

Executive Summary

This report presents results of an evaluation of activities and services delivered under the School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994 (PL 103-239) by the Capital Area Education and Careers Partnership (the Partnership). The Partnership contracted with the Ray Marshall Center for the Study of Human Resources (RMC), a research unit of the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at The University of Texas-Austin, to conduct the evaluation.

School-to-Work activities (known as “School-to-Career” in Texas) are provided largely through 26 regional School-to-Career (STC) Partnerships with funds provided by a five-year federal grant administered by the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC). The Partnership has received three successive one-year grants from TWC to implement School-to-Career activities in Travis County. TWC required an independent evaluation of Year One (SFY 1998) and Year Two (SFY 1999) activities that included recommendations for program improvements for its Year Three (SFY 2000) grant.¹ This report is in response to that requirement.

During its first two years of operation, we found that the Partnership:

- Consistently progressed towards the attainment of annual objectives in each of its four major program areas: Career Awareness, School-based Activities, Work-based Activities and Connecting Activities. For example, the *quality* of student internships increased alongside the *quantity* of slots available. Also, Partnership support for “Industry Liaisons” has helped to strengthen *employer engagement* within the Industry Sector Steering Committee (ISSC) structure.
- Delivered goods and services directly to schools that further engaged their interest in STC. The Partnership provided assessment and testing software, supported Career Fairs, assisted curriculum development, and provided brochures and other marketing materials to schools and school districts.

¹ Year One funds did not become available for expenditure on program activities until February 1998. According to planning documents, the total Year One budget was \$381,831; the Year Two budget was \$440,000.

- Directly accomplished or contributed to the advancement of School-to-Career objectives in Travis County by promoting regional, systemic, collaborative and continuous improvement approaches throughout the STC initiative.
- Continues to face constraints beyond its control in implementing its STC initiative. These include the voluntary nature of participation for educators, employers and students; the persistence of the academic/vocational track mentality at the secondary level; and the paucity of secondary students in the Austin area who are adequately prepared for and/or interested in High Tech careers.

The Partnership may find this a propitious time for considering options to redirect part of its energies and resources over the remaining annual grant cycles toward several important tasks. We recommend that the Partnership revisit strategic approaches, enhance systemic practices, improve performance management, increase the transparency of STC among educators and employers, and advance the sustainability of STC activities by forging new funding linkages, among other recommendations. The Partnership has developed a foundation upon which collaborative leadership and support from employers, educators, government and communities can be focused toward institutionalizing STC practices and policies in their operational regimes. Although relatively simple to articulate, these remain immense challenges.

This report presents our evaluation results in the following four sections. The first assesses the effectiveness of the Partnership in attaining its stated annual objectives. The next presents notable accomplishments of the Partnership in Years One and Two. The third section raises some of the fundamental and persistent issues that surfaced during discussions in the field. Though most of the individuals who are actively engaged in Austin STC efforts are familiar with these issues, restating them is beneficial to understanding the operational context and challenges as the Partnership prepares to continue its efforts in the forthcoming years. The final section recommends specific actions for the Partnership to consider in the last two years of its federal grant.