The Reconnection (Reconnect) program was designed to assist students recover credits for incomplete (due to excessive absences) or failed courses. The program allowed students to remain enrolled in courses in the traditional classroom setting on their campus while recovering credit in Reconnect centers during assigned periods. Credit recovery allowed students to remain on track to be promoted or graduate with their cohort.

The Reconnect program provided students with online and offline work. The online work was prescriptive, meaning that the student pre-tested over the objectives in a module, using NovaNET. The pre-test determined which objectives the student needed to master. The student worked through only those modules and was tested again at completion. As the student mastered a module, they moved to the next module. The student did not have to spend additional time on those modules whose objectives had been mastered; they were able to focus on only those objectives they had not mastered. Offline coursework was generated from the district’s mandated curriculum (Curriculum Planning Guides). Students completed work based on the requirements of the district prescribed curriculum. With successful completion of prescriptive online work, teacher-graded offline work, and the district Assessment of Course Performance (ACP) test, students were awarded credit using district grading standards. The Title I 2011-12 workscope allocation for this program was $2,593,643.

2010-11 Case Study

The results of this case study showed that Reconnect centers were not using the same forms or methods to track student work. The majority of Reconnect work was recorded on hard copy forms and only one center was using electronic record keeping. While student data was mostly available at an individual student level, it was difficult to review data at a center or program level making determining the effectiveness of the centers hard to measure. The inability to quickly report on what courses students were taking in Reconnect and what progress they were making through those courses continued to hinder the ability of the evaluation office or any other office in determining the needs of the Reconnect program. Data suggested that there were many students not completing courses in Reconnect. This could have been because counselors referred students to Reconnect for courses they did not actually need to complete or they retook the course in the regular classroom, thus the student never began work on the course. However, it also could be from students beginning courses and then withdrawing. This is important information when tracking student retention.

Data Management Systems

Reconnect used Chancery to track which students were enrolled in the program but Chancery did not allow tracking of what course students were taking, what grades they were receiving, the reasons they were enrolled in the course, and whether they were recovering full or partial credits. None of the current data management systems allowed for review of aggregate data across Reconnect Centers or across the district. The additional data features Pearson was working to add to the NovaNET system will benefit the program in the future, but the program should continue to work with the district to align their reporting structures in an electronic format.

Evaluation and Accountability Procedures

Evaluation and accountability of the Reconnect program and its staff would benefit from universal criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of Reconnect personnel, administrators who are more informed on the Reconnect procedures and expectations of Reconnect facilitators, and an adapted appraisal form that more accurately reflects the duties performed by a Reconnect facilitator. Reconnect staff and campus administrators agreed that knowledge of the program was important to evaluating Reconnect staff and that an understanding of the differing job responsibilities of Reconnect facilitators would make evaluation criteria more accurate and reflective of actual work performance.

NovaNET Curriculum

Existing Pearson textbooks and their online NovaNET curricula based on those books were both aligned with Texas Education Association (TEA) guidelines and Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) standards and also met nationwide standards. The prescriptive NovaNET courses utilized both a pre-test and post-test for each module. The pre-test tested the student’s knowledge at an individual skill level. If students showed mastery of the skills on the pre-test they were not required to take the post-test; however, if a student did not master all of the skills, then they worked through the course content associated with the skills they did not pass in addition to having to take the post-test which tested all the skills again. Each course
consisted of a series of online and offline activities that each student was required to complete in order to meet the state's minimum requirements for credit in that course. Information about how TEKS standards were developed can be found on the TEA website at http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=6148. A description of the process for review and revision of the TEKS and reviews of each subject area can be found on the TEA website. Pearson has a catalog that outlined how its course offerings correlated with the TEKS. This catalog was only available to Pearson customers.

The courses available through the Pearson NovaNET program were part of a comprehensive, online system designed to help students reach three specific goals: achievement of objective-level mastery, preparation for the challenges of high school, and readiness for graduation and college. In order to reach these goals, Pearson incorporated three specific instructional design best practices into NovaNET Courseware: Gagné’s Nine Events of Instruction to facilitate learning and improve student performance, Visual Literacy principles (contrast, alignment, repetition, and proximity) to organize the material for maximum effect, and the Cognitive Load Theory defined by John Sweller et al. in 2006 to ensure the learner was able to efficiently and effectively move through the program.

**Student Demographics and Academic Achievement**

Between the 2010-11 and 2011-12 school years, the Reconnect program lost 11 teachers, five grant-funded teachers and six campus-based teachers. Nineteen centers had only one teacher and one center was operating with three teachers. The Reconnect program served 3,868 students during the 2011-12 school year, a 10 percent decrease from the 2010-11 school year. The majority of Reconnect students were seniors or juniors, male, Hispanic, and economically disadvantaged. The average age was about 18 and the average GPA was about 77 percent. Of the 27 Reconnect Centers, nine showed an increase in the number of students served from the 2010-11 school year and 11 schools had a decrease in the number of students served. Of those with an increase, four showed a corresponding increase in the number of credits earned. Of those centers serving fewer students, three showed an increase in the number of credits earned. When reviewing the average number of credits earned, 13 Reconnect Centers had an average number of credits earned of less than 0.5. Reconnection students attended school less often than those students not in the program. Reconnection students were likely to have family and personal issues that interfered with their ability to attend school. Reconnect students attended school about 86 percent of the time while non-Reconnect students attended about 92 percent of the time. Reconnect students also received lower TAKS and STAAR scores than their counterparts. Reconnect students scored better than non-Reconnect students on 20 ACP exams but scored at least five percentage points lower on five exams. As expected, Reconnect students had a lower GPA than did non-Reconnect students (i.e., about 77% and 81%, respectively).

It is unacceptable for the Reconnect program to continue with the current levels of tracking and accountability. The program needs to be able to prove its usefulness to the district. All campus and program staff (including campus administrators, counseling staff, Reconnect facilitators and Reconnect managers) associated with this program should be held accountable. In order for this program to operate successfully, centers need to function under universal criteria and guidelines to which campus staff should adhere.

**Recommendations**

The following are recommendations based on the findings of the 2011-12 evaluation:

1. Work with campus administrators to increase accountability of facilitators and teaching staff. This includes ensuring facilitators comply with program data collection procedures, enter data accurately and completely, and follow all grading procedures. Because the program manager is not the direct supervisor to the facilitators, it is imperative that campus administrators review Reconnect policies and procedures and develop accountability measures that align with Reconnect goals.

2. Continue to work with Pearson and Dallas ISD Management Information Systems to develop a better database system to track student progress through the program. In addition, the program should continue to work on other methods to record student progress electronically until an adequate database is available. This includes course information, course grades, exam grades, course completion times by module, students served, and credits earned.

3. Develop universal, districtwide policies and procedures for the Reconnect program and develop an infrastructure to hold campus and Reconnect staff accountable for adhering to these guidelines. The Reconnect program does have a policies and procedures handbook. If this document is determined to be adequate, then district leaders should create accountability measures to ensure all staff follow these guidelines, including campus administrators and Reconnect facilitators.
For more information, see EA12-132-2, which can be found at http://www.dallasisd.org/Page/15252.