, and this negative relationship was stronger at FTF campuses than at FTF-comparison campuses. This climate measure, taken from the AISD Staff Climate Survey, captures the prevalence of staff reinforcement of desirable student behaviors, as well as the existence and frequency of desirable student behaviors on campus. Two of the three campuses selected for PBS implementation (Travis and Reagan) also were chosen for FTF intervention, which may help explain why the relationship is stronger among FTF campuses.

To summarize the multivariate results from the discipline referral analyses, both FTF and FTF-comparison campuses experienced dramatic declines in the percentages of students with discipline referrals and in the per student discipline referral rate from 2006–2007 to 2007–2008. At FTF campuses, high student attrition, particularly among students who had chronic disciplinary problems and who were predisposed to dropping out, may have contributed to these declines.

Figure 21: Predicted Discipline Referrals, by FTF Status and Student and School Characteristics, 2006–2007 and 2007–2008

*Source.* AISD student records and AISD Staff Climate Report, prepared by the DPE, October 2008

*Note.* Estimates were derived from a conditional negative binomial regression with robust standard errors and unit-specific effects. GPA and PBS indicate the change generated from a one standard deviation increase. African American, Male, and Special Education status denote the difference in number of referrals relative to a corresponding reference group. For African Americans, the reference group is Hispanics.

## **D**

Although classroom observations took place frequently in all of the schools at the beginning of the year, they decreased significantly as the school year progressed. The factors causing the decreasing numbers of classroom observations were not explored. Commitment of campus and district administrators, time for completing the observations, ongoing training needs, and TAKS testing calendars may have influenced the frequency of observations. In addition to the decreasing numbers of observations throughout the year, little information was available about how classrooms were selected for the visits or whether individual classrooms were visited at similar intervals or frequencies. Without this information, it is difficult to discern whether the trends in engagement, alignment, and rigor were representative of the whole campus or SLC.

Because the family advocacy portion of the FTF initiative was fundamental in the development of student engagement and academic success, this evaluation examined the outcomes of the family advocacy component in relation to the relationships built between the students, their parents, and their family advocates. Each school established family advocacy classes that met regularly throughout the school year on their respective campuses. Students' reports that they interacted with their advocates



student advisory/family advocacy program is provided in the report entitled *High School Redesign: Student Advisory Evaluation, 2007–2008* (Looby & Garland, 2008).

Standardized test performance improvements were evident at all of the FTF schools. The TAKS test outcomes were particularly impressive at Travis compared to other FTF schools, where the percentage of students who met the math TAKS standard increased significantly in 2007–2008. Facing state intervention due to poor statewide assessment performance, Travis staff sought a wide range of innovative and intensive instructional strategies and other types of reforms to increase student achievement. A math instructional specialist at Travis described the efforts of their PLCs, which met after school to review students' math performance and discuss and design activities or strategies for improved student learning. They received strong district and campus administration support and were compensated for the extra time spent after school. Although these departmental meetings were not explicitly prescribed by FTF, such innovations that emerge organically at campuses can

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The FTF initiative includes three major components: SLCs for students; a family advocacy system; and instructional improvement efforts focused on student engagement, curricular alignment, and rigorous instruction. In 2007–2008, the LBJ, Reagan, and Travis high schools engaged in a full-scale implementation and experienced positive results. With ongoing support provided by district and school administrators, implementation can continue to progress. Recommendations for continuing support and improvement are provided for consideration.

1. *Ensure a lasting commitment to conducting EAR classroom observation visits throughout the school year to ensure sustained instructional improvement and to meet student achievement goals.* Across FTF campuses, district and campus staff demonstrated admirable enthusiasm early in the 2007–2008 school year for conducting EAR classroom visits. District- and campus-level administrators may need to articulate expectations regarding the frequency of the observations and the use of the observation data to improve instruction and learning. Both district- and campus-level observers, representing administrative and curriculum offices, should complete the observations to guard against possible bias issues. This will facilitate a more even distribution of responsibility for conducting classroom visits, while also counteracting any systematic data collection errors or biases that may be introduced when observations are disproportionately conducted by only a few campus staff members. Distributing this responsibility will also serve as a hedge against future attrition among campus staff assigned observation duty which may contribute to the sustainability and institutionalization of the EAR protocol tool. Furthermore, administrators need to provide the resources required (e.g., time, training, and

monitor compliance and unfeasible to asse

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**APPENDIX A: FTF STUDENT SURVEY PROFILE AND SAMPLING METHODOLOGY**

Although the entire population of students enrolled at LBJ, Travis, and Reagan during the Spring 2008 semester were sampled, the composition of survey respondents at each school was not representative of the respective school's enrollment. Thus, non-response or incomplete survey response was correlated with student-level characteristics, including grade level. For instance, 1,085 students successfully completed the survey, and 939 respondents accurately indicated their grade level, but only 755 provided a valid student identification number that would permit linking the responses to other district data sources. The patterns of non-response resulted in the underrepresentation or overrepresentation of particular student populations. For instance, although 12<sup>th</sup> grade students comprised 21% of the Travis student body when the survey was administered, only 11% of Travis respondents classified themselves as a 12<sup>th</sup> grade student. To correct for this lack of representativeness, poststratification weights by grade-level populations within each school sampled were applied. The poststratification weight was equal to the inverse of the probability of being selected as a result of the sampling procedure. More formally,  $W_{ij} = N_{ij}/n_{ij}$ , where  $W_{ij}$  = the probability weight,  $N_{ij}$  = the population of students within each grade level, by school, and  $n_{ij}$  = the total number of survey respondents within each

**APPENDIX B: SELECTION OF COMPARISON CAMPUSES**

Several methods were used to select comparison campuses for the FTF evaluation analyses. First, and least rigorously, schools were identified that resembled FTF campuses on an assortment of demographic and achievement indicators, including ethnic composition, high-needs population, and TAKS performance. Schools must have had a student body comprising at least 80% economically disadvantaged students, and an average 2006–2007 math TAKS score below .5 standard deviations from the overall mean. This method identified Lanier and Johnston high schools as the campuses most similar to the FTF schools.

Second, and more rigorously, a variant on propensity score matching (PSM) was used to quantify the multiple school and student-level characteristics associated with selection for FTF intervention. More precisely, a multivariate logistic regression was estimated to determine the conditional probability that a given student at a particular school was enrolled at a FTF campus. These probabilities then were aggregated up to the campus level. Confirming the results from the first, more rudimentary procedure, Lanier and Johnston were found to be most like the FTF campuses, after controlling for student-level demographic and academic characteristics.

**APPENDIX C: TECHNICAL MATERIAL FOR TAKS MULTIVARIATE ANALYSES SECTION**

Because we were investigating the change in student performance that stemmed from the introduction of the FTF reform model, compared with performance at similar schools that did not implement the initiative, the improvement attributable to FTF was captured by the change in students' TAKS performance—or the change in any student outcome measures—between 2006–2007 and 2007–2008. This assumed that all other confounding school-level and student-level factors that could influence student academic performance were included. The impact of FTF implementation on student performance was represented by the inclusion of a school-level dummy variable that was coded as “1” for the 2007–2008 school year and “0” for 2006–2007. If this implementation variable was statistically significant for a FTF school, the improvement resulting from FTF intervention was considered to be meaningful and not generated by sampling or measurement anomalies.

The outcome of interest was whether an individual student satisfied the minimum standard for the TAKS subject area in a given school year. Thus, the dependent variable was binary, assuming values of “1” if a given student met the standard and “0” if the student did not. Limited dependent variables necessitate econometric techniques that adjust for the non-continuous and non-linear structure of the dependent variable. Adopting standard ordinary least squares (OLS) regression techniques with a limited dependent introduces numerous statistical violations and jeopardizes the researchers' ability to extract sound inferences from the statistical results. To avert these dangers, maximum likelihood estimation (MLE) techniques (i.e., logistic regression) were used to produce estimates of the impact of student and school-level characteristics on the likelihood a student met the TAKS standard. These logit estimates then were converted to predicted probabilities to ease the interpretation of the results.





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