

AFRICAN AMERICAN SUCCESS INITIATIVE: 2015-2016

Akiva Lorenz, Ph.D.

EA16-152-4

At-a-Glance

The African American Success Initiative (AASI) started in 2006 to close the achievement gap and increase access to academic opportunities for African American students. AASI concentrated on three specific areas for the 2015-16 school year: 1) student mentorship program, 2) parent, family, and community engagement, and 3) professional development. AASI received \$500,000 in Title I funding to implement the program at 13 schools in the Carter and Wilmer Hutchins feeder patterns.

Mentorship Program

The AASI program had two mentors per school for a total of 26 mentors. Mentors were predominately African American (93%) with an average local classroom experience of 9 years. Mentors were classified primarily as professional staff employed as teachers (79%) or school counselors (11%). AASI data indicated that 50 percent of the mentors were mentors in prior years; however, only 16 percent indicated that they volunteered to be mentors for the 2015-16 school year.

Collectively, these mentors served 401 students (mentees), primarily enrolled at the elementary school level (68%). The majority of mentees were African American (93%), the target population, and came from an economically disadvantaged background (94%). However, only 70 percent were characterized in the Dallas ISD chancery file as being at risk, and 11 percent were considered Talented and Gifted (TAG). This suggests that observation of mentee selection during the next program year is warranted (Table 1).

Table 1: Characteristics of AASI Mentees

	AASI		Schools*	
	N	%	N	%
Race/Ethnicity				
African American	372	92.8	4,576	22.6
Hispanic	29	7.2	3,074	39.3
Gender				
Female	168	41.9	3,735	47.7
Male	233	58.1	4,091	52.3
Subgroup				
Econ Disadvantage	378	94.3	7,125	91.0
Special Education	43	10.7	720	9.2
Talented and Gifted	44	11.0	677	8.7
LEP	15	3.7	1,998	25.5

* Students in the AASI program are not included in the Schools category.

Enrollment in the AASI program averaged 159 days. AASI mentees received an average of 11 mentoring sessions resulting in an average of 13 hours of

intervention. Four out of the 13 schools (31%) provided an average of less than six hours of mentoring. In addition to mentoring sessions, AASI scheduled and conducted six educational activities during the 2015-16 school year. The goal of these activities was to promote comradery and leadership among the mentees and to offer insight into cultural and educational opportunities. Attendance records for AASI activities, although incomplete, showed an average of 45 percent for mentoring activities (e.g., book reports) and 86 percent for trips (e.g., College Tour).

STAAR Results

Analysis of *State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR)* test results for grades 3-8 indicated the passing rate for AASI mentees was 52 percent for both reading and mathematics (Table 2). AASI students in J.N. Ervin ES, Umphrey Lee ES, and Ronald McNair ES achieved higher passing rates compared to the entire school population and the non-AASI African American subpopulation. AASI mentees in Wilmer-Hutchins ES had higher passing rates for reading and mathematics than the entire non-AASI African American population but lower passing rates when compared to the entire student population.

Table 2: STAAR Passing Rates for AASI Mentees

Test	N*	%
STAAR Grades 3-8		
Reading	306	52.0
Math	303	51.5
STAAR EOC		
English I EOC	13	23.1
English II EOC	20	40.0
Algebra EOC	16	68.8

*N indicates the number of students tested.

The passing rate for AASI mentees who took the English I EOC was 23 percent, English II EOC was 40 percent, and Algebra EOC was 69 percent. Further analyses of STAAR EOC test takers by gender or a comparison of passing rates with the entire school or subpopulations could not be conducted due to the low number of test takers.

Parent Outreach

AASI's parent outreach program was split into two segments. Mentors were asked to contact parents twice a month to provide progress updates, while the Office of Family and Community Engagement organized and spearheaded two distinct family workshop series under the name "Parents Matter Too." Mentors indicated that

they contacted parents an average of 7 times during the 2015-16 school year to discuss various topics. These topics included explaining the AASI program, providing updates about AASI activities, and discussing test preparation.

The Office of Family and Community Engagement created a series of parent workshops for the Carter and Wilmer Hutchins feeder patterns. Both workshop series reached almost the same number of participants (Carter, N = 66 vs Wilmer Hutchins, N=65). The number of attendees per workshop varied greatly between the feeder patterns. Workshops at the Carter feeder pattern were attended by an average of 20 parents while those at the Wilmer Hutchins feeder pattern were attended by an average of 8 parents.

The Office of Family and Community Engagement provided documentation showing that 77 percent of the mentees have a parent account associated with them.

Professional Development

AASI provided professional development opportunities for the mentors in the form of mentor meetings and Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning (CRTL) sessions. AASI staff could not provide attendance records for all four mandatory mentor sessions. However, the information that was made available indicated that mentor meetings had a low participation rate (<40%). Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning (CRTL) sessions were conducted by Dr. Sharroky Hollie. CRTL sessions concentrated on communicating the impact of African American culture on education, increasing classroom management, as well as providing best practices for test taking and the implementation of learned materials in the classroom. Mentor participation at CRTL workshops decreased from the first workshop (65%) to 27 percent at the fourth workshop. Analysis of AASI mentor participation at the CRTL sessions indicated that only five of the 26 mentors (19%) participated in all four workshops, while six mentors (23%) participated in none. CRTL workshops were open to mentors, CRTL campus trainers, and school leadership reaching a total of 107 personnel. Attendance records indicate that of the 107 potential participants only 31 (29%) attended all four workshops. Fifty-four percent attended at least three workshops, raising the question as to whether priority was given to AASI concepts.

CRTL campus trainers were part of AASI's professional development initiative. The goal of CRTL campus trainers was to participate at Dr. Hollie's workshops and then to present CRTL principles and examples to the school staff during professional development and professional learning community meetings. AASI identified 58 campus trainers. Overall, attendance rates at CRTL trainers' workshops decreased from 88 percent at the first workshop to 60 percent at the fourth.

CRTL campus trainers held a total of 50 campus training sessions during the 2015-16 school year. Analysis of the campus training sessions indicated that four of the 13 AASI schools (31%) conducted each of their training sessions prior to the next CRTL workshop. Moreover, 23 of the 50 sessions (46%) were conducted after the fourth workshop. Six of the 13 AASI schools (46%) held more than 50 percent of their training sessions after the fourth workshop, providing little or no time to implement learned concepts during the 2015-16 school year.

Stakeholders of the AASI program were surveyed to solicit their feedback on the AASI program. Overall, mentors agreed that the AASI program provided new opportunities to students and that the mentoring environment, consisting of the AASI team and school staff, was supportive of their needs. However, mentors suggested a decreased workload and better scheduling of AASI events. CRTL workshop participants enjoyed the quality and relevance of the CRTL workshops, although 54 percent remained concerned about their readiness to implement CRTL in their classrooms. Also some perceived that AASI and CRTL training were not considered priorities at the school and feeder level.

Dallas ISD Climate Survey results from Spring 2015 to Spring 2016 indicated that six of the 13 (46%) AASI schools saw an increase in average favorable responses. Five of the six schools are in the Carter feeder pattern. Climate Survey results cannot serve as an indication that AASI made a meaningful positive or negative impact.

Summary

The purpose of this evaluation was to analyze the implementation of the various AASI components, and to understand the impact of this program on the academic achievement of AASI mentees. The presented data indicated that mentees and program staff failed to reach their set goals.

Evidence from the evaluation suggests that AASI was not a cohesive program but instead was a collection of activities and professional development opportunities offered to participating schools. As such, it was difficult for the program to set and establish specific goals and outcomes that could be attributable to AASI. Implementation varied across schools and all AASI schools participated in a variety of other programs and activities that may have affected student outcomes. Student selection for the mentoring program was inconsistent across schools and selection criteria changed during the course of the school year. The number of mentoring meetings and hours was inconsistent across participating schools. AASI Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning professional development session attendance fell significantly over the course of the year and campus training at many schools was held late in the school

year, leaving little time to implement the training in classrooms at participating schools. For the most part, outcomes addressed in this evaluation are not directly attributable to AASI activities but reflect general results at participating schools.

Recommendations

Limit student mentorship program participation to Tier 2 students. Shifting the workscope of Student Advocate Coordinators from Tier 2 to Tier 3 students eliminated a valuable resource for the main target population, while not providing enough resources for the additional group.

Construct longitudinal intervention setting. Consider supporting and tracking the same mentees over several school years to establish a meaningful relationship between mentee and their mentor, and to increase the ability to identify effects from participation in the program.

Create incentives for mentor participation. Mentors noted that the current stipend did not equal the additional time and work commitment. Further, only 16 percent of mentors volunteered for the assignment. Therefore, AASI should reevaluate the stipend amount to attract high quality teaching staff. The payment of the stipend should be based on achieving certain targets.

Create incentives for school participation. Consider providing or paying for substitute teachers when AASI mentors or CRTL trainers are participating in professional development trainings or providing services to mentees. This would enable school leadership to occasionally release AASI mentors and CRTL trainers from their teaching commitments to encourage greater participation in professional development and provision of specific services to mentees.

Conduct training in August. Mentor and CRTL training should be conducted as early in the school year as possible to increase the likelihood that the program can help support the academic achievement of students.

Expand community and parent outreach programs to further increase the participation of parents in their children's education and raise community awareness. Consider expanding AASI's cooperation with the Office of Family and Community Engagement to provide specific workshops to parents based on the 2015-16 feedback.

Create a program website. The program may benefit from a dedicated website within the Dallas ISD infrastructure. The website may serve as a hub to connect current and future students with the program, and serve as a repository of program information for parents and district staff.

Establish appropriate tracking mechanism. No rigorous evaluation of the effectiveness of an intervention can take place without the availability of high quality student attendance data and other program related information. Consider working with Dallas ISD's

IT department to establish a program tracking database to minimize data collection and entry issues.

For more information, see EA16-152-2, available at <http://www.dallasisd.org/Page/888>.