

Reconnection Centers Program: 2015-16

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At-a-Glance

The purpose of the Reconnection Centers program was to provide recovery of credits for students who had failed a course or courses in a core subject area. The program allowed students to remain enrolled in courses in the traditional classroom setting on their campus while recovering credit in Reconnection Centers during assigned periods. Credit recovery allowed students to remain on track to be promoted or graduate with their cohort.

Reconnection Centers provided students with online coursework. The Districtwide Student Initiatives Department partnered with Apex Learning to provide each Reconnection Center with digital curriculum, offering Center students self-paced, personalized instruction. The Apex digital curriculum was aligned to Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) standards and, where applicable, designed to prepare students for *State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) End-of-Course (EOC)* assessments.

School counselors and Reconnection Center staff worked together to identify students who were good candidates for the program. Once students were identified, they were assigned to the program for one or more class periods, including before- and after-school periods at some campuses. With successful completion of prescriptive online work and the district *Assessment of Course Performance (ACP)* test, students were awarded credit using district grading standards.

The Reconnection Centers had a school-within-a-school environment in which the staff consisted of one or two teachers, based on student need. At two-teacher Centers, one teacher served as the facilitator and team leader. At schools with low student demand, the Center was staffed part-time, and one teacher/facilitator divided his or her time between two to three centers. Each center contained 25 to 30 networked computers. At the time of this report, the district was operating Reconnection Centers at 28 high schools receiving State Compensatory Education (SCE) funds. The 2015-16 SCE allocation for this program was \$2,888,786, and expenditures were \$2,238,407.

Student Selection Criteria

New criteria and procedures for student selection into the Reconnection Centers, established during the 2013-2014 school year, were revised in 2015-16. A Path of Documentation was used to identify and enroll students who met program criteria.

Because Reconnection Centers are funded from SCE allocations, it was initially determined that all students assigned to the Centers must be classified as At-Risk according to state criteria as defined in Texas Education Code (TEC) §29.081. Personnel at each campus received information and training on the updated policies and procedures. Districtwide Student Initiatives provided additional licenses for online coursework, funded from other sources, for a relatively small percentage of students without At-Risk classifications.

Student selection was initiated by the counselor, who examined student records to determine At-Risk status and conducted an individual planning session with each eligible student. In the meeting, the counselor presented academic expectations and a timeline for those expectations. The student was informed about the grading structure and student responsibilities of the Reconnection Centers, and was required to agree to the expectations and responsibilities in a signed contract. The student was also required to have passed either the 8th grade *STAAR* Reading test or the English I *End-of-Course (EOC)* test. If the student had passed neither of those, a Lexile score of 800-1050 on the *Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI)* was required.

Characteristics of Students Served in Reconnection Centers

Across grades 9-12, 6.8% of enrolled students (2,689 of 39,539) were assigned to one or more periods of Reconnection Center classes, a decrease from 8.2% reported in 2014-15. Figure 1 shows the percent of students at each grade level who were enrolled in the program during either or both semesters of the 2015-16 school year. The largest percentage of students served was in Grade 12 (N=1,230).

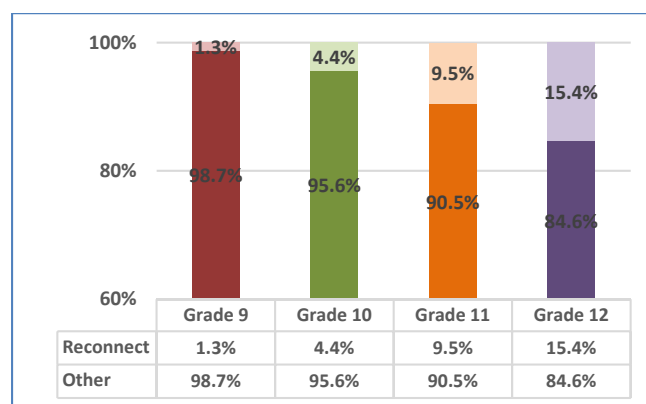


Figure 1. Percentage of students enrolled in Reconnection Centers by grade.

In comparison to district totals, a larger proportion of Reconnect students were male and At-Risk. Differences between program students and all district students in ethnicity, English Proficiency status, and economic status were less than 5 percentage points in all categories.

Outcomes of the Reconnection Centers Program

Course Completions. Apex Learning data show a total of 4,189 students who accessed online coursework in the Reconnection Centers, attempting completion of 9,212 courses. Approximately 56% of students (N=2,345) were successful in completing at least one course. Districtwide, the completion rate for all online Apex courses attempted was 69%.

ACP. Reconnection Center students were required to take the district's ACP final examination to receive course credit for each completed semester. Figure 2 shows the percentage of tests taken in Reconnection Centers by content area, and Table 1 shows the results of those tests.

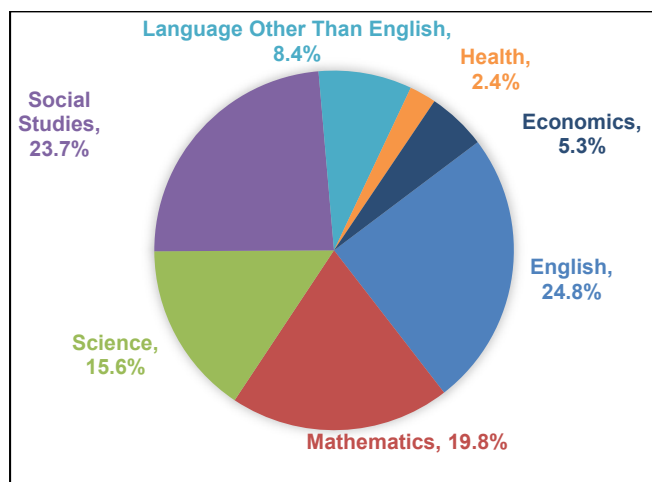


Figure 2. ACP exams taken in Reconnection Centers by content area.

Passing rates by content area varied from 35% to 82%, and mean scaled test scores ranged from 66 to 82. Overall, 49.7% of tested students passed semester final examinations in their Reconnection courses.

Table 1

Results of ACP Exams Administered in Reconnection Centers

Content Area	N Tested	Mean Score	Percent Passing
English/Lang. Arts	815	69	53.5
Mathematics	650	67	34.6
Science	511	66	36.6
Social Studies	778	70	51.0
Lang. Other Than English	276	82	82.1
Economics	175	69	52.0
Health	78	78	82.1

Credit Recovery in Grades 9-11. The workscope Key Result for students in grades 9-11 was stated as, "85% of the under-credited 9th, 10th, and 11th graders in the

Reconnection Center will recover credits to advance to the next grade level by July 2016."

Table 2 shows credit gains of Reconnection Center students between the end of the first six weeks and the end of the second semester of the 2015-16 school year. Credit accumulation was lower at grades 9 through 11 than credit gains expected for students enrolled in regular classes, which generally must average six credits per year to graduate in four years, but exceeded that number at grade 12.

Table 2

Credit Gains of Reconnection Center Students

Grade	N Students	Credits		
		BOY	EOY	Gain
9	133	2.8	5.9	3.1
10	447	8.4	13.1	4.7
11	819	15.2	21.0	5.8
12	1,216	21.8	28.0	6.2

Table 3 shows the percentages of Reconnection Center students who attained the next grade level by July, 2016. No grade reached the 85% promotion target, but grade 11 approached the target of 85%.

Table 3

Promotion Rates of Reconnection Center Students

Grade	N Students	Promoted	
		N	Percent
9	133	62	46.6
10	447	276	61.7
11	819	658	80.3
Total 9-11	1,399	996	71.2

A second workscope goal was that 85 percent of grade 12 Reconnection students would recover credits sufficiently to graduate with their class by July, 2016. After excluding verified leavers, 82.1% of grade 12 Reconnection students had graduated by the specified date. As well, four Reconnection students who began the year in grade 10 and 342 who began the year in grade 11 were able to graduate by July.

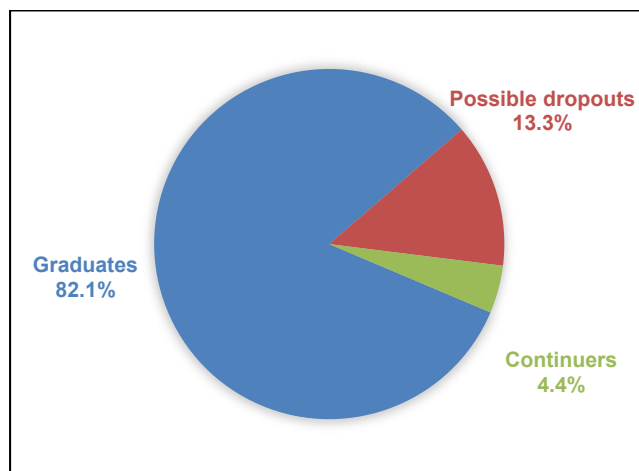


Figure 3. Graduation Status of Grade 12 Reconnection Center Students.

Facilitator Interview Responses

A sample of five facilitators participated in in-depth interviews in depth during the spring of 2016. Interviews were held on campus during planning periods or after school, and lasted approximately one hour. Facilitators were asked five open-ended questions, which were provided to them in advance of the interview. The questions focused on issues that were raised in a survey administered to all facilitators in the 2014-15 school year.

Four of the five facilitators interviewed felt that the level of campus support was good to excellent. All four specifically mentioned communication with counselors as a positive factor, indicating improvement from the previous year. The fifth reported a low level of support, primarily because counselors at that school were busy with other duties and had not fully grasped the intent of the program. That facilitator also expressed a need for “updated and operable” computers, in order to meet administrators’ expectations of the number of students to be served in the program. All facilitators interviewed saw additional support from content-area teachers as a need, specifically in mathematics (4 facilitators), science (4), Spanish (1), Special Education (1), and all core areas (1).

Facilitators were asked about needs for professional development and other support based on their classroom observations and evaluations, but four of the five did not identify any needs in this area. The fifth suggested that newer facilitators should have the opportunity to shadow more experienced facilitators, and that professional development sessions should be held at different Centers to see in person how they are run.

All facilitators interviewed cited self-motivation, maturity, and self-discipline as characteristics most likely to lead to student success in a self-paced program, and more often found in juniors and seniors than in underclassmen. Other factors cited as affecting student success were support and structure at home (3), reading levels (3), and chronic absenteeism (1).

Recommendations

The primary recommendation from prior reports which was addressed in 2014-15 was to “create clear criteria for selecting students for the program,” including setting the required minimum reading level score at a sixth grade equivalency. A Path of Documentation created in 2013-14 outlining enrollment procedures and criteria has been updated in each subsequent year. As well, counselors have been given a larger role in identifying and enrolling students in the program. Counselor turnover at some schools and lack of training at others appeared to have contributed to past difficulties in appropriate student assignment. However, the Student Initiatives Department has increased efforts in both 2015-16 and for the upcoming 2016-17 school year to

ensure that all counselors and administrators receive appropriate training.

Documentation of coursework has improved considerably with the Apex Learning online gradebook, but improvements are still needed. As in previous reports, it is recommended that the existing student data system be used in addition to the Apex system to record attendance and grades. One solution would be to repurpose the existing Reconnection course numbers to identify the course being taken, instead of indicating only the period during which the student attends Reconnection classes. Class period should be identified in the same way as for any other course. As well, before- and after-school enrollment should be recorded in GradeSpeed at every campus, even before changes to the current course numbering conventions are considered.

To address a major concern expressed by facilitators both last year and in this year’s interviews, staffing should be reviewed to determine whether additional support is needed in some locations, either from an additional teacher or aide, or from content area teachers assigned to assist in Reconnection Centers during designated class periods.

Further analysis is needed to determine which students benefit most from the Reconnection program. Facilitators contend that students in grades 11 and 12 with motivation to graduate and adequate reading skills are most likely to benefit from the self-paced online coursework offered. Outcome data on credit gains, grade-level promotion, and graduation gives support to their claims. Past achievement results, current and previous course grades, attendance data, and course completion records of current program students should be analyzed in greater depth to help refine identification criteria, in order to assist schools in assigning students to Reconnection Centers who are most likely to be successful in the program.

For more information, see EA16-132-2, which can be found at <http://www.dallasisd.org/Page/888>.