

July 8, 2003

The Honorable Rick Perry, Governor
The Honorable David Dewhurst, Lieutenant Governor
The Honorable Thomas R. Craddick, Speaker of the House
Chief Deputy Commissioner Robert Scott

Fellow Texans:

I am pleased to present this report on the progress of the Robstown Independent School District (RISD) in implementing my Texas School Performance Review (TSPR) recommendations.

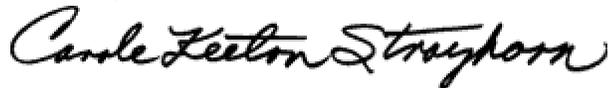
In August 2001, I released the results of my review of the district's operations. This review offered 74 recommendations that collectively could save RISD taxpayers a net of more than \$10.1 million by 2005-06. The review also noted a number of RISD's exemplary programs and model services provided by district administrators, teachers and staff.

In February 2003, we returned to check on how well the district's leadership put these proposals into practice. Over 18 months, RISD has implemented, or is in the process of implementing, 67 of the proposals, or 91 percent. The district has saved a net of more than \$1.2 million to date and expects those savings to grow to more than \$6.1 million over five years.

This report is available on my Web site at www.window.state.tx.us/tspr/robstownpr/.

Thanks for all that you do for Texas.

Sincerely,



Carole Keeton Strayhorn
Texas Comptroller

c: Senate Committee on Education
House Committee on Public Education
The Honorable Juan "Chuy" Hinojosa, State Senator, District 20
The Honorable Jaime Capelo, State Representative, District 34

Progress Report

Robstown Independent School District

July 2003

In April 2001, Texas Comptroller Carole Keeton Strayhorn began a review of the Robstown Independent School District (RISD) at the request of the former superintendent and board president. In August 2001, the Comptroller issued a final report detailing 74 recommendations that could result in net savings of more than \$10.1 million by 2005-06 when fully implemented. During February 2003, TSPR staff returned to assess the district's progress in implementing the recommendations.

Since 1991, TSPR has recommended more than 7,000 ways to save taxpayers more than \$800 million over a five-year period in more than 90 public school districts throughout Texas. TSPR also conducts follow-up reviews of districts that have had at least one year to implement its recommendations. These 61 subsequent reviews show that more than 90 percent of TSPR's combined proposals have been acted upon, saving taxpayers almost \$125 million, with the full savings estimated to grow in the future.

Improving the Texas School Performance Review

Comptroller Carole Keeton Strayhorn, who took office in January 1999, consulted school district officials, parents and teachers from across Texas and carefully examined past reviews and progress reports in an effort to make the Texas School Performance Review (TSPR) more valuable, even vital, to the state's more than 1,000 school districts. With the perspective of having served as a teacher, and later a school board president, the Comptroller has vowed to steer TSPR toward being more accountable to local school districts and the communities they represent.

Comptroller Strayhorn began by establishing new criteria for selecting school districts for future reviews. Priority is now given to districts judged poor performing academically or financially, and to hands-on reviews that benefit the greatest number of students. To ensure this process also serves small districts, reviews of numerous school districts in close proximity, regardless of academic or financial status are also completed to achieve some economy of scale.

Recognizing that only about 51 cents of every education dollar is spent on instruction, Comptroller Strayhorn's goal is to drive more of every

education dollar directly into the classroom. In addition, no longer are school districts' best practices and exemplary models left buried inside individual TSPR reports. Instead, Comptroller Strayhorn has ordered best practices and exemplary programs to be shared quickly and systematically among all the state's school districts and with anyone who requests such information. There is simply no reason for a district that has solved a problem well to keep the solution to itself. Comptroller Strayhorn has directed TSPR to serve as an active clearinghouse of the best and brightest ideas in Texas public education. Best practices identified in the original review will be included in the Comptroller's best practices database, *A+ Ideas for Managing Schools (AIMS)*, which is accessible on the Web at www.aimsdatabase.org.

Under Comptroller Strayhorn's approach, the TSPR team and consultants work with districts to:

- ensure students and teachers receive the support and resources necessary to succeed;
- identify innovative options to address core management challenges;
- ensure administrative activities are performed efficiently, without duplication and in a manner that spurs education;
- develop strategies to ensure the districts' processes and programs are continuously assessed and improved;
- understand the links among the districts' functional areas and determine ways to provide a seamless system of services;
- challenge any process, procedure, program or policy that impedes instruction and recommend ways to reduce or eliminate obstacles; and
- put goods and services to the "Yellow Pages test"—government should do no job if there is a business in the Yellow Pages that can do that job better and at a lower cost.

Finally, Comptroller Strayhorn has opened her door to Texans who share her optimism about TSPR's potential. Suggestions to improve school reviews are welcome at any time. The Comptroller is a staunch believer in public education and public accountability.

Detailed information can be obtained from TSPR by calling 1-800-531-5441 extension 5-3676, or by visiting the Comptroller's Web site at www.window.state.tx.us.

TSPR in the Robstown ISD

When TSPR began its RISD review in April 2001, it discovered a district confronting significant financial and operational problems. The district had been assigned a Texas Education Agency (TEA) governance monitor after a 1998 investigation revealed 10 incidents in which board members interfered in the superintendent's daily operation of RISD. In early 2000, TEA returned to conduct a financial investigation of the district. Throughout this period, RISD student enrollment declined and the district outspent its revenues, decreasing its reserves to dangerously low levels. In 1999-2000, the district's expenditures exceeded its revenue by almost \$500,000. In April 2001, the district began making significant budget cuts and through attrition and a reduction in force, cut its personnel budget for 2001-02 by more than \$745,000.

The Comptroller contracted with Trace Consulting Services Inc., a San Antonio-based consulting firm, to assist with the RISD review. The team interviewed district employees, school board members, parents, business leaders and community members and conducted one public forum at the high school, on April 5, 2001 from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. To obtain additional comments, the review team conducted numerous small focus group sessions with teachers, principals, employees, students, parents and community members.

In an effort to ensure that all stakeholders had an opportunity to provide input, TSPR sent surveys to teachers, students, administration and support staff and parents and received 336 responses from 50 campus and central administrators and support staff; 157 teachers; 37 parents; and 92 students.

The review team also consulted two TEA databases of comparative educational information, the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) and the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS).

RISD selected peer districts for comparisons based on similarities in student enrollment, student performance and community and student demographics. The selected peer districts were Hidalgo ISD, Mercedes ISD, Raymondville ISD and Roma ISD. TSPR also compared RISD to district averages in TEA's Regional Education Service Center II (Region 2), in which RISD is located, and to the state as a whole.

During its five-month review, TSPR developed recommendations to improve operations and save taxpayers more than \$10.7 million over the next five years. Cumulative net savings from all recommendations (savings minus recommended investments or expenditures) would reach more than \$10.1 million by 2005-06.

Robstown ISD in Profile

Located in the center of Nueces County, Robstown lies 20 miles from Corpus Christi. Originally an agricultural town, Robstown is now predominately supported by light manufacturing. The town has a population of almost 13,000. The district is bordered on the north by Calallen ISD, on the southeast by West Oso ISD, on the south by Bishop ISD and on the west by Banquete ISD. The district has nine campuses including four elementary schools, one intermediate school, one junior high school, one high school and two alternative education programs. The district also includes a central administration complex, a maintenance and operations building, a transportation facility, a parent involvement center and a special education center.

In 2002-03, RISD's students consisted of 98.0 percent Hispanic, 1.3 percent Anglo, 0.5 percent African American and 0.1 percent Asian/Pacific Islander or Native American. Eighty-seven point nine percent of RISD's students were classified as economically disadvantaged.

In 2001-02, TEA awarded RISD's four elementary campuses and its intermediate school a *Recognized* rating. TEA rated the other schools as *Acceptable*. The district received an overall *Academically Acceptable* rating.

In 2001-02, 85.2 percent of all students passed the reading portion of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test; 85.8 percent passed the math portion of the test; 86.9 percent passed the writing portion of the test; and 76.7 percent of students passed all tests.

In 2002-03, the district had 656 employees with teachers accounting for 284, or more than 43 percent, of RISD staffing. The district's expenditures reached \$26.5 million in 2002-03. The district generated 11.4 percent of its budgeted revenues through local taxes; 1.9 percent from other local and intermediate sources; 78.6 percent from the state; and 8.1 percent from the federal government. In 2002-03, RISD budgeted 46.5 cents of every tax dollar on classroom instruction compared to the state average of 51 cents.

Over the last year, significant changes have occurred in the district. The district is performing extensive facility repairs including replacing and/or repairing roofs throughout the district. The district also went through an extensive mold remediation program in fall 2002.

While work continues in the district, RISD staff and TSPR team members have a sense of steady progress: 50 recommendations have been implemented; 17 are in various stages of progress; four have been

reviewed but not implemented; and three were rejected outright. (See Appendix A for details on the recommendations' status.)

Robstown ISD Report Card

Chapter	Total	Complete	In Progress	Not Implemented	Rejected	Percent Complete/In Progress	Grades
District Organization and Management	10	7	3	0	0	70%/30%	Satisfactory
Educational Service Delivery	5	5	0	0	0	100%/0%	Excellent
Community Involvement	2	2	0	0	0	100%/0%	Excellent
Personnel Management	6	6	0	0	0	100%/0%	Excellent
Facilities Use and Maintenance	9	1	5	2	1	11%/56%	Needs Work
Asset and Risk Management	8	8	0	0	0	100%/0%	Excellent
Financial Management	6	4	2	0	0	67%/33%	Satisfactory
Purchasing and Contract Management	6	4	1	0	1	67%/17%	Satisfactory
Food Services	6	4	1	1	0	67%/17%	Satisfactory
Transportation	6	3	1	1	1	50%/17%	Needs Work
Safety and Security	5	4	1	0	0	80%/20%	Satisfactory
Computers and Technology	5	2	3	0	0	40%/60%	Satisfactory
Overall Grade	74	50	17	4	3	68%/23%	Satisfactory

Excellent = More than 80% complete

Satisfactory = 80% to 100% complete or in progress

Needs Work = Less than 80% complete or in progress

Exemplary Programs and Practices

RISD is a school district with some notable successes, and TSPR has identified numerous “best practices.” Through commendations in each chapter, the original report highlighted model programs, operations and services provided by RISD administrators, teachers and staff members. The Comptroller encourages other school districts throughout Texas to examine these exemplary programs and services to see if they could be adapted to meet local needs. TSPR’s commendations are listed below followed by updated information on each topic in italics.

- ***The ongoing review and assessment of curricula has contributed to improved student performance.*** RISD’s TAAS scores have improved significantly over the past five years. The assistant superintendent for Educational Operations, facilitators, teachers and principals have developed curriculum guides that provide direction for teachers on student objectives and skills to be taught. Assessments in the form of practice tests are given each six weeks on all mandatory TAAS requirements and results are used to monitor and continually improve curriculum and instruction.

The district has continued to make necessary adjustments to curriculum guides and district assessments to prepare for the more rigorous Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), which replaced TAAS in 2002-03. Throughout each school year, teachers participate in horizontal and vertical teaming to ensure curriculum alignment and address issues.

- ***RISD’s Migrant Program has been recognized for excellence.*** RISD’s Migrant Program is a year-round program that begins with a pre-kindergarten through grade 3 school-based education program exclusively for migrant students. Not only is staff trained to give special attention to students, but services are also provided to parents. In 1999, more than 80 percent of the district’s migrant student population passed all TAAS tests, the migrant student attendance rate exceeded 94 percent and the migrant student dropout rate equaled less than 6 percent, all of which are criteria needed to be recognized for excellence by TEA.

As a result of passing the spring 2002 TAAS with a rate of 80 percent or better, RISD’s schools received the Outstanding

Migrant Student Award. In 2000-01, the migrant student dropout rate fell to 2.5 percent.

- ***RISD's Gear-Up program promotes participation in pre-AP and AP classes.*** The Gear-Up program targets students in grades 6 through 12 and educates them on the purpose and benefits of pre-advanced placement (Pre-AP) and advanced placement (AP) classes and exams. To encourage participation, the Gear-Up grant pays student exam fees. University professors talk to students about higher education, including trade schools, two-year colleges and four-year universities. In the second year of the program, the number of students enrolling in pre-AP and AP classes and taking AP tests have increased.

The Gear-Up program continues to promote higher education through teacher professional development, student services, parent services and business/community partnerships. The program has resulted in an increase in advanced placement testing and a majority of the senior students graduating under the Recommended High School Program. The Gear-Up grant continues to pay for student fee exams.

- ***Just-in-time delivery of supplies and materials saves money.*** RISD avoids the personnel, maintenance and utilities costs associated with operating a warehouse facility by using just-in-time delivery of supplies and materials. Supplies and materials ordered are either delivered to the central administration office and subsequently delivered to schools by the mail clerk or delivered directly to the originator of the request.

RISD's just-in-time delivery of supplies continues to save money. District administrators said the cost-effective practice benefits the district, teachers and staff because supplies are purchased as they are needed and are delivered quickly.

- ***RISD uses an automated inventory system to receive, issue and account for textbooks.*** RISD's book-tracking system reduced lost or damaged book charges by 37 percent between 1999 and 2000. The inventory system, which tracks the current inventory at each school, is constantly updated with current TEA textbook information. The district also conducts random checks to verify that students have the assigned textbooks and determine whether textbooks are lost or damaged.

RISD continues to use its automated inventory system to manage textbooks, limiting its textbook losses.

- ***The district created a Risk Management Department that provides safety education and training to employees.*** RISD was experiencing higher than average accident rates, which increased workers' compensation claims. The district distributed safety booklets and manuals to employees and provided high-risk groups of employees additional training. Accidents have declined, and workers' compensation claims for 2000-01 decreased by 40.8 percent from 1999-2000.

In 2001-02, the Safety Plan was updated and distributed to all employees. From 2000-01 to 2001-02, the district experienced an 11.2 percent reduction in accidents involving district staff and a decrease of \$140,580 in workers' compensation losses. Principals and directors continue to participate in safety facility inspections and conduct safety meetings for their staff.

- ***RISD has an automated inventory system allowing electronic ordering of food items with up-to-the-minute inventory at all schools.*** Knowing current inventory levels is an important first step in controlling costs. RISD cafeteria managers place food orders through an automated system. Orders can be compared to each school's inventory allowing the district to know what is on hand in all of its cafeterias so that only the necessary items are purchased.

RISD continues to use its automated inventory system to order food. The system helps the district limit waste and control losses, enabling the district to manage its Food Service operation efficiently.

- ***RISD participates in a multi-regional food-purchasing cooperative.*** Larger school districts are able to purchase food at a lower per-unit cost than smaller districts because they buy at a larger volume. RISD participates in a 35-district multi-regional cooperative to buy in bulk and achieve better per-unit prices. Regional Education Service Center 2 solicits bids on behalf of the member districts, allowing RISD to realize a lower per-unit cost.

RISD plans to renew both the coop and state purchasing agreements before they expire at the end of 2002-03. Region 2 continues to solicit bids on behalf of the co-op, helping RISD keep food expenditures within industry standards.

- ***RISD has implemented a point-of-sale system in each cafeteria.*** Many districts have problems accurately tracking sales within each cafeteria. RISD's cafeterias use a point-of-sale (POS) system, which protects the anonymity of students, eliminates human error and increases the accuracy of tracking and reporting cash sales.

The POS system also helps the district accurately track its sales, maximizing federal reimbursements.

District administrators said the RISD schools' point-of-sale systems help cafeteria staff track sales more accurately than using manual counts. With the district losing students, accurate accounting of each student is particularly important for federally-funded programs.

- ***RISD implemented a staggered bell schedule at its campuses to optimize the use of buses and bus drivers.*** When all schools in a district start and end at the same time, buses cannot run multiple routes and are consequently less efficient. RISD's staggered daily school start and end times allow drivers to make multiple trips on some routes; serving more than one school and providing timely delivery of students.

RISD continues to use the staggered bell schedule allowing individual buses to run multiple routes each day. Since the scheduled routes require fewer drivers and fewer buses, the strategy has saved the district resources and increased efficiency. The district continues to examine its routing schedules and school bell times and is considering staggering the starting time at the junior high to ensure that student wait times decrease. Any changes would take effect in 2003-04.

- ***The district has created a "Team Approach" to crisis management.*** Crises in schools affect the entire community. A committee of staff, parents, community members and representatives of the City of Robstown and the Coastal Bend-Texas Chapter of the American Red Cross developed the district's crisis management plan. By working together, the district, city and American Red Cross can provide a more effective response to any crisis.

At its March 10, 2003 meeting, the RISD Board of Trustees approved the new RISD Security Plan, which outlines a method of collecting and reporting data to analyze security and evaluate its effectiveness. RISD has also implemented the Community Oriented Policing (COPs) Program at the high school and junior high school. The district, which has one certified police officer at each school, anticipates hiring two more officers by August 2003.

TSPR Key Recommendations

The following are some of the key recommendations that administrators and staff said they believe had the greatest impact on district operations. The highlighted recommendations are organized by chapter and by the area of operation as contained in the original report. The comments came from district administrators during the TSPR team's follow-up visit.

District Organization and Management

Recommendation 3: Develop and implement a code of conduct for the RISD board, including a mechanism for self-evaluation.

District administrators said RISD board members recognized that because of previous conflicts between the board and the former superintendent, the board needed a code of conduct to help it work more effectively with school administration. The election of new board members and the firing of the former superintendent has reduced much of the original conflict. The interim superintendent said the board had not yet finalized a code of conduct, but had been actively investigating several districts' codes of conduct. The board, which is still determining what to include in its code of conduct, anticipates adopting a new code of conduct by September 2003.

Recommendation 8: Conduct annual performance evaluations of the superintendent.

District administrators said at the time of the original review that the superintendent had not been formally evaluated in more than three years. Some of the conflict between the superintendent and the board was attributed to differing goals and unclear expectations. The district recognized the importance of the board and superintendent agreeing on district goals. In addition, the board and the superintendent developed the superintendent's evaluation criteria. The board now evaluates the superintendent every January and ties any salary actions to the evaluation.

Education Service Delivery

Recommendation 11: Review the dropout prevention program and develop new ways to retain students.

The district created a task force of teachers, administrators, community members and students to work on this problem. Working in conjunction with recommendation 69, concerning student truancy, the task force developed a comprehensive plan to get students to school and keep them in school. Until administrators examined this problem from a districtwide perspective, they did not understand that many district policies actually hampered efforts. For example, the district's prior truancy policy actually

encouraged kids to stay home and hurt the district's average daily attendance numbers. The program adopted by the district reduced the dropout rate from 2.8 percent in 1999-2000, one of the highest in the state, to 0.9 percent in 2001-02. With support from the community, the district redefined which students were counted as dropouts and significantly revised PEIMS reporting procedures.

Personnel Management

Recommendation 20: Update existing job descriptions and develop new descriptions for positions that require them.

Recommendation 23: Improve procedures for employee evaluations and establish a timeline for the completion of all employee evaluations.

District staff worked on these recommendations simultaneously. RISD believes the measures and detailed job descriptions developed as a result of these recommendations were critical to filling vacant district positions with the most qualified candidates. In the past, accurate and comprehensive job descriptions were not completed for each vacant position and, as a result, RISD did not have any benchmarks to assess candidates' compatibility for the vacant position. By developing the job descriptions, the district ensures that the hiring department fully understands the necessary job qualifications. The district also stated that job-related accountability increases as a result of these recommendations. District administrators said the job descriptions were critical for hiring new, qualified staff for positions. Because student enrollment continues to decline, resulting staff decreases makes having the most qualified person in each position important to getting the job done. Evaluating employees has allowed the district to make midcourse corrections with employees having problems, reduce the number of staff terminations and help the district control legal costs relating to personnel issues.

Facilities Use and Management

Recommendation 31: Develop a timeline and implementation plan for SECO's recommendations to reduce utility expenses.

Administrators said this was one of the most important report recommendations because it allowed the district to replace aging and inefficient equipment. Because much of the replaced equipment was more than 15 years old, it was costly for the district to repair the equipment. The district financed the changes through the SECO's LoanSTAR program. The district is borrowing \$1.8 million.

Asset and Risk Management

Recommendation 33: Use a sweep account to increase interest earnings on idle bank balances overnight.

Recommendation 34: Diversify into other board-authorized investment vehicles to maximize investment revenue.

The district acted immediately on these two recommendations, setting up a sweep account in October 2001, then adopting a change in investment policy. Even though interest rates dropped dramatically after the review was released, these two recommendations saved the district much-needed funds. According to the district's assistant superintendent for Business and Finance, if the district had not transferred monies into a sweep account and diversified its investments, the district losses could have been remarkable. Because of these investment strategies, the district's interest earnings remained fairly constant from 2000-01 to 2001-02 while many other districts experienced decreased interest earnings.

Financial Management

Recommendation 42: Establish a general fund balance management policy.

Because the district's fund balance had been declining up until the time of the review, RISD staff said this recommendation highlighted its potential problem. The board adopted a new fund balance policy in 2001-02. Despite declining revenues resulting from declining student enrollment, since the change, the district has increased its fund balance by \$1 million to \$2.3 million. At the end of 2001-02, the district's fund balance increased to 8.6 percent of operating expenditures.

Purchasing and Contract Management

Recommendation 50: Establish a strong system of procedures to ensure compliance with purchasing laws and policies.

RISD said this recommendation was essential in fixing the district's purchasing system, which was out of control at the time of the review. The district developed and adopted new procedures in September 2001 and continues to closely monitor district staff purchases.

Food Service

Recommendation 58: Reinvest a portion of the Food Service fund balance to replace aging equipment.

The director of Food Service said that this recommendation enabled the district to replace equipment that otherwise would not have been replaced. The district replaced all of the equipment identified in the original report for \$76,000, less than half of the original estimated expenditure.

Transportation

Recommendation 62: Develop and implement a formal school bus replacement plan.

Administrators said this recommendation was important because some of the district's fleet was old, and the district only replaced a bus when the bus had broken down and the mechanics could no longer fix it. The district purchased two new 71-passenger diesel buses in fall 2002 and adopted a plan to purchase one new bus annually, but with the current budget shortfalls has delayed the 2001-02 bus purchase. The district used a lease-purchase plan to acquire the buses and plans to use the same purchase method in the future.

What Still Needs to be Done?

RISD has made progress in implementing TSPR recommendations. The district has implemented 50 recommendations; 17 are in various stages of progress; and seven have not been addressed. This section addresses the key areas requiring additional attention.

District Organization and Management

Although the district made an initial attempt to restructure the RISD organization to better align education and business operations within the district (Recommendation 7), the effort has stalled. Soon after the review, the former superintendent proposed a new organizational structure, but it had reporting problems similar to the original organization and the board did not approve the plan. The former superintendent then left the district. RISD's interim superintendent believes that the recommendation should not be completed until the district hires a permanent superintendent. The board is in the process of a superintendent search and has delayed implementation of a new organization for now. The original recommendation was made to redistribute responsibility more equally between three assistant superintendents because one of the superintendents only managed the business office, another managed part of the educational delivery system departments and a third assistant superintendent managed part of the educational service delivery departments plus transportation, food service and personnel. The original recommendation called for a reorganization of functions, aligning all business functions under one

assistant superintendent and all education functions under another assistant superintendent. The problem of confusing reporting structures and uneven distribution of responsibility remains and departments involved in educational service delivery still report to four different offices. By reorganizing these departments now, the board will provide the new superintendent, when hired, with an efficient and well-ordered organization with clear reporting structures and an even distribution of responsibilities.

Strategic planning (Recommendation 10) also got started about the same time as the intended reorganization, but has not been implemented. According to the interim superintendent, the strategic plan has been completed but has not been fully implemented because the board has yet to approve the plan. The superintendent said the plan was ambitious, and the district has not had the money to fund the proposed changes, so the board has not reviewed or approved the plan. The board should review the plan and request the administration provide the board with a timeline for implementing the plan that can be funded within the existing budget. With a viable timeline attached to the strategic plan, the district should then adopt the plan.

Facilities Use and Management

Although the district has secured a loan through SECO, many of the other recommendations contained in the facilities section of the Comptroller's report have been tabled for review at a future time.

Recommendations 25, 26 and 30, regarding selling a school, eliminating portable classrooms and issuing Qualified Zone Academy Bonds (QZAB) for school repairs have not been implemented or were rejected. District administrators said the board does not want to address these issues at this time. With a declining enrollment and a corresponding loss of state funds, the district need to quickly address deteriorating facilities and excess space that can be very costly for the district to maintain. At the time of the review, district schools had an occupancy rate of 51.44 percent. Since the review, RISD has lost more students. Operating schools so far below capacity requires additional administrators, teachers and auxiliary staff, as well as supplies and utilities. These three recommendations could save the district more than \$831,000 over the next five years—dollars that the district can ill-afford to bypass.

Financial Management

Although the district investigated refunding bonds (Recommendation 43), it has not taken any action at this time. The district has financed its capital projects through the issuance of Schoolhouse Bonds and at the time of the

review the district had more than \$18 million in outstanding bonds. Interest rates have been declining and are now at an all time low. School districts can achieve significant savings by issuing refunding bonds when interest rates fall below the rates that districts are paying on existing bonds. As noted in the original report, Corpus Christi ISD replaced its high interest bonds with lower interest bonds and saved more than \$2 million. Interest rates are much lower than when the original bonds were financed and the district needs to implement this recommendation before interest rates increase. Implementing this recommendation could save the district more than \$620,000 on interest payments over time.

RISD's Ideas for Improving the Texas School Performance Review

The Texas School Performance Review team does not assume that its process for performing school reviews works so well that it cannot be improved. Therefore, as part of the progress report preparation, TSPR asked RISD staff members and administrators to discuss what went right, what went wrong and how the process could be improved.

The feedback TSPR has received from other districts led to improvements in the review process. For example, early reports did not include implementation strategies, and districts told TSPR they needed help in getting started. As a result, the reports now include implementation strategies and timelines to complement the recommendations. Districts have told TSPR these blueprints are invaluable to achieving the desired results. It is important for TSPR to continually be mindful of those things that did not work as intended so that the review process can be improved.

RISD administrators and board members made the following observations.

The district said the review team was very thorough in its interviews and the consultants knew what to examine. RISD said it was a good process and made the district evaluate its operations. As a result of the review, the district said it has implemented a number of good, new processes. District staff said RISD took the report very seriously and the effort to implement the recommendations was time well spent.

District administrators said requests for duplicate information on several occasions were the only complaint they had. TSPR is sensitive to this issue and will continue to work closely with consultants to ensure information gathered through the preliminary data requests and through interviews is carefully catalogued and provided to all review team members to help prevent duplicative requests.

A questionnaire was sent to each of the district's board members; responses noted no dissatisfaction with the review.

Appendix A

Status of Recommendations and Savings

Rec. #	Recommendation	Implementation Status	TSPR Projected Five-Year Savings (Costs)	RISD Savings (Costs) to Date	RISD's Projected Five-Year Savings (Costs)	Comments
Chapter 1 - District Organization and Management						
1	Complete training for RISD board members in accordance with district policy and Texas Education Code requirements. p. 25	Complete	\$0	\$0	\$0	All board members have met their training requirements for 2002-03. RISD has policies and procedures to ensure compliance with state laws concerning board member training hours. New board members have received training from Region 2 and attended the convention of the Texas Association of School Boards (TASB) in Dallas.
2	Develop and enforce attendance requirements for board meetings. p. 27	Complete	\$0	\$0	\$0	The district's board member attendance problem has mostly corrected itself by the election of new board members. RISD experienced some difficulty with board member

						attendance at regularly scheduled meetings due in part to a health problem with one of the board member, who did not seek reelection
3	Develop and implement a Code of Conduct for the RISD board, including a mechanism for self-evaluation. p. 31	In Progress	\$0	\$0	\$0	RISD is researching different district codes of conduct, with a particular emphasis on the code of conduct used by Tulos-Midway ISD's board. Although much of the conflict that prompted this recommendation has subsided, the board still plans to adopt a code of conduct by September 2003.
4	Meet the conflict-of-interest requirements as defined by Chapter 553 of the Texas Government Code and local board policy. p. 33	Complete	\$0	\$0	\$0	To ensure compliance with state law and local board policy, each current board member has signed the conflict-of-interest statement, which is kept on file with the district. Board members said this has helped their relationship with the community.
5	Prepare board packets containing	Complete	\$0	\$0	\$0	Currently, all board packets

	comprehensive and detailed background information for all agenda items and disseminate them to board members at least 72 hours before school board meetings. p. 34					contain the necessary background information for all agenda items. Also, the board packets are distributed to trustees at least 72 hours before board meetings. The board packets are hand-delivered to each board member to ensure each has the necessary information prior to a board meeting.
6	Conduct the board's executive session at a regularly scheduled time prior to the regular board meetings. p. 35	Complete	\$0	\$0	\$0	All executive sessions are scheduled to occur at the beginning of each regular board meeting. The board posts the time of the executive session and the time of the regular session. The board does not always meet in executive session, and the length of time spent in executive session has also been reduced.
7	Restructure the district's organization by realigning all education and business operations under two assistant	In Progress	\$0	\$0	\$0	Soon after the review, the former superintendent proposed a new organizational structure, but it had reporting

	superintendents. p. 38					problems similar to the original organization and the board did not approve the plan. The former superintendent then left the district. RISD's interim superintendent believes that the recommendation should not be completed until the district hires a permanent superintendent. The board is in the process of a superintendent search.
8	Conduct annual performance evaluations of the superintendent. p. 40	Complete	\$0	\$0	\$0	The board and superintendent selected criteria for evaluating the superintendent and adopted the new criteria in 2001-02. The board evaluates the district's superintendent every January.
9	Distribute a monthly employee newsletter. p. 42	Complete	\$0	\$0	\$0	An employee newsletter is distributed every six weeks to all district staff. The district sent out its first employee newsletter in October 2001. Since 2002-03, the newsletter has also included relevant district news articles written by staff

						and students.
10	Establish a strategic planning team to develop a comprehensive strategic plan. p. 45	In Progress	\$0	\$0	\$0	The strategic plan has been completed but has not been fully implemented because the board has yet to approve the plan. The superintendent said the plan was ambitious, and the district has not had the money to fund the proposed changes. Therefore, the board has not adopted the plan.
Totals -Chapter 1			\$0	\$0	\$0	
Chapter 2 - Educational Service Delivery						
11	Review the dropout prevention program and develop new ways to retain students. p. 61	Complete	\$0	\$0	\$0	The district adopted a board-approved plan to address dropouts effective January 2003. Before this plan was approved, there was no consistency in handling students across the schools. The district used a task force to develop a dropout and truancy plan (recommendation 69) and obtained community buy-in by including community members on the task force. The district has

						<p>trained applicable staff on dropout prevention procedures and is working towards a common goal of reducing the districts dropout rate. The 2001-02 dropout rate decreased from 2.8 percent in 1999-2000, which is more than twice the state's 1.3 percent average, to 0.9 percent. Since the plan decreased dropouts, the number of students in the schools increased, increasing the district's average daily attendance, which the state uses in its funding formula. The plan also identified that the district had miscoded many students as dropouts when, in fact, they were at another RISD school.</p>
12	Create a plan to improve student ACT/SAT test scores. p. 64	Complete	\$0	\$0	\$0	<p>In October 2002, the district formed a committee consisting of secondary school facilitators and English Language Arts teachers to identify deficiencies in</p>

						teaching and/or curriculum related to substandard ACT/SAT scores. In January 2003, the committee formulated a plan that has since been incorporated into the DIP.
13	Develop procedures to verify PEIMS data before submission to TEA. p. 65	Complete	\$0	\$0	\$0	The PEIMS procedures were developed in 2002-03 and have been approved by the administrative staff. The PEIMS coordinator has developed checklists to ensure that all required data is submitted to TEA on time.
14	Analyze test results for the Bilingual Education/English-as-a-Second-Language student population to identify problem areas and develop a plan to raise TAAS scores. p. 72	Complete	\$0	(\$800)	(\$800)	TEA will be auditing the district's bilingual program in 2003-04. The district appointed a Bilingual Evaluation Committee in September 2002 and hired a consultant to disaggregate the appropriate data. The district also meets once a month to discuss and propose action items on improving the educational service delivery of the Bilingual/ESL

						population.
15	Eliminate medical clerk positions. p. 83	Complete	\$162,474	\$72,819	\$121,365	At the beginning of 2002-03, two medical clerk positions were eliminated.
	Totals -Chapter 2		\$162,474	\$72,019	\$120,565	
Chapter 3 - Community Involvement						
16	Consolidate all community and parental involvement functions into one department, and designate an individual to serve as director. p. 90	Complete	\$195,340	\$0	\$0	The district reorganized the community and parental functions for better alignment as opposed to a complete consolidation. The district said that a complete consolidation would not have been appropriate because of the nature of the programs within the functions. The programs work together rather than at cross purposes. Community involvement is now centrally managed.
17	Aggressively recruit school volunteers for campuses with low volunteer involvement. p. 97	Complete	\$0	\$0	\$0	The district received a grant in 2002-03 that has a parental involvement component. Though parental involvement at the secondary level has not increased, the number of volunteers at the middle and

						elementary levels has increased, and the district has parents volunteering when students are not at school.
Totals -Chapter 3			\$195,340	\$0	\$0	
Chapter 4 - Personnel Management						
18	Conduct reduction in force to achieve levels of staffing that more accurately reflect enrollment. p. 110	Complete	\$6,739,018	\$1,128,721	\$5,643,605	The district has implemented a one-time reduction in force, has added a staffing formula to its internal hiring procedures and only fills positions when necessary. The district eliminated 17 teaching positions, two librarians, eight paraprofessionals, five maintenance and transportation staff, two counselors and one assistant principal. In addition, the position of athletic director and head football coach were combined, eliminating one position.
19	Develop a personnel procedure manual. p. 111	Complete	\$0	\$0	\$0	The district developed a personnel procedures manual. The district also downloaded TASB personnel administrative

						procedures and used TASA procedures as guides.
20	Update existing job descriptions and develop new descriptions for positions that require them. p. 112	Complete	\$0	\$0	\$0	The district completed updating all job descriptions in February 2002, and the subsequent job description manual was approved by the board that same month.
21	Develop a teacher recruitment strategy. p. 115	Complete	\$0	\$0	\$0	The district posts jobs on its external Web site and on other regional, state and national Web resources. The district's recruitment strategy has resulted in receipt of many applications from throughout the state and nation. The district has also received applications from England, Mexico and Puerto Rico.
22	Develop strategies to address the district's shortage of substitutes. p. 116	Complete	\$0	\$0	\$0	The district has implemented various strategies to address the shortage of substitute teachers including moving the training sessions from the local community college to the district. As a

						result, the potential substitutes do not have to pay for the course. The district also investigated outsourcing the hiring of substitutes. Another strategy the district is considering is for the district to provide an incentive for long-term substitute assignments.
23	Improve procedures for employee evaluations and establish a timeline for the completion of all employee evaluations. p. 117	Complete	\$0	\$0	\$0	For 2002-03, the district ensures that evaluation timelines are issued to all evaluators early in the school year. The district ensures that employees are evaluated based on responsibilities listed in their job descriptions.
Totals -Chapter 4			\$6,739,018	\$1,128,721	\$5,643,605	
Chapter 5 - Facilities Use and Maintenance						
24	Establish a facilities planning committee to confirm facilities needs and develop a master plan, complete with implementation steps for board action. p. 128	In Progress	\$0	\$0	\$0	As of March 2003, the director of Maintenance and Transportation was working under the guidance of the assistant superintendent of Human Resources and

						the superintendent to name a facilities planning committee.
25	Close and sell or lease one of the district's schools. p. 130	Not Implemented	\$275,740	\$0	\$0	Because the board does not want to address the issue of selling or leasing a school until a future date, this recommendation remains under consideration. The board finds closing a school difficult to consider.
26	Eliminate use of portable classroom buildings and sell them as excess property. p. 132	Not Implemented	\$555,661	\$0	\$0	At its 2002 board budget workshop, the board said it does not want to address this decision yet, but may consider it in the future. District administrators said 20 percent of the existing portables are not being used.
27	Develop and maintain a comprehensive facilities and property inventory. p. 133	In Progress	\$0	(\$8,000)	(\$8,000)	The district has assigned this responsibility to the business manager who hired an external consultant to complete the property inventory. Though this is ongoing, the district still needs to complete its facilities inventory, which

						is the responsibility of the district's risk manager.
28	Implement a custodial staffing formula. p. 137	In Progress	\$359,664	\$25,000	\$125,000	The district reduced custodial staff through attrition. RISD established target levels for custodians using the formula recommended by TSPR and the formula used by Tulosso-Midway ISD.
29	Develop a schedule of maintenance priorities and automate the work order process to track progress and completion of maintenance work orders. p. 139	In Progress	\$0	\$0	\$0	The current Maintenance and Operations director is following the work order process closely. The district has implemented a spreadsheet tracking method and is currently looking at an online system to handle the process.
30	Pursue funding of facility repairs and rehabilitation by applying for and issuing Qualified Zone Academy Bonds. p. 141	Rejected	\$0	\$0	\$0	The board decided not to pursue QZAB loans at this time.
31	Develop a timeline and implementation plan for SECO's recommendations to reduce utility expenses. p. 143	In Progress	\$0	\$0	\$0	The district developed an implementation plan and entered into a Memorandum of Understanding for a \$1.8 million

						loan from SECO's LoanSTAR program in December 2002. The board has tabled final action on the loan pending the hiring of the new superintendent.
32	Involve schools in districtwide energy efficiency and conservation efforts. p. 145	Complete	\$51,518	\$0	\$0	SECO's Watt Watchers Program was implemented in 2001-02 and monthly reports are sent to the principals.
Totals -Chapter 5			\$1,242,583	\$17,000	\$117,000	
Chapter 6 - Asset and Risk Management						
33	Use a sweep account to increase interest earnings on idle bank balances overnight. p. 151	Complete	\$482,956	\$0	\$0	The district set up a sweep account in October 2001. Since its inception, the district has not realized any savings because of the decrease in interest rates. District administrators said, however, that if the district had not set up the account, the district would have suffered losses as the result of declining interest rates.
34	Diversify into other board-authorized investment vehicles to	Complete	\$86,772	\$0	\$0	The district diversified its investments after October 2001 but did so at a time

	maximize investment revenue. p. 153					when national interest rates were dropping, so it has not realized any additional interest income. If the district had not diversified its investments, RISD would have experienced a net loss according to the assistant superintendent for Business and Finance.
35	Obtain training for the investment officer to be in compliance with the Public Funds Investment Act. p. 154	Complete	(\$375)	(\$300)	(\$300)	The investment officer participated in Public Funds Investment training in 2001-02.
36	Establish a committee to review the state health plan options and devise a plan of action for the district in 2001-02. p. 157	Complete	\$0	\$0	\$0	At the beginning of 2001-02, the district established a committee of 20 district staff to assess insurance options. The committee met with four insurance consultants and selected one to provide expertise in developing a request for proposals. The committee considered self-funded insurance but chose not to self-fund. The committee recommended and the board approved to buy

						private insurance.
37	Assign responsibility for tagging all fixed assets to ensure proper accounting of district-owned property. p. 159	Complete	\$0	\$0	\$0	The district completed a comprehensive property inventory in 2001-02. The Business manager contracted this service out to an external company. The annual inventories are ongoing.
38	Hold school principals and other department heads accountable for the fixed assets under their supervision. p. 160	Complete	\$0	\$0	\$0	In September 2001, the superintendent assigned responsibility for fixed asset accountability of individual schools to principals and supplied the administrators with a listing of all the fixed assets under their control.
39	Perform an annual physical inventory of fixed assets. p. 161	Complete	(\$2,000)	(\$2,150)	(\$2,150)	The district retained a consulting firm to conduct an inventory in 2001-02. In 2002-03, the district conducted the annual inventory with school personnel.
40	Increase the district's fixed assets capitalization policy to \$5,000 and include a	Complete	\$0	\$0	\$0	During October 2001, the district increased its fixed asset capitalization policy to \$5,000

	depreciation policy. p. 162					and addressed the depreciation policy issue by including it in board policy. Implementation of GASB 34 makes this limit mandatory.
	Totals -Chapter 6		\$567,353	(\$2,450)	(\$2,450)	
Chapter 7 - Financial Management						
41	Initiate a multi-year budget process. p. 170	In Progress	\$0	\$0	\$0	The district contracted with a Texas A&M professor to help it develop a multi-year budget in 2002-03.
42	Establish a general fund balance management policy. p. 172	Complete	\$0	\$0	\$0	The district developed a fund balance policy in 2001-02. As a result of this policy, the district's fund balance increased by \$1 million to \$2.3 million.
43	Refund bonds at a lower interest rate. p. 174	In Progress	\$620,224	\$0	\$0	The district sought the expertise of several financial advisors regarding bond refunding. These unpaid consultants told the district that it would be impossible to refund its bonds at this time. The district plans to pursue this recommendation in the future.
44	Update the	Complete	\$0	\$0	\$0	The district

	Business Office procedures manual to include procedures for all functions. p. 176					adopted the TASB procedures manual for the Business Office in 2001-02.
45	Develop and implement a policy regarding manual checks and a schedule for computer-prepared checks. p. 177	Complete	\$0	\$0	\$0	The district developed and adopted a policy regarding manual checks and a schedule for computer-prepared checks in 2001-02.
46	Centralize the administration of the student activity funds. p. 178	Complete	\$0	\$0	\$0	The district centralized student activity funds into one account in 2001-02.
Totals -Chapter 7			\$620,224	\$0	\$0	
Chapter 8 – Purchasing and Contract Management						
47	Establish thresholds for approval of fund disbursements and require board approval in an open board session for disbursements over \$500. p. 190	Rejected	\$0	\$0	\$0	Based on the volume of fund disbursements, the district said implementing such a stringent disbursement policy would adversely impact district operations. Disbursements of more than \$10,000 have to be board approved if not approved in the budget.
48	Enforce district policy requiring purchase orders for all purchases of \$10 or more. p. 192	Complete	\$0	\$0	\$0	At the time of the review, the district said more than one-half of all purchases were processed without a

						purchase order. Since the district began enforcing internal policies, this number has become negligible. The district currently will not procure an item unless it is accompanied by a purchase order.
49	Install the district software purchase order module and train users. p. 194	Complete	(\$1,100)	(\$1,180)	(\$1,180)	The district installed the purchase order module in September 2001 and trained appropriate staff in October 2001.
50	Establish a strong system of procedures to ensure compliance with purchasing laws and policies. p. 195	Complete	\$0	\$0	\$0	RISD's central administration has repeatedly sent out letters outlining district-purchasing procedures to district staff since September 2001.
51	Provide training on contract management and contractor evaluation. p. 198	In Progress	\$0	\$0	\$0	RISD's administration is still investigating contract management and evaluation training as of March 2003.
52	Adopt and implement a written policy for technology contracting. p. 199	Complete	\$0	\$0	\$0	The district adopted and implemented a technology contracting policy in 2001-02.
	Totals -Chapter 8		(\$1,100)	(\$1,180)	(\$1,180)	
Chapter 9 - Food Services						
53	Conduct annual	Complete	\$0	\$0	\$0	Since 2001-02,

	surveys of students, parents, teachers and administrators to assess satisfaction with services and the quality, appearance and taste of food provided in school cafeterias. p. 209					the district has conducted staff and student surveys including a comment box located in each cafeteria. It also instituted an advisory committee at the high school consisting of students, parents and teachers. The committee meets monthly to discuss the district's Food Service program quality.
54	Reduce cafeteria staffing to achieve the recommended Meals Per Labor Hour. p. 211	Not Implemented	\$593,658	\$0	\$0	RISD plans to reduce staff through attrition. The Food Service Director anticipates one staff person will be leaving at the end of 2002-03.
55	Develop and implement an incentive program to encourage attendance and superior performance. p. 212	In Progress	(\$95,400)	\$0	\$0	The district did not implement the incentive program as recommended, but the director of Food Service has developed programs to reward superior performance within that department. Food Service gives a variety of awards such as employee of the year and the safety award.
56	Comply with disciplinary action	Complete	\$8,215	\$0	\$0	In 2001-02, the director of Food

	guidelines required by the Child Nutrition Program. p. 216					Service sent letters to all principals and key administrative staff outlining the guidelines on disciplinary actions required by the Child Nutrition Program.
57	Encourage and reward healthy eating choices. p. 217	Complete	\$0	\$0	\$0	The district began the Coordinated Approach to Child Health (CATCH) program in 2002-03, which is geared to instilling responsible eating habits for third graders. RISD also has established a promotion program, which explains healthy living and choices.
58	Reinvest a portion of the Food Service fund balance to replace aging equipment. p. 219	Complete	(\$180,795)	(\$76,000)	(\$76,000)	The district replaced \$76,000 in aging Food Service equipment in 2001-02. Items replaced included dishwashers, kitchen utensils, pots and pans, food storage bins, bowls, lunch trays, a convection oven and other kitchen necessities.
Totals -Chapter 9			\$325,678	(\$76,000)	(\$76,000)	

Chapter 10 - Transportation						
59	Optimize bus routes to improve linear density and make better use of bus capacity. p. 232	Not Implemented	\$25,400	\$0	\$0	Bus drivers complete routing sheets that the Transportation director uses to optimize bus routes manually. The district does not use software nor does it analyze the data collected. The district only has nine remaining routes and feels it cannot increase its linear density with declining enrollment.
60	Target bus driver recruitment to individuals who are interested in flexible schedules and part-time work hours. p. 234	Complete	\$0	\$0	\$0	Through recruitment efforts, the district has hired two new bus drivers and one substitute driver. The district is also using four coaches as alternate drivers.
61	Document the existing vehicle preventive maintenance process. p. 236	Complete	\$0	\$0	\$0	The district hired a senior-level mechanic in fall 2002 to ensure this process is performed on an ongoing basis.
62	Develop and implement a formal school bus replacement plan. p. 238	In Progress	(\$91,840)	(\$23,801)	(\$119,005)	The district lease-purchased two new 71-passenger diesel buses in fall 2002. The district planned to purchase one bus a year, but with the current budget shortfalls,

						the district delayed the purchase for 2001-02. Costs relate to the lease-purchase payments over time.
63	Purchase and implement an automated vehicle maintenance software program. p. 239	Rejected	(\$2,200)	\$0	\$0	Because the district believes this software is only useful for larger districts, it has no plans to purchase transportation software.
64	Use cooperative purchasing arrangements to purchase fuel, tires, lubricants and supplies at discounted prices. p. 240	Complete	\$0	\$0	\$0	RISD began using cooperative purchasing arrangements in October 2002.
	Totals -Chapter 10		(\$68,640)	(\$23,801)	(\$119,005)	
Chapter 11 - Safety and Security						
65	Establish a districtwide security plan that includes a mechanism for measuring and evaluating security activities. p. 248	In Progress	\$0	\$0	\$0	The security committee consists of district staff, police and community members. The committee developed a plan and issued it at the beginning of 2003 to the board for approval. The board is reviewing the plan.
66	Issue an RFP for security services and notify	Complete	\$0	\$0	\$0	The district issued a request for proposals in

	Accident Reconstruction Specialist of intent to terminate the current contract. p. 249					2001-02, evaluated the bids and awarded a contract in June 2002.
67	Create a committee to develop a course of action for reducing drug abuse. p. 257	Complete	\$0	\$0	\$0	The district formed a task force to reduce drug abuse per school, and the task force developed a plan for 2002-03. The district has a contact person at each school trained to deal with drug-related problems. The number of student drug-use incidents dropped from 64 in 2000-01 to 47 in 2001-02, a 27 percent decrease. The district now conducts drug counseling in RISD at the parent center rather than requiring students and parents to travel to Corpus Christi.
68	Provide specialized training to all personnel assigned duties at the Alternative Education Program school. p. 258	Complete	\$0	\$0	\$0	The district developed a staff development plan based on identifiable needs.
69	Develop a district truancy plan that includes	Complete	\$376,839	\$68,000	\$340,000	In 2001-02, a committee was formed including

	procedures and performance measures to increase attendance rates. p. 260					local community members and staff to address this problem. The district paired this recommendation with recommendation 11. A comprehensive truancy plan was developed in 2002 and the district thinks it will show an increase in attendance rates for 2002-03.
	Totals -Chapter 11		\$376,839	\$68,000	\$340,000	
Chapter 12 - Computers and Technology						
70	Eliminate one secretarial position in the Career and Technology Education Department. p. 267	Complete	\$0	\$20,000	\$100,000	The district eliminated this position in July 2001.
71	Establish a technology committee led by the director of CATE to develop a technology plan. p. 269	Complete	\$0	\$0	\$0	A committee was established and is part of the Technology Department. The committee developed a plan in 2002-03 which also includes the disaster recovery plan.
72	Develop a comprehensive disaster recovery plan and test it. p. 271	In Progress	\$0	\$0	\$0	The Technology plan, which was developed in 2002-03, contains a disaster recovery plan, but the district has not yet tested it.
73	Develop a Web-	In Progress	\$0	\$0	\$0	The district has

	based work order submission and status reporting system. p. 273					considered this recommendation and has begun the necessary steps to develop the Web-based system.
74	Create and maintain comprehensive software and technology inventories at each school and a master software and technology inventory. p. 273	In Progress	\$0	(\$1,000)	(\$1,000)	The district has identified a software package in January 2003 called Audit Wizard that can automatically inventory all software packages on each computer in the district's network.
	Totals -Chapter 12		\$0	\$19,000	\$99,000	
	Total Savings		\$10,159,769	\$1,201,309	\$6,121,535	