

Texas Migrant Education Program Evaluation

Final Report

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Texas Migrant Education Program Evaluation: Final Report

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Executive Summary

In September, 2008 the Texas Education Agency (TEA) contracted with MGT of America, Inc. (MGT), and their subcontractor, Resources for Learning, L.L.C. (RFL), to conduct a two-year evaluation of the effectiveness of the Texas Migrant Education Program (TMEP), as required by Section 1304(c)(5) of Title I of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965* (ESEA), as amended by the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB), and by Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Section 34 CFR 200.84 and 200.85.

Five overarching evaluation objectives guided the TMEP evaluation study:

- 1) Conduct a literature review of best practices in migrant education.
- 2) Determine the instructional and support services for migrant students implemented in Texas.
- 3) Review alignment of TMEP services with best practices from the literature and make recommendations for additional migrant programs and services that are likely to be effective at helping migrant students in Texas.
- 4) Determine stakeholder perceptions of implementation success and patterns of participation in local and statewide longstanding Texas migrant education programs to include the TMEP and two special programs: the Texas Migrant Interstate Program (TMIP) and the Migrant Student Graduation Enhancement Program (MSGEP)¹.
- 5) Compare trends in academic achievement of migrant and non-migrant students in Texas.

¹ Data were not available to examine the effectiveness of the TMIP or MSGEP on educational performance outcomes. See discussion on pages 5, 6, and 7 of the report.

The [TMEP interim evaluation report](#)² published in August 2009 includes a detailed description of the TMEP as well as the state's service delivery plan (SDP) and comprehensive needs assessment (CNA) for providing migrant services. Findings from the first two evaluation objectives were addressed within the interim report. This final report presents findings from the comprehensive evaluation addressing all five of the research objectives. A summary of the findings for each of the evaluation objectives follows.

Evaluation Objective 1: Best Practices Literature Review

Efforts to identify best practices in migrant education literature were limited by a lack of empirical research and large-scale studies of effectiveness. However, the literature did include ethnographic studies and qualitative studies of migrant education programming. Additionally, best practice research from other fields could be applied, to some extent, to migrant education, especially in the areas of early childhood education, language and literacy development, dropout prevention, and parent involvement. The findings of the literature review identified a set of interrelated themes that reflect what is known about effective programming within the migrant education community. These themes, or best practice principles, included the following:

- *Responsiveness.* Innovative and flexible programming that reflects intentional knowledge of the particular needs of the community, families, and students served;
- *Communication, Collaboration, and Relationships.* Coordinated data and information sharing systems and networks, partnerships between service providers, and personal relationships built on trust and caring;
- *Adequate and Appropriate Staffing.* Staffing to provide the level of advocacy and individualized services migrant students require;

²The interim TMEP evaluation report can be found at:
http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/opge/progeval/Other/TMEP_Interim_0809.pdf.

- *Instructional Quality and High Expectations.* High quality and relevant instruction focused on high expectations; and
- *Focus on Language Issues.* Attention to the language needs of migrant students and families.

Evaluation Objective 2: TMEP Instructional and Support Services

In early 2010 TMEP coordinators within the state of Texas completed the TMEP Instructional and Support Services Survey (ISSS) developed for this evaluation study. ISSS yielded information about the types and prevalence of migrant education services provided throughout the state of Texas. The most prevalent instructional services (i.e., services provided by the largest percentage of the districts) were those relating to New Generation System (NGS)³ services, translation services, identifying students for preschool, professional development (e.g., staff TMEP conferences), tutoring and interventions, monitoring student progress (i.e., toward meeting learning goals and graduation requirements), credit accrual and recovery services, and providing homework and assistance tools.

The most prevalent support services included those related to Parent Advisory Councils (PACs) and holding PAC meetings (e.g., offering childcare or snacks during meetings), conducting home visits, providing materials and supplies to meet basic needs for attending school (e.g., clothes, school supplies), making referrals to community programs and health providers, and providing vision screenings. The services that were the least likely to occur were typically those provided during summer school or intersession, such as distance learning programs, out-of-state Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) training and testing, and out-of-state summer migrant program coordination.

³ The New Generation System is one of three Internet-based systems in use nationally that is specifically designed for the interstate transfer of migrant student educational and health records (USDE, 2005).

In addition to these survey data, site visits were conducted during the second phase of the evaluation at select district sites as well as at the two special statewide programs supported by TMEP that are designed to provide support to local programs, TMIP and MSGEP. Site visits were conducted to gather additional data about instructional and support services, including qualitative information from migrant staff, students, and parents. Site visit data were used to develop case studies, and a cross-case analysis was conducted to identify common instructional and support services. These included:

- Comprehensive identification and recruitment and screening processes for eligible students
- Coordination and collaboration with existing programs to provide supplemental instructional support, TAKS remediation/retesting, and credit recovery/accrual
- Additional MEP-funded academic support at times/locations convenient to migrant families including technology-based support
- Informal mentoring through local TMEP staff
- Student enrichment and recognition activities
- Personalized support from MEP staff to support students in school, engage families, and address their needs
- Comprehensive record keeping processes and monitoring
- Attention to language needs through existing district programming, bilingual staff, and family outreach and services

The cross-case analysis was also used to identify common facilitators and barriers to local TMEP implementation. Commonly reported facilitators included: strong and informed leadership; formal and informal organizational and communication structures that supported collaboration; Parent Advisory Councils; access to technology; high level of staff knowledge, experience, and commitment. Common barriers included: changes in MEP funding and eligibility

criteria as well as local and federal immigration policy and practices; district transportation and travel restrictions; need for migrant-specific mentoring/dropout prevention programs; need for additional language support; and conflicting family needs, goals, and values.

Evaluation Objective 3: Alignment of TMEP Services with Best Practices

The cross-case analysis developed from the site visit data was used in conjunction with survey data to provide an overall assessment of alignment of instructional and support services for migrant students currently being implemented in Texas with best practices identified in the research. Broadly speaking, evidence from these data sources indicated a high degree of alignment with best practice principles from the literature review and diverse and effective approaches at the local level in serving the needs of the migrant community. These include:

- Responsiveness to migrant student and family needs;
- Communication/Collaboration/Relationships necessary to ensure effective TMEP services;
- Adequate and appropriate staffing; and
- Quality instruction and high expectations.

Based on these findings, and an overall assessment of the TMEP CNA, SDP, and knowledge of the field, the expert panel provided the following suggestions and recommendations for TEA's TMEP:

- Continue to collect data on local implementation of services, including data on quality of implementation, to inform discussions of how best to promote best practice strategies.
- Provide support to local operating agencies on developing a local needs assessment and determining priority for services (PFS).

- Consider how NGS might further support program evaluation and the collection of measurable program outcomes data.
- Emphasize language support across strategies.
- Further explore the impact of professional development for TMEP and non-TMEP staff.
- Provide support for implementation of a mentoring curriculum.
- Clarify how health services are provided.
- Enhance interstate coordination during the summer.
- Provide strategies to support Texas' binational students.
- Consider offering graduation enhancement activities in the lower grades.
- Provide additional technical assistance and training support to local TMEPs.
- Focus on increased coordination with English as a Second Language (ESL)/bilingual staff.
- Increase access to technology.
- Marshal resources for out-of-school youth.

Evaluation Objective 4: Perceived Effectiveness of the TMEP Statewide and Special Programs

To understand the effectiveness with which TMEP is implemented and meets the goals of reducing hindering factors associated with OME's seven areas of concern, the TMEP Migrant Coordinator Perceptual Survey (MCPS) was developed. The initial ISSS provided information on what TMEP services were being implemented throughout Texas. The perceptual survey extended these findings by gathering perceptions on the extent to which TMEP grantees' accomplishments are aligned with established TMEP goals and the degree of success with which migrant services are provided through the TMEP and longstanding special programs (TMIP and MSGEP). MSGEP provides alternative credit options for migrant secondary school

students through distance learning courses. TMIP facilitates intra- and interstate coordination of programs for migrant children. The MCPS was developed in line with the best practices derived from the literature review and the goals and objectives established in the state's SDP and CNA.⁴

To meet the state's established TMEP delivery goals and objectives, districts were expected to demonstrate increases in students demonstrating certain educational performance outcomes (e.g., required core credits earned by migrant secondary students for on-time graduation) or receiving certain services (e.g., timely attention and appropriate interventions related to academic and non-academic problems and concerns). During the 2008-09 academic year, districts typically reported either showing increases or remaining the same in terms of the proportion of students demonstrating a performance outcome or receiving a service. Districts that began the year with larger proportions of students meeting the state's established TMEP delivery goals were more likely to report remaining stable over the school year. Districts beginning the year with smaller proportions of students meeting the established goals were more likely to report increases over the school year. Accomplishments demonstrated by TMEP districts were most well aligned to these established goals:

- Increasing the proportion of migrant students who failed TAKS in any content area that then participated in a summer TAKS remediation program; and
- Increasing the proportion of required core credits for on-time graduation earned by migrant secondary students.

Regarding the effective implementation of migrant best practices through TMEP, most services were perceived by TMEP coordinators to be implemented with some degree of success (somewhat or very successful implementation) in a large percentage of districts (typically over 90 percent) during 2008-09. Most districts that provided a given service reported a somewhat

⁴ A description of the state's SDP and CNA can be found in the TMEP evaluation interim report at: http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/opge/progeval/Other/TMEP_Interim_0809.pdf

or very high degree of implementation success. The most effectively implemented practices reported included those related to providing appropriate staff training for using NGS and identifying migrant students for provision of services. Although the overall pattern of results suggests that TMEP coordinators perceive TMEP implementation to be generally successful, there was variation in success rates with the majority of services reported to be implemented very successfully by less than 60 percent of the districts. Services that were least likely to be implemented or implemented successfully were those services related to collaboration and communication with parents and other key stakeholders within the state and across the country. This suggests that support and training in the best practice area of communication, collaboration, and relationships may be useful to TMEP districts.

Services implemented through TMIP and MSGEP relating to facilitating on-time graduation through offering flexible methods of completing coursework and earning necessary credits toward graduation also were typically perceived to be implemented somewhat to very successfully. A service deserving more exploration and perhaps an area for improvement is providing opportunities for state academic achievement testing outside of Texas, when needed, for grade-level promotion or graduation requirement for Texas home-based migrant students. A relatively high percentage (13%) of districts did not know whether this service was provided and a correspondingly low percentage (43%) of districts indicated that the service was very successfully implemented.

In terms of the frequency with which NGS was used by TMEP districts, typically high rates of usage were reported (70% to 80% of districts reported always/almost always or often implementing most NGS activities). The least frequently implemented NGS activity was: Used NGS to provide student data to students leaving the district. Across NGS activities, rates of seldom or never occurring ranged from 8% to 25%; so while data are frequently input into NGS

and used by school and district staff to support migrant students, some improvements could be made in the usage and communication regarding NGS and corresponding migrant student data.

Evaluation Objective 5: Academic Achievement of Migrant and non-Migrant Students

In addition to understanding the success with which TMEP services are implemented, another critical objective of this study was to understand the educational performance outcomes (i.e., achievement scores [TAKS], dropping out, graduating, school attendance, and post-secondary performance [Scholastic Aptitude Test or SAT] scores) experienced by migrant students and the impacts of the TMEP on these outcomes. A quasi-experimental design was used to examine the impact of participation in the TMEP within each of six study years (2003-04 through 2008-09).

Specifically, a non-migrant sample, matched to the migrant sample on background factors and early achievement, was selected for comparison of outcomes between the migrant student sample and a similarly high-risk group of students⁵. In addition to examining the impact of migrant status (migrant or matched non-migrant group), two migrant exposure factors were examined to understand the trends in outcomes for students receiving more migrant services or being exposed for a longer period of time to the migrant program.⁶ Furthermore, outcomes for PFS-migrant and non-PFS migrant students were compared for each of the evaluation years.

First, it is important to note that all findings are correlational and no causal statements can be made about the impact of program participation on PFS or non-PFS status on student educational performance outcomes; rather, the findings can only be used to help understand the size, direction, and significance level of the correlational finding. Interpretation of findings must

⁵ Random assignment was not possible for this study because all migrant students who meet the federal migrant definition are eligible for services through the TMEP. Additionally, it was not feasible to capture a true pre-program baseline measure for migrant and non-migrant students as student data were collected retrospectively. Finally, examining within-student growth over time longitudinally was not feasible due to the highly mobile nature of the migrant sample and the types of outcome measures available. Therefore, a matched-comparison group design combined with a within year cross-sectional design examining trends in findings from year to year was the most rigorous option for this evaluation study.

⁶ Length of exposure was based on the cumulative number of years a student participated in the migrant program as of a given year.

be made within the correlational context of the study. Taking this important fact into consideration, migrant students tended to have poorer outcomes at each study year as compared to non-migrant students. Migrant students were less likely to stay in school, attend school regularly, pass TAKS exit exams, and obtain high scores on the SAT. These findings are not surprising given that migrant students are likely at higher risk than non-migrant students even with a matched comparison group, as not all risk factors are accounted for with the available data. Findings were mixed regarding graduation rates for migrant as compared to non-migrant students. Migrant students were more likely than non-migrant students to graduate during three study years, but the effect was significant during only one of those years. In contrast, migrant students were significantly less likely to graduate than non-migrant students during two study years.

In general, the number of years that a student participated in TMEP and the number of supplemental services received was not significantly linked to TAKS pass rates or SAT scores. Receiving more services was significantly related to attending school more often. Additionally, there was a significant relationship between participating in the TMEP for a greater number of years and receiving a larger number of supplemental services and being less likely to drop out of school. However, receiving more services was also related to being less likely to graduate across years, with significant effects for five of the six years.

In addition, trends in outcomes were examined for PFS and non-PFS migrant student groups. PFS students had poorer outcomes at each study year as compared to non-PFS students. PFS students were less likely to stay in school, attend school regularly, graduate, pass TAKS exit exams, and obtain high scores on the SAT. These findings are not surprising given that PFS students are, by federal definition, at higher risk than non-PFS students. There was a trend toward a reduction in the size of the difference in performance for PFS as compared to non-PFS students on 8th and 11th grade TAKS passing rates from earlier to later study years. The odds of

a non-PFS student being more likely to pass than a PFS student were smaller in later evaluation years compared to earlier years.

All Texas school districts and charter schools are required to determine if migrant students are enrolled in the district. The majority of Texas school districts are non-project districts. School districts without migrant children are called non-project districts. School districts or charter schools with TMEP grant awards and which operate programs for migrant students are called Independent Project Districts (IPDs). Districts and charter schools also may contract with a regional education service center (RESC) or another entity to provide services under a Shared Service Arrangement (SSA). Districts that contract are called SSA districts (SSAD). IPDs or SSAs may expend funds for migrant students not only from the grant awards under Title I, Part C Migrant Education but also from the basic Texas school finance awards for general operating expenditures, from special Texas grants, and from other federal programs such as grants for Special Education, bilingual education, or compensatory education. This report includes only expenditures made from Title I, Part C Migrant Education funds, not expenditures from other sources because details on these expenditures are not available from IPDs or SSAs.

Financial data available for this study included reported data for five years, 2003-04 through 2007-08; data for 2008-09 were not available in time to include in the analyses. Not all IPDs or SSAs⁷ participated in all five years examined. In 2003-04, IPDs and SSAs expended a total of \$50.9 million to provide services to migrant students and their families, while regional Education Service Centers (ESCs) spent \$4.8 million for technical assistance activities. Total expenditures for migrant programs in 2003-04 were \$56,394,210, including expenditures for special programs such as TMIP and MSGEP. By 2007-08, the total of Title I Part C funds expended for migrant programs had declined slightly to \$54,755,951, with corresponding declines in expenditures for

⁷ School districts may participate in the TMEP as IPDs or SSADs. The IPDs independently operate TMEP projects. For SSADs, the TMEP project is operated by the regional education service center (ESC).

IPDs. It is noteworthy that the 57% decline in the number of migrant students was much greater than the 3.4% reduction in funding. This decline in the number of students likely can be attributed, at least in part, to changes in the federal TMEP qualification requirements and the economic downturn or recession in the economy requiring fewer migrant workers.⁸

In terms of special programs, over the five years examined in this analysis, TMIP funding increased from \$295,850 in 2003-04 to \$467,735 in 2007-08. As for MSGEP, over the five years included in this report, funding was approximately \$350,000 per year. During that time period, migrant students in the MSGEP successfully completed more than 5,000 courses.

Summary across Evaluation Objectives

To summarize across the objectives, activities, and findings of this comprehensive TMEP evaluation study, MGT collected, analyzed, and synthesized a wealth of extant and primary data to understand TMEP implementation; examined trends in outcomes for and impacts of the TMEP program on migrant and non-migrant and PFS and non-PFS migrant students; examined the patterns of expenditures for TMEP funding throughout Texas; and formulated recommendations for improvement of program implementation.

Overall, these findings suggest that the program reflects best practices as found in the literature and is perceived by TMEP coordinators to be effectively implemented with grantee accomplishments aligned to the state established program goals. TMEP students, particularly PFS students, tended to have poorer achievement and post-secondary outcomes than non-migrant and non-PFS students, respectively. Importantly, migrant students who received more years of programming and more migrant services were less likely to drop out of school. Additionally, for some outcomes (TAKS pass rates for grades 8 and 11), the gap in performance for PFS and non-PFS students decreased from earlier to later study years, implying that the

⁸ The federal requirements for eligibility were made more stringent during the time period in this study.

odds of PFS-migrant students performing more poorly were not as high over time. This was not true of all outcomes. Additionally, there were some mixed findings when comparing trends from one year of the evaluation to another year. For instance, migrant students were significantly more likely to graduate during 2007-08 and significantly less likely to graduate during 2005-06.

It is important to consider possible confounding factors that cannot be accounted for which may be related to the evaluation findings. For example, the federal definition for being a migrant student changed, becoming more conservative during the six year timeframe of this study. Additionally, not all risk factors or impacts on migrant student educational performance outcomes could be accounted for in this study. Overall, these findings offer some preliminary evidence that the accumulation of multiple years of programming and greater numbers of services may have some positive effects on the likelihood of not dropping out of school and attending more days of school, but as indicated, causal statements cannot be made based on the study findings. An alternative explanation is that students who are in school (attending regularly and have not dropped out) and are available for more services are more likely to receive services. Perhaps the greater utility of the findings relating to the quantity of TMEP exposure is that they point to a possible profile of the type of students who are more likely to receive services: those who are attending school more regularly and who have not exited through dropping out or graduating.

Recommendations for changes in Texas migrant service delivery and data collection specifically related to service delivery include:

- **Provide support to local operating agencies on developing a local needs assessment and determining PFS.** To assist with data collection efforts, state support for development of a local needs assessment is indicated. In addition, because of staff attrition, local TMEPs need technical assistance and resource

materials to assist in consistently and coherently identifying student needs and monitoring the progress of students who have been determined through an established process to have priority for services.

- **Improve awareness of and participation in special programs: TMIP and MSGEP.**

Only about 30% of districts reported on the MCPS that they participated in MSGEP and TMIP. Improving awareness of and understanding of how to access and benefit from these programs may help improve usage rates and further improve perceptions of success of special program implementation.

- **Improve opportunities for state academic achievement testing outside of Texas, when needed, for grade-level promotion or graduation requirement for Texas home-based migrant students.**

A relatively high percentage of districts did not know whether this service was provided and a correspondingly low percentage of districts indicated that the service was very successfully implemented.

- **Enhance interstate coordination during the summer.**

Texas has recommended in its SDP that receiving states provide TAKS remediation. The expert panel suggested that strategies for communication and coordination activities with receiving states be included along with suggestions for how to prepare students for TAKS testing during the short summertime window of time that they are in the receiving states. The panel also suggested that the SDP contain ways that Texas might address TAKS remediation services during the summer in Texas before students travel to the receiving states (typically the month of June). Offering additional strategies for how Texas and the receiving states can partner for more effective communication would add an important safeguard to support students who migrate from Texas.

- **Improve NGS usage rates.**

The NGS was reported to be used relatively frequently across MCPS items but usage rates were still lower than expected. Gathering information from TMEP coordinators to better understand barriers specifically related

to NGS usage would provide a good starting point for helping to improve usage rates.

Consider how NGS might further support program evaluation and the collection of measurable program outcomes data. Data collection across Texas' local TMEPs is a large undertaking that is facilitated through NGS. It will be beneficial to program implementation to ensure a complete alignment between the required data fields within NGS and the data elements that local TMEPs need to collect to determine if the measurable program outcomes are met.

- **Further explore foundational functions.** Areas of the TMEP that merit further exploration include health, records transfer, and interstate/intrastate coordination because these pivotal areas are common to all migrant programs. Capturing data on the quality of services in these key areas will help illuminate what is lacking to support the achievement of desired program outcomes measured in the evaluation.
- **Emphasize language support across strategies.** The state should emphasize efforts to embed language development within and across all strategies that are recommended through the SDP. This includes strategies to ensure the accurate assessment of student language proficiency. While systems and procedures may be in place for the ongoing and accurate assessment of students' language proficiency, more information needs to be collected by the state to monitor this aspect of language support. In addition, more specific guidance could be provided by the state to clarify the role of the TMEP in providing language development services to allocate funds appropriately.
- **Further explore the impact of professional development for TMEP and non-TMEP staff.** The state should survey the extent and quality of training provided to professional and support staff serving migrant students. The practicality of preparing educators to meet the needs of migrant students deserves further study. As part of this effort, the state should identify staff development resources for local TMEP

operating agencies, including training for non-TMEP staff. The research literature indicates that training to raise awareness and staff ability to provide culturally and linguistically respectful services to migrant students and families reflects best practice.

- **Provide support for implementation of a mentoring curriculum.** As indicated in the state-level strategies of the SDP, there is a need to develop a mentoring curriculum for local TMEPs. Enhanced student-to-student and adult-to-student relationships may help students see the positive potential for achievement and the importance of regular attendance, credit accrual, and graduation, as well as post-secondary opportunities. With a K-12 mentoring curriculum to rely upon, TMEP sites are more likely to implement this potentially successful strategy.
- **Clarify how health services are provided.** The expert panel suggested setting measurable program outcomes in the service delivery plan to reflect this core area of concern.
- **Improve collaboration and communication with parents and other key stakeholders within the state and across the country.** Through the MCPS, coordinators reported relatively lower rates of implementation and implementation success with regard to collaboration and communication. TMEP coordinators and other key service delivery providers would benefit from professional development and support relating to how and when to communicate with parents and other service delivery providers throughout the state and country. Perhaps it would be helpful to leverage the PACs to support this effort. PACs reportedly helped facilitate parental understanding of the TMEP.
- **Provide strategies to support Texas' binational students.** Strategies to coordinate with Mexico's public school system, the *Secretaría de Educación Pública*, in supporting Texas' substantial binational migrant student population are warranted because of the large number of students who cross the border in both directions. Help

teachers in Texas understand the use of the “Transfer Document” (which transfers students among the countries) and how the educational systems and the grade levels between the two countries are aligned. Explore partnerships with the university systems and the U.S. Binational Migrant Education Initiative, as well as key agencies in the U.S. and Mexico to help binational migrant students and eligible binational migrant youth obtain needed access and resources.

- **Consider offering graduation enhancement activities in the lower grades.** High dropout findings for migrant students call for strategies to be introduced at the lower grade levels. Visits/field trips to colleges and universities, discussions about post-secondary education opportunities, and the involvement of parents in graduation enhancement are a few ways that schools might address dropout prevention at the lower grades.
- **Provide additional technical assistance and training support to local TMEPs.** Additional training is needed on the use of funds and allowable activities in the supportive services areas of health, nutrition, medical/dental, and referrals to community agencies.
- **Focus on increased coordination with ESL/bilingual staff.** To maximize the resources of the TMEP, more coordination with ESL/bilingual staff and programs is needed. The state should model formal and informal networks, provide examples of successful coordination networks, and consider offering incentives for sharing information and resources such as an information roundup of best practices in coordination.
- **Increase access to technology.** As a means of expanding services and sharing effective practices, work with local TMEPs and regional configurations to increase advanced technological options and access to the Internet. Access to the internet was found to be a barrier to some districts.

Recommendations related to the financial data are the following:

- **Include the number of students for each school district.** The file containing information on grant awards should include not only the amount of the award but also the numbers of PFS and non-PFS students used in the formula determining the grant award.
- **Collect expenditure information on all funds used to provide services to migrant students.** This report includes only expenditures made from Title I, Part C Migrant Education funds, not expenditures from other sources because details on these expenditures are not available from IPDs or SSAs. If data were available on other resources from other sources, additional analysis on cost-effectiveness could be completed.