

## The 2001 - 2002 High Challenge Grant Program

The purpose of the High Challenge Grant Program was to encourage school districts to develop innovative, comprehensive, research-based models that addressed the needs of at-risk children. The funded programs had four years to develop and refine their models. During that time, they participated in program evaluation that provided information for program development and overall effectiveness. At the end of the fourth year, if the program was determined to be effective, it received validation as a successful program for at-risk students. Once validated, a fifth year of funding was provided for the programs to concentrate on replication activities. Funds were also available for schools who wanted to replicate the validated models at their sites. The goal of the grant program was to develop a pool of effective models for serving at-risk students that could be replicated across the state.

Twenty-nine programs were funded in 2001-2002 through the Oklahoma State Department's High Challenge Grant Program, three fewer than last year. These 29 programs served a total of **2,355** students. The geographic distribution of funded programs has always favored districts in the eastern half of the state. Currently, three programs are located in the western half. Of the newly funded programs in 2001-2002, two were located in Eastern Oklahoma and one in the West. This report includes descriptions and individual evaluations for each of the 29 programs.

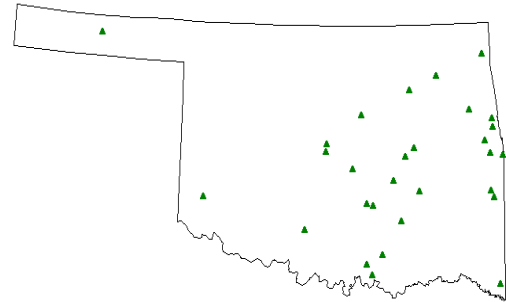


Figure 1

OTAC Field Coordinators assisted the districts with the many implementation difficulties that often plague first year projects. They also worked with the staff of continuing projects to refine the models and respond to annual evaluation results as well as feedback from faculty, parents, students. OTAC's mission for providing technical assistance as well as evaluation required that Field Coordinators make multiple on-site visits to the programs during the year. Programs in their first or second year of implementation traditionally required more contacts than those in the refinement or replication stages of their project. First-year sites were visited a minimum of four times during the school year, with follow-up telephone, e-mail, and telefax contacts. No site was visited fewer than four times during the year. OTAC staff made a total of 140 on-site visits to these 29 programs in 2001-2002, an average of 4.82 site-visits per project. First-year programs averaged 6.00 visits per program.

Three of the 29 grant projects were in their first year of funding, eight in their second, ten in their third, six in their fourth, and two in their fifth. The two fifth-year schools in the program had not yet been validated, but received continued funding so that additional evaluation could be conducted. Table 1 presents the number of years the program has been in operation, the grade levels served, the number of students served, staffing requirements, and state funding provided for the program.

<b>Table 1. Program information.</b>					
<b>School</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Grades</b>	<b>Students Served</b>	<b>Staff</b>	<b>State Funding</b>
Ada	2	4-6	7	1 teacher, 1 assistant	\$58,900
Agra	3	K-6	74	1 director/teacher, 2 assistants	\$25,000
Arkoma	2	3 PK-6	49	1 teacher, 1 assistant	\$64,499
Cherokee County Interlocal	2	7-8	291	2 counselors, 1 director	\$83,500
Claremore	1	4	350	1 teacher, 1 director	\$47,100
Cottonwood	3	6	21	1 teacher	\$55,763
Crooked Oak	4	6-8	45	1 teacher	\$21,750
Duncan	5	4PK	71	1 director, 1 counselor, 3 certified early childhood specialists, 6 teachers, 1.5 assistants	\$8,172
Graham	3	6	19	1 teacher, .5 assistant	\$27,553
Greasy	2	K-8	57	1 teacher	\$78,200
Grove	3	6-8	59	1 teachers, .5 assistant	\$30,249
Guymon	4	5-7	8	1 teacher, .5 counselor	\$27,432
Heavener	4	K-12 and adults	62	.75 coordinator, 7 teachers, 3 assistants	\$23,965
Henryetta	3	1-8	29	3 teachers, 2 assistants, 1 counselor, 2 mentors, 3 volunteers	\$50,490
Holdenville	3	7	13	1 teacher	\$55,000
Howe	2	K-12	47	33 teachers, 1 Technology Master	\$36,150
Kingston	2	K-5	106	1 teacher	\$17,030
Madill	3	3PK -1+	117	1 director, 1 teacher, 1 assistant	\$57,799
Mangum	4	K-8	46	2 administrators, 9 teachers, 1 assistant	\$12,253
McAlester	3	4-5	97	1 teacher	\$66,497
Milburn	2	K-12	59	5 teachers, 1 director, 1 bus driver	\$57,382
Muldrow	3	K-12	150	1 director, 25 teachers	\$30,140
See Worth Academy	1	3 - 12	311	4 administrators, 27 teachers, 4 counselors, 1 nurse, 4 mentors	\$68,500
Peavine	3	1-8	44	1 teacher, 1 assistant	\$68,267
Pickett Center	4	K-8	50	1 teacher, 1 tutor	\$3,775
Sallisaw	5	T1-2	41	10 teachers	\$5,000
Tecumseh	1	4 -7	33	1 teacher, 1 counselor	\$86,200
Tom	4	K-8	64	9 teachers	\$19,300
Tulsa	2	1-5	35	3 teachers, 2 assistants, 1 counselor	\$88,906
<b>Total</b>			<b>2355</b>	<b>156 teachers, 10.5 counselors, 14 directors, 16.5 assistants, 13 support staff</b>	<b>\$1,274,772</b>

The majority of High Challenge projects served more than one grade level. Twelve (41.37 %) of the programs served students in grades K-6 in some combination. Nine (31.03 %) of the programs extended the services to include middle school students (K-8). Four (13.79 %) of the programs allowed participation of students in all grade levels (K-12). Four (13.79 %) of the programs built models just for middle school students (6-8). No programs were designed to solely serve high school students. Four (13.79%) of the programs addressed the needs of just one grade level. All of the programs provided a classroom setting for a specified group of at-risk children.

The model chosen by a district determined the number of students to be served by the High Challenge project. For example, Ada's model consisted of providing intensive behavioral intervention services to elementary-level students in a self-contained classroom setting. Due to the severity of these children's issues, a low professional staff-to-student ratio was appropriate. Those districts that served the most students were rural cooperatives and whole-school projects, such as Claremore's multicultural awareness model, and Oklahoma City's charter school focusing on academics and drug and alcohol prevention. The Cherokee Interlocal's guidance counseling project provided services to ten area schools. The average number of students served per program was 81.20, quite a bit higher than last year's average of 77.03. The number of students served ranged from 7 to 350.

Professional staff were needed to meet project goals. Table 1 lists the number and type of staff required for each of the projects. A total of 213 staff members was listed; many of these were part-time and a few were volunteers. The programs averaged 7.34 staff members per project. The project with the most staff was See Worth Academy that served 311 students in an alternative school program. In all, the 29 projects required 156 certified teachers, 14 administrators, 16.5 instructional assistants, 10.5 counselors, and 13 support staff. Volunteers, such as peer tutors or community members, usually assisted in the programs that emphasized tutoring or mentoring.

The average amount of grant funding per program was \$43,957. The awards ranged from \$3,775 to \$88,906. The range of awards for the three new projects was from \$47,100 for a multicultural enrichment program at the elementary school level to \$86,200 for an upper elementary/middle school half-day academic intervention program that also provided counseling. The average award for first-year programs funded in 2001-2002 was \$67,266. The average amount of funding for second-year programs was \$60,570, third-year programs - \$46,675, fourth-year programs - \$18,079, and fifth-year programs - \$6,586. (Programs in their fourth year received 50 percent of this original grant amount and programs in their fifth-year received 25 percent. The purpose of this funding structure was to encourage school districts to gradually assume financial responsibility for their programs.)

*Student demographics.* Demographic information was reported for approximately half of the students in the High Challenge program. Figures 2-7 present the demographic information concerning the students served in the High Challenge program this year. Relevant information from the demographic data may be summarized as follows:

*Figure 2.* Grade level information was available for the majority of students served in High Challenge projects. Over half the students served were in the elementary grades (PreK-8). 82.9 percent of all High Challenge students were in these grades. This year, 4<sup>th</sup> grade students were the largest group served, 19.7 percent. Last year, 8<sup>th</sup> grade represented the largest group served and this year 8th-graders accounted for 17.6 percent of all High Challenge students. This change can be attributed to a new program, Language in Arts, serving fourth-grade students. The ten-school transition model continued to be the source for the large number of students in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Other elementary students were served by reading remediation tutorial programs.

*Figure 3.* Gender distribution in High Challenge projects tended to favor males over females again this year. Of the 1,455 students for whom this information was recorded, 53.6 percent were males and 46.4 percent were females.

*Figure 4.* Racial/ethnic group information was available for 1,404 students, approximately 63.5 percent of all those served by the High Challenge program. Over half of the students (55.5 percent) served by the High Challenge program were minorities. The largest minority groups served were African Americans at 27 percent and Native Americans at 21.9 percent. Last year these two groups were reversed with more Native Americans being served in High Challenge projects than African Americans. 44.7 percent of students served were Caucasian. This was the first year in which more minority students than Caucasians were served by High Challenge projects. This is a proportion higher than expected when compared to Oklahoma school children. The state data show that 35 percent of Oklahoma school children are members of racial or ethnic minorities (*Profiles 2001*, State Office of Accountability). In part, this discrepancy can be accounted for by four districts that have minority populations greater than 60 percent (Tom, Crooked Oak, Peavine and Greasy); however, in four other districts minorities are over-represented in High Challenge projects. These districts are Mangum, Oklahoma City, Tulsa and Sallisaw.

*Figure 5.* Information on the number of years students participated in High Challenge projects was provided for almost half of all High Challenge students, for a sample of 1064 students. The vast majority (85 percent) were in their first year of participation in the program. In part, this may be accounted for by the initiation of one large program this year. In addition, many of the programs only allow for one year of participation.

*Figure 6.* The primary reason for referral was recorded for 998 students, approximately 45.2 percent of the students served. Academic deficiency (22.3 percent) was the reason reported for more than half of the students served. This is an indicator of the many tutorial models funded.

*Figure 7.* Student exit status was available for 877 of the students served. The most frequently-recorded statuses were continuing in program and returned to traditional program (28.1 percent). Of the 72 seniors who participated, 67 graduated from school. All five of the students who dropped out of school were in the 9<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> grade.

*Program characteristics and outcomes.* Each of the 29 projects had specific goals and activities which defined its purpose. Each project was reviewed and categorized by its most defining component. Table 2 lists the principal components and the number of programs offering those components, although most models included ancillary components (see Figure 8). For the fourth year in a row, tutoring programs were the most frequently funded. One-third (34.40 percent) of the programs listed some type of tutoring as their primary activity. Most projects (24.10 per cent) focused on reading remediation in response to the requirements of the Reading Sufficiency Act. Other tutoring projects (basic skills remediation at the elementary level and homework assistance at the secondary level) accounted for 10.30% of the projects. Self-contained classrooms and resource rooms accounted for 27.58 percent of all programs. This model was implemented at all grade levels and focused on solving behavioral issues and improving students academic achievement. This year, two new models were piloted. Oklahoma City initiated a charter school focusing on academics and alcohol and drug prevention while Claremore began a program to raise student awareness of the variety of cultures represented in the elementary school.

<b>Primary component</b>	<b>Number of programs</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Primary component</b>	<b>Number of programs</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Art	1	3.45%	Professional development	1	3.45%
Distance Learning Lab	1	3.45%	Summer School	2	6.89%
Drug and Alcohol Prevention	1	3.45%	Transitional	1	3.45%
Early Childhood	2	6.89%	Tutoring ESL	1	3.45%
Multicultural Awareness	1	3.45%	Tutoring/ Homework Assistance/ Basic Skills	3	10.34%
Self-contained/ Resource Classroom	8	27.58%	Tutoring/Reading Remediation	7	24.13%

Ancillary services were also features of each High Challenge project. Figure 8 presents the types and number of ancillary services provided by the projects. These ancillary components were intended to complement and support the primary intervention. The ancillary model component most frequently included by the programs was parent involvement. 19 of the 29 program models made efforts to increase parent participation or knowledge. Counseling services were an ancillary component in ten of the programs. This component usually accompanied the self-contained classrooms. Eight projects had a professional development component included in their model.

Each of the High Challenge Grant programs reported pre-post academic and behavioral data for the students they served. The data collected took various forms depending on the program and the target population it served. For example, grade point averages were usually collected for older elementary students while Priority Academic Skill checklists were often developed to assess acquisition of skills at younger ages. Statistical tests of significance were conducted for each site to determine the reliability of student outcomes and effects of the interventions on at-risk students. Grade point averages were reported most frequently by the projects. Figure 9 presents the pre-post averages for the group. A statistically significant increase was noted in the pre-post grade point averages of the High Challenge students ( $t(1308) = 14.08, p = .000$ ). Prior to intervention, the mean GPA was 2.36 compared to 2.70 at the end of the year. Although, as a group, the students continued to achieve at the C level, the increase in GPA was substantial.

Absences were the only behavioral data available for over half of the students (see Figure 10). Before participation in the program, the at-risk students averaged 12.14 days a semester compared to 8.53 days during the spring semester of 2002 ( $t(1205) = 7.90, p = .000$ ). This average included the absences recorded for students who were suspended from school until the end of the year. Analyses of student absences when the suspended students were eliminated from the sample indicated a small,

but statistically significant, decrease. The average number of days students were absent prior to intervention was 9.53 compared to 8.11 during the spring semester.

Due to the variety of academic and behavioral data collected, the programs were coded as having either positive academic and behavioral outcomes or no positive outcomes. In order to be coded as having a positive outcome, the participating students needed to demonstrate positive results on at least two of the variables measured. Sixteen of the 29 programs were recorded as having made positive gains during the year. Seven of the programs did not have any positive or negative academic or behavioral changes and five of the programs reported negative changes for their students. Overall, 41 percent of the projects were not successful in their goal of assisting at-risk students.

Of the programs with positive student outcomes, the programs with a self-contained classroom model showed the greatest success. Of the seven self-contained programs, six reported positive outcomes for their at-risk students. Three of the self-contained classrooms served only elementary students, two served middle school students, and one served students in grade 4-7. Two of the programs were located off-campus and four of the classrooms were located within the traditional school. The programs served an average 34.6 students in this type of model. Four of the six self-contained programs were staffed by one teacher and one other staff member, either part-or full-time. Five of the six programs were in rural areas.

The two early childhood models also reported gains. Both programs focused on the developmental growth of the Spanish-speaking children in the community. Both programs also included adult ESL and parenting components. The following models were implemented by a single district and found to have positive results: a drug and alcohol program implemented in an alternative school setting, a school-wide multicultural program, and an after-school tutoring program that targeted Spanish-speaking youth. In each of these cases, students were also exposed to a number of reform efforts beside the High Challenge program model.

None of the three basic skills tutoring models produced positive results for their at-risk participants. The three models were all implemented in rural, elementary districts. Two of the three districts developed programs that operated after school and one tutored students during the school day. The after-school program had open-entry/open-exit policies that allowed for voluntary participation. Staffing varied greatly among the models. Other models developed by single districts that were not demonstrated to be effective included a schoolwide art program, a high-school distance learning lab for advanced placement courses, and an eighth-grade transitional program.

Seven of the models in the High Challenge Grant program focused on reading remediation for elementary students. Of the seven models, three of the programs produced positive academic outcomes, two reported no change and two had negative effects. The three programs differed in structure. Two of the programs were voluntary, after-school models while one was an elective class. One of the after-school models targeted the early elementary grade levels; one provided instruction for elementary and middle school students; the elective class was offered at the middle school level. All three programs relied on computer-assisted instruction as a primary component. All three

programs also identified students' strengths and weaknesses and developed individualized instructional interventions based on assessment results.

The four programs with neutral or negative outcomes all served a broader range of elementary populations than the more successful interventions. One district served students in grades 1-8, one served K-6, and the other two served students in grades K-8. Two programs developed pull-out classes that focused on reading remediation. One used a specific reading program delivered in a small group setting and the other relied primarily on the Accelerated Reader program. The other two models were dissimilar. One was a schoolwide reform model that relied heavily on computer-assisted-instruction and the other was a voluntary after-school program. In all, three of the four unsuccessful models included the Accelerated Reader program as a primary program component. All of the models included a parent involvement component.

*Cost analysis.* In 2001-2002 the State Department of Education awarded funds to 29 programs that served 2,355 students at a total cost of \$1,274,772. The amount of funds awarded through the High Challenge Grant program this year was \$94,679 less than last year, a substantial reduction. The average cost was \$43,957.66 per program and \$541.28 per student served. This is an 8.90% reduction from last year's average cost per student of \$608.10. When the programs who received partial funding (fourth and fifth-year programs) were removed from the analysis, the average amount per program was \$54,910 and the average cost per student was \$585.93, more than two hundred dollars less than last year's average of \$824.59.

Table 3 presents each of the model types by the original amount of funding requested to implement the program. The ten-school transition model was the most expensive type of model to implement, followed by the drug and alcohol prevention model. The self-contained classroom had the largest range of funding. Self-contained classrooms that served younger students and provide intensive ancillary services (e.g., Tulsa and Tecumseh) were the most expensive to implement. Self-contained classrooms for older students (that were, in effect, credit recovery programs) were some of the least expensive projects. As a group, the counseling models and the art model were the least expensive to operate.

Primary component	Number of programs	Average cost	Range of cost
Art	1	\$17,030	
Distance Learning	1	\$36,150	
Drug and Alcohol Prevention	1	\$68,500	
Early Childhood	2	\$32,985	\$8,172 - \$57,799
Multicultural Awareness	1	\$47,100	
Self-contained/ Resource Classroom	8	\$54,842	\$27,432 - \$88,906
Professional Development	1	\$66,497	
Summer School	2	\$34,817.50	\$12,253 - \$57,382
Transitional	1	\$83,500	
Tutoring ESL	1	\$23,965	
Tutoring/Homework Assistance/Basic Skills	3	\$36,676	\$3,775 - \$55,763
Tutoring/Reading Remediation	7	\$35,379.57	\$5,000 - \$78,200

Twelve models were implemented this year through the High Challenge program. Five of these twelve had multiple schools using the same model. Within each of the model groups that had multiple practitioners, the cost of program operation varied widely. For example, the cost of reading remediation ranged from \$25,000 in Agra to \$78,200 in Greasy. The highest-funded project in the High Challenge grant program was Tulsa s elementary alternative classroom model that required \$88,906. The least expensive model in the group was Kingston s Art on a Cart project. The average cost for the programs that had statically significantly positive outcomes was \$39,167 which is substantially lower than last year s \$44,389. If the fourth and fifth year programs, which were successful, are removed from this analysis, the average cost per program was \$56,585 and the average cost per student was \$504. The average cost per program that produced neutral or negative results was significantly less, \$50,507 but the per-student cost was significantly higher at \$849. There were fewer students being served in programs producing neutral or negative results and the average cost per program was still relatively expensive.

*Conclusions.* The Alterative Approaches Grant program requires a High Challenge program to be evaluated for effectiveness after three consecutive years of funding. If the program has local and state significance, is found to be effective in reaching the targeting population, and is replicable, state validation is granted. Eighteen programs were eligible for validation this year. All but one of the programs provided information that allowed for a rigorous, multi-year, program evaluation. Of the 18 programs, sixteen were not recommended for validation and two were recommended for one more year of study. This is the fifth consecutive year that none of the eligible programs were

recommended for state validation. The programs that have been funded in the last five years have not been comprehensive intervention models, but rather, a combination of ancillary components. When the next round of new High Challenge grants are awarded, they will be under new legislation that sets out a higher standard for making the grant award. Future evaluations will determine whether this is an effective means of developing effective models for improving the educational prospects of high-risk children and youth.