

# Evaluation of Accelerating Campus Excellence (ACE) 2015-16

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## At-a-Glance

In 2015-16, the Accelerating Campus Excellence (ACE) initiative offered competitive stipends to incentivize top teachers and principals to relocate to seven of the district's Improvement Required (IR) campuses (Annie Webb Blanton, Roger Q. Mills, Elisha M. Pease, Umphrey Lee, Billy Earl Dade, Thomas A. Edison, Sarah Zumwalt). The ACE program was supported by \$4,720,200 of Dallas ISD general operating funds. Most of this budget was earmarked for teacher and leadership annual stipends ranging from \$8,000 to \$15,000, depending on role and, in the case of teachers, TEI effectiveness rating.

The ACE program aimed to improve student achievement on these campuses through five primary components including 1) effective principals and teachers, 2) instructional excellence, 3) extended learning, 4) social-emotional support, and 5) parent and community partnership. Program objectives to support these components included the following:

### Effective Principals and Teachers

- 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> quintile<sup>1</sup> scores on the Culture of Feedback and Support section of the campus Climate Survey
- High percentages (70% in fall, 85% in spring) of proficient teachers as measured by Teacher Excellent Initiative (TEI) spot observation scores

### Instructional Excellence

- Growth toward district averages on test scores [within 15 percentage points of district averages in the fall for *Assessment of Course Performance* (ACP) exams; within 10 percentage points of district averages in the spring for ACP and *State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness* (STAAR) exams.]

### Extended Learning

- Growth in literacy as measured by *Istation Indicators of Progress* (ISIP) (increase number of students at or above grade level by 10 percent every six weeks, attain ISIP Tier 1 scores within 10 percentage points of district averages, OR attain growth of at least 15 percentage points over the previous year)

- Fewer than 10 percent (elementary) or 15 percent (middle) of students with at least one failing grade

### Social-Emotional Support

- Reduction of disciplinary offenses by 10 percent

### Parent and Community Partnership

- Attendance rates of at least 96 percent

Although the ACE program was primarily about placing the most effective leaders and teachers on campuses, there were several elements that were common for all. Campuses were required to use common tools for regular assessment and tracking, were offered common professional development tools and programs to support effective teaching, and participated in regular team walks and coaching with program leadership. All ACE campuses also had one extra hour embedded into the master schedule, and remained open every day until 6pm for students to get extra help and to participate in extracurricular activities. ACE program leadership also strove to maintain strong program communication among campuses through regular newsletters, meetings, and celebratory events. Importantly, several factors were not part of the ACE initiative, such as technology availability, small class sizes, unlimited supplies and resources, or removal of students with disciplinary challenges from classrooms.

### What were the characteristics of ACE students, teachers, and principals?

The 3,925 ACE students were mostly male (52.8%), and African American (57.0%) or Hispanic (41.2%). Most were economically disadvantaged (89.7%), 29.6 percent were English language learners, and 9.1 percent were enrolled in special education. The 297 ACE teachers were mostly female (71.2%), African American (63.0%) or Hispanic (16.8%), and 38.0 percent held at least a master's degree. Teachers had been employed by the Dallas ISD an average of 6.7 years, and 43.7 percent had taught in the district for six or more years. Teachers relocated from 93 different campuses within the Dallas ISD, and 16.2 percent came from outside the district. Experienced new principals were selected for all campuses from within the Dallas

<sup>1</sup> A quintile is a statistical value that represents 20 percent of a set of scores. For example, the first quintile represents the lowest 20 percent of scores, while the fourth and fifth quintiles together represent the top 40 percent of scores.

ISD; five principals completed the entire year on ACE campuses.

### What were stakeholder perceptions of ACE?

**Principals.** Principals appreciated support from ACE leadership. They were challenged to help teachers adjust to new campus cultures and to muster support from their campus communities. They also were wary of the excessive burden placed on teachers by keeping campuses open until 6pm. Principals optimistically expected positive academic outcomes as a result of the ACE program, but were greatly concerned that the program would be discontinued prematurely.

**Teachers.** Most ACE teachers estimated that they worked about 11 to 20 more hours per week than they had on campuses not part of the ACE program, and the majority of teachers agreed that the stipend was fair considering this extra workload. They indicated that high expectations, highly qualified teachers, instructional rigor, policy structure and consistency, discipline, and a sense of urgency were the most important factors contributing to teaching quality on ACE campuses. Although teachers believed that there were more opportunities on ACE campuses for parent involvement than on non-ACE campuses, most teachers reported a relatively low level of parent involvement. Just under half of teachers desired more collaboration among ACE campuses in future years. Teachers disagreed on whether or not the program was implemented in the way it was described. Teachers offered several suggestions for improvement including topics related to discipline, work environment, professional development, and student offerings.

**Students.** Students were well-versed in changes resulting from the ACE program. This was particularly apparent with regard to teacher quality and discipline improvements. Students clearly were focused on academic achievement and on their short- and long-term goals. When asked what they liked most about their schools, students most frequently mentioned their teachers, who cared about them and challenged them to do their best. Students felt motivated by their new teachers. Students also agreed that, although schools were more orderly than in previous years, they often felt distracted by misbehaving cohorts, and wished that more could be done to minimize this erosion of their learning time.

In addition, all ACE campuses experienced gains in favorable ratings on the Student Experience Survey

when compared to 2014-15. Three elementary schools (Mills, Blanton, U. Lee) and elementary schools overall exceeded the 2016 favorable rate for district elementary schools. Two middle schools (Zumwalt, Dade) exceeded the 2016 favorable rate for district middle schools.

### What were the outcomes of the effective principals and teachers component?

**Climate Survey.** In spring 2016, four of the seven ACE campuses attained 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> quintile scores on the Culture of Feedback and Support scale of the district Climate Survey. The four campuses consisted of two elementary schools (U. Lee, Blanton) and two middle schools (Dade, Zumwalt). Compared to spring 2015, quintile ratings in spring 2016 for four ACE campuses increased (Blanton, U. Lee, Pease, Dade), two remained constant (Edison, Zumwalt), and one declined (Mills).

**Spot observations.** One campus (U. Lee) met the objective of 85 percent of teachers with proficient spot observations (average >2.0) in spring 2016 for section 2.3 (clearly presents instructional content), but not on section 2.5 (engages students at all learning levels in rigorous work). However, as a result of moving highly effective teachers onto ACE campuses, the rate of average proficient spot observations improved both semesters on all campuses for both sections compared to 2014-15.

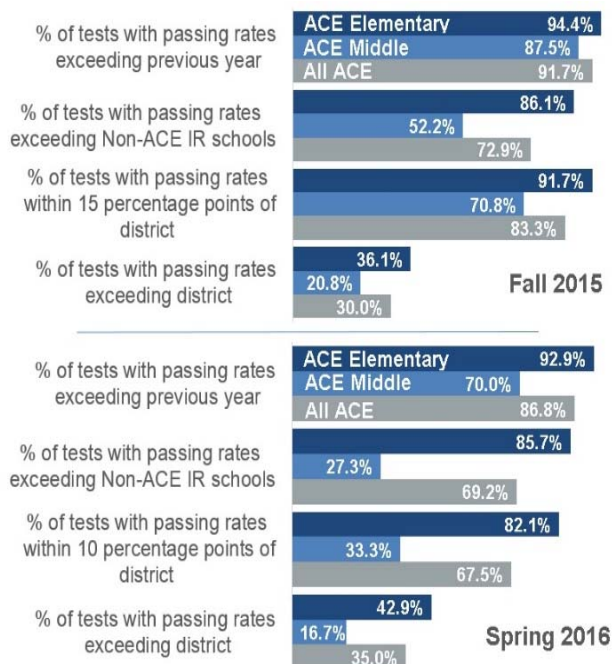
### What were the outcomes of the instructional excellence component?

**Assessment of Course Performance (ACP).** ACE campuses showed strong growth in ACP passing rates when compared to both semesters in the previous year, to non-ACE IR campuses, and to the district. A total of 40 ACP exams were administered (including versions in Spanish) on ACE campuses.<sup>2</sup> As shown in Figure 1, for ACE overall, fall 2015 passing rates for 83.3 percent of tests were within 15 percentage points of district rates, and spring 2016 passing rates for 67.5 percent of tests were within 10 percentage points of district rates. For both semesters, results were stronger at the elementary school level than at the middle school level.

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<sup>2</sup> The total number of ACP exams varied slightly by campus because it was dependent upon course offerings.

Figure 1: 2015-16 ACE ACP Passing Rate Comparisons



Source: District data files dated January 27, 2016 (fall) and July 11, 2016 (spring). Note: ACP scores of 70 or higher were considered passing; Scores included for students enrolled on the PEIMS snapshot date of October 30, 2015; Non-ACE IR = Non-ACE Improvement Required Campuses.

**State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR).** ACE campuses also experienced notable growth on STAAR passing rates when compared to the previous year, to non-ACE IR campuses, and to the district (see Table 1). For ACE overall, passing rates for 50.0 percent of exams were within 10 percentage points of passing rates for the district, and rates for 11.1 percent of tests exceeded the district. In addition, 88.9 percent of tests showed improved passing rates over 2015, and 66.7 percent of passing rates exceeded those for non-ACE IR campuses. In general, results were stronger at the elementary school level than at the middle school level.

Table 1: 2015-16 ACE STAAR Test Passing Rate Comparisons

| Tests              | Passing Rates        |         |                   |         |                                         |     |                 |     |
|--------------------|----------------------|---------|-------------------|---------|-----------------------------------------|-----|-----------------|-----|
|                    | Exceed Previous Year |         | Exceed Non-ACE IR |         | Within 10 Percentage Points of District |     | Exceed District |     |
|                    | N                    | n %     | n %               | n %     | n %                                     | n % | n %             | n % |
| All Tests          | 18                   | 16 88.9 | 12 66.7           | 9 50.0  | 2 11.1                                  |     |                 |     |
| All Mathematics    | 7                    | 6 85.7  | 4 57.1            | 4 57.1  | 2 28.6                                  |     |                 |     |
| All Reading        | 6                    | 5 83.3  | 3 50.0            | 2 33.3  | 0 0.0                                   |     |                 |     |
| All Writing        | 2                    | 2 100.0 | 2 100.0           | 1 50.0  | 0 0.0                                   |     |                 |     |
| All Science        | 2                    | 2 100.0 | 2 100.0           | 2 100.0 | 0 0.0                                   |     |                 |     |
| All Social Studies | 1                    | 1 100.0 | 1 100.0           | 0 0.0   | 0 0.0                                   |     |                 |     |
| All Elementary     | 8                    | 8 100.0 | 7 87.5            | 7 87.5  | 1 12.5                                  |     |                 |     |
| All Middle         | 10                   | 8 80.0  | 5 50.0            | 2 20.0  | 1 10.0                                  |     |                 |     |

Source: District STAAR files dated July 11, 2016 (grades 3 to 8) and July 12, 2016 (Algebra I EOC). Note: Passing rates reflect satisfactory or higher scores using the year-specific standard for all versions of STAAR excluding Alternate 2; Scores included for students enrolled as of the PEIMS snapshot date of October 30, 2015; Non-ACE IR = Non-ACE Improvement Required campuses (see Appendix L for included campuses).

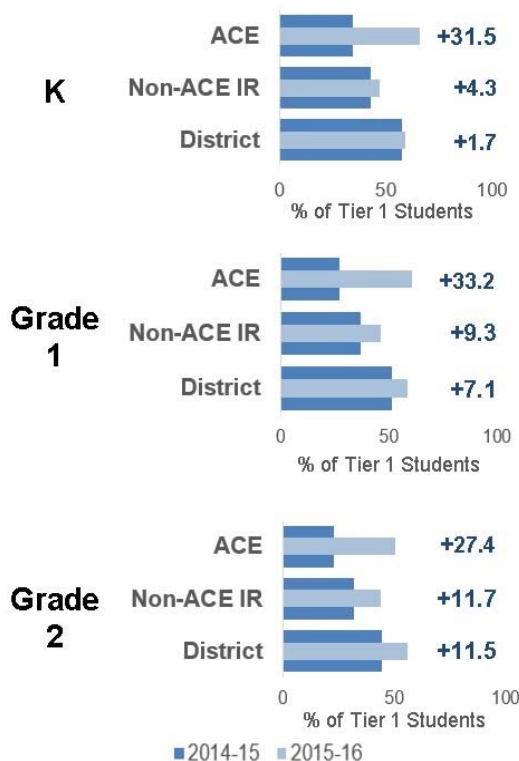
**Terra Nova/SUPERA.** ACE campuses achieved passing rates that exceeded non-ACE IR campuses and the district in several areas, particularly in Terra

Nova reading (kindergarten and grade one), and Terra Nova mathematics (grades one and two).

### What were the outcomes of the extended learning component?

**Islation Indicators of Progress (ISIP).** ACE campuses showed strong growth throughout the year in ISIP Tier 1 achievement rates, and also showed strength when compared to the previous year, to non-ACE IR campuses, and to the district. For combined English and Spanish versions, Tier 1 rates consistently exceeded those at the beginning, middle, and end of the previous year. Tier 1 rates grew steadily in all three grades throughout the current year. Kindergarten and grade one Tier 1 rates exceeded the district, and grade two Tier 1 rates closed the gap with the district by the end of the year. Importantly, the end-of-year growth rate from 2014-15 exceeded that for non-ACE IR and the district for all grades (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: 2015-16 ISIP Percent at Tier 1 Versus 2014-15 for ACE, Non-ACE IR, and District



Source: District ISIP files dated June 17<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>, 2016 for students enrolled on the PEIMS snapshot dates of October 31, 2014 (2014-15) and October 30, 2015 (2015-16). Note: Growth is expressed in percentage point differences; Non-ACE IR = Non-ACE Improvement Required campuses.

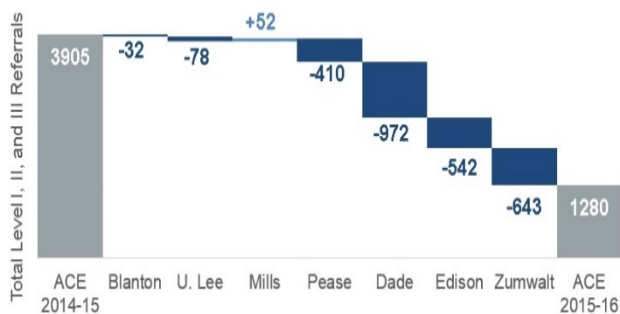
**Course grades.** ACE campuses struggled to meet stated objectives regarding course grades. One elementary school (Blanton) and one middle school (Dade) met the objective of fewer than 10 percent (elementary) or 15 percent (middle) of students with at

least one failing final course grade. Overall, both ACE elementary school campuses and middle school campuses fell short of this benchmark. However, at both the elementary school and middle school level, the rate of students with at least one failing grade was lower than both the district and non-ACE IR campuses.

### What were the outcomes of the social-emotional support component?

ACE campuses showed a remarkable 67.2 percent reduction in level I, II, and III disciplinary referrals in the 2015-16 academic year. Six out of the seven campuses (three elementary schools and all middle schools) contributed to this reduction (see Figure 3). These improvements were likely attributed to effective leadership and strong communication of structures and systems on ACE campuses.

Figure 3: 2015-16 ACE Total Discipline Referrals Versus 2014-15  
Change in 2015-16 ACE Campus Level I, II, and III Referrals from 2014-15



Source: Office of Student Discipline files dated August 5, 2015 (2014-15) and July 13, 2016 (2015-16).

### What were the outcomes of the parent and community partnership component?

ACE campuses overall fell short of the stated objective of 96 percent attendance rates. One campus (Blanton) met this objective in the current year, with four others (U. Lee, Mills, Dade, Edison) attaining attendance rates within 0.5 percentage points of this benchmark.

### What were the 2016 accountability ratings for ACE campuses?

The ultimate test of the success of a program designed to boost campuses with an Improvement Required TEA accountability rating is earning a Met Standard rating as the result of implementation. As shown in Table 2, six of the seven ACE campuses earned a Met Standard rating in 2015-16 after one year of program implementation. This accomplishment is the most important indicator of the success of the program.

Table 2: 2016 ACE Accountability Results

|         | Index 1<br>Met? | Index 2<br>Met? | Met<br>Index<br>1 or 2? | Index 3<br>Met? | Index 4<br>Met? | 2016<br>Rating |
|---------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|
| Blanton | Y               | Y               | Y                       | Y               | Y               | Met            |
| U. Lee  | Y               | Y               | Y                       | Y               | Y               | Met            |
| Mills   | Y               | Y               | Y                       | Y               | Y               | Met            |
| Pease   | N               | Y               | Y                       | Y               | Y               | Met            |
| Dade    | N               | Y               | Y                       | Y               | Y               | Met            |
| Edison  | N               | Y               | Y                       | N               | N               | IR             |
| Zumwalt | N               | Y               | Y                       | Y               | Y               | Met            |

### Recommendations

#### Keep focus on effective teachers and principals.

Effective leadership and teachers were the cornerstones of ACE successes. Therefore, they should have the resources and professional development they need to teach effectively, and should continue to be rewarded financially and otherwise for their efforts. Technology and other resources (e.g., lab supplies) were not specific promises of the ACE program, but ensuring that teachers have the supplies that they need through the appropriate channels will make a difference in teaching effectiveness, will improve workplace satisfaction, and will reduce turnover. Clear and frequent communication about expectations will avoid future misunderstandings. Prioritizing professional development will reinforce the skills of teachers who are highly rated, and also will boost the skills of promising teachers who one day may qualify to teach on an ACE campus. Expanding and retaining the pool of effective teachers will be critical as the program evolves. There were many teaching innovations and successes this year on all ACE campuses, and teachers asked for more collaboration among ACE campuses. These are a few examples of what teachers suggested would maintain and improve workplace satisfaction for highly-rated teachers, without whom the program cannot continue.

#### Continue and extend training and systems for social-emotional support and behavioral management.

Although there was both quantitative (decreased discipline referrals) and anecdotal (stakeholder perceptions) evidence that systems and structures and behavioral management improved on ACE campuses compared to last year, teachers and students indicated more improvement was necessary. Teachers desired more training on behavioral management and on reaching disengaged students and students from poverty. They also desired support from trained counselors on campus to allow them to focus more heavily on instruction. Students on all campuses were concerned that disruptive classmates deprived them of learning time. Ratings on the Student Experience Survey showed stronger relationships between students and teachers than last year and stronger than the district in the current year. The extent to which these improved relationships motivate

students to work hard and translate to academic achievement should be considered in future decisions.

**Further evaluate the return on investment of after-school hours.** Data collection on the quantity and quality of after-school programs this year was insufficient to usefully evaluate the efficacy of after-school hours. Leadership should prioritize determining methods for recording the time and activities of students during after-school hours. This would provide a way to evaluate more effectively whether or not the extra time spent by teachers and students correlates with improved outcomes.

**Continue efforts to strengthen parent involvement.** Principals and teachers on most campuses mentioned parent involvement as a challenge. Low attendance rates and low response rates on parent surveys also support the notion that engaging parents was difficult on these campuses. More partnership with ACE parents may help improve outcomes, such as discipline enforcement, attendance rates, and dedication to learning. The success of the ACE program in its first year provides a strong talking point for campus leadership to use to invoke expanded interest, pride, and involvement from parents on ACE campuses.

**Consider long-term transition plans with caution.** Future inclusion of campuses in the ACE program was unknown past 2016-17, and this was clearly a point of anxiety for current ACE principals and teachers. Although most ACE campuses have experienced tremendous academic success in one year, it is worrisome to consider what would happen to students should the effective teachers be relocated to other campuses. Stability has been an important factor for supporting order and for improving community trust. It is unknown how long such intensive instruction is necessary to solidly change campus culture. Research should be conducted to determine the most effective way to transition campuses from the ACE program to avoid losing gains afforded by participation.

**Carefully consider grade levels that will experience most long-term benefit.** Passing rates on both ACP and STAAR exams experienced more growth from last year and were relatively higher in the current year than non-ACE IR and district passing rates for elementary school grades than for middle school grades. As new campuses are selected for the ACE program, a limited number of highly effective teachers will make determining where the program will have the highest return on investment and effort critical. Leadership should consider grade level when finalizing future ACE campuses.

**Prepare to evaluate long-term outcomes.** It will be important to evaluate long-term success as students move from ACE elementary school and middle school

campuses to non-ACE middle schools and high schools. Dosage of years enrolled on ACE campuses and comparisons to students who were not enrolled on ACE campuses should be examined against outcomes like upper-level test scores, graduation rates, college and career readiness, college enrollment, and other factors to determine the lasting benefit of ACE. It is important to consider how this will be studied before the ACE campuses enrolled in the program change to ensure the data and circumstances are in place for future evaluation.

**Re-evaluate objectives for 2016-17.** This evaluation was based on first-year objectives for ACE. Throughout the course of the year, certain data provided more insight than others. The evaluator and ACE leadership should carefully review and modify objectives for evaluating the program in the upcoming year to ensure data are most useful for the program's evolving needs.

The full 2015-16 Accelerating Campus Excellence (ACE) evaluation can be found online at <http://www.dallasisd.org/Page/888>. For more information, contact Program Evaluation at 972-925-6457.