

2016-17 Evaluation of Dallas ISD Early Learning

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At-a-Glance

The goals of the Early Learning department were to improve kindergarten (K) readiness and to ensure that all students were reading on grade level by the end of grade two. The budget for the department in 2016-17 was \$9,911,521. The purpose of this report was to summarize the 2016-17 context, process, and outcomes of the Dallas Independent School District's (Dallas ISD) Early Learning department initiatives.

Context of the Early Learning Initiatives

Assistant Superintendent Interview

The Early Learning department's first goal was increasing K readiness through the provision of education services to children from birth to age five through the expansion of the prekindergarten (PK) program. The second was to ensure that all students were reading on grade level by the end of grade two. To reach these goals, Early Learning staff endeavored to increase demand for and access to PK, extend the continuum of care through community resources to support children from birth, increase classroom quality, and support reading and language acquisition in K and beyond.

To increase access and demand, the district continued to foster growth. An early childhood expansion was approved in November 2016, and another early childhood center was scheduled to open in January 2018. Additionally, the district added three new partnerships with childcare centers (for a total of 21).¹ Early Learning staff fostered community partnerships with Commit!² and community childcare centers. To expand the continuum of care, students from birth to five could also receive services through the Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY)³ program and AVANCE.⁴ To improve classroom quality, the Early Learning department continued using PK specialists and added K-2 specialists into some K through grade two classrooms. Specialists provided individual support for teachers. Another attempt to increase quality was a focus on assessing student-teacher interactions. The *Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)*,⁵ an observation instrument, was administered by Southern Methodist University (SMU) to measure the quality of teachers'

interactions with students. Finally, to ensure that students were reading on grade level, there was an increased focus on reading and language acquisition. The district used professional development (PD) and specialist coaching to ensure that teachers were equipped to teach reading.

Professional Development Lead Coordinator Interview

There were 34 PK specialists, 26 K-2 specialists, and 10 lead specialists⁶ who provided individualized tiered support to about 20 teachers each. First, specialists participated in PD programs including Children's Learning Institute (CLI) Engage training, CLASS observer training, Jim Knight's coaching training, and content related training. Then, specialists provided teachers with training about CLASS (including Making the Most of Classroom Interactions training, PK only), the *Circle* assessment (PK only), content training, and Just in Time training. Department staff also provided a Summer Institute and a two-day training about student activity centers for PK teachers. K-2 teachers attended the district's summer Personalized Professional Learning and Development (P2LD) program. Lastly, the Early Learning department provided training for teachers in third-party childcare settings and for teaching assistants.

Specialist Interviews and Observations

Four specialists were interviewed and observed. During interviews, the specialists defined their role as building relationships with teachers to facilitate more effective teacher coaching and support. Noted successes included gaining teachers' trust and seeing teachers implement suggestions, grow, and take ownership of their progress. Specialists' greatest challenges were convincing teachers to implement suggestions consistently and interacting with the few teachers and/or administrators who resisted help. During site visits, the evaluator saw specialists observing, communicating, demonstrating, and providing hands-on assistance to teachers.

¹ Students in partnerships were taught by Dallas ISD teachers.

² For more information, see <http://cominit2dallas.org/>.

³ For more information, see Turner (2017).

⁴ For more information, see <https://avance-dallas.org/> or Turner (2017).

⁵ For more information, see <http://teachstone.com/classroom-assessment-scoring-system/>.

⁶ As of February 2017.

Characteristics of Early Learning Students

In 2016-17, there were 48,311 students enrolled in early childhood (EC) education through grade two. Over half of the students were male (51%), Hispanic (69%), and/or economically disadvantaged (83%). English Language Learners made up 49 percent of students.

Retention and Special Education Enrollment Rates

Lower percentages of students who attended Dallas ISD PK (*DISD PK*) were retained than students who did not attend Dallas ISD PK (*No DISD PK*).⁷ Across years, 1.6 to 4.9 percent of the *No DISD PK* group was retained compared to 0.4 to 2.4 percent of the *DISD PK* group. In addition, lower rates of *DISD PK* students (3.8% to 6.1%) were enrolled in special education than *No DISD PK* students (4.8% to 10.4%).

PK Through Grade Two Staff Perceptions

PK and K-2 teachers were surveyed about their perceptions. PK teacher survey respondents (601 teachers; 51% of PK teachers) were mostly positive ("agree" or "strongly agree") toward the PK program (84% to 95%); the support and resources they received (67% to 87%); the PD provided by the Early Learning department (79% to 86%); and the PK specialists (84% to 94%). Additionally, most teachers rated the Early Learning training as "somewhat helpful" or "very helpful" (83% to 96%). Fewer respondents (57%) thought the PK curriculum ensured K readiness.

The most-cited successes were implementation of the new Frogstreet curriculum ($n=64$); support from campus administrators, Early Learning department staff, or specialists ($n=53$); teamwork with other teachers and teaching assistants ($n=36$); and increased student achievement or engagement ($n=36$). The most commonly referenced challenges were the new curriculum ($n=92$), student behavior problems ($n=25$), and lack of resources ($n=21$). The main suggestion was increasing training ($n=37$).

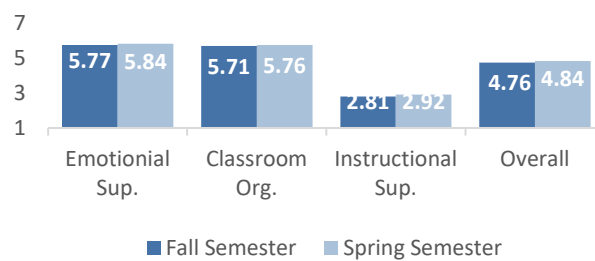
The response rate for K-2 teachers was 27 percent (610 K-2 teachers). Results were similar to those of PK teachers, but because of the extremely low response rate, results of the K-2 teacher survey should be reviewed with caution.

PK Through Grade Two Classroom Quality

Results of *CLASS* indicated that the district was above the quality threshold for both semesters in the emotional support (threshold=5.00) and classroom organization

(threshold=5.00; Figure 1). The district was below the quality threshold for both semesters in the instructional support domain (threshold=3.25). Overall results were similar to 2015-16. All three domains showed statistically significant, but not practically significant,⁸ increases from fall to spring [emotional support: $t(1,210)=2.99$, $p=.003$, $d=.10$, classroom organization: $t(1,210)=2.18$, $p=.03$, $d=.08$, and instructional support: $t(1,210)=3.47$, $p=.001$, $d=.13$]. The district's teachers were strongest in emotional support and weakest in instructional support. While more than 85 percent of teachers met the quality thresholds for emotional support and classroom organization, less than 37 percent of teachers met the quality threshold for instructional support. Only 32 and 36 percent of teachers met or exceeded the quality threshold in all three domains in fall and spring, respectively.

Figure 1: Fall 2016 and Spring 2017 *CLASS* Raw Domain Score Averages



Source: Data provided by SMU, received 4/27/17 and 5/23/17.

Note: Sup.=Support; Org=Organization. Possible scores ranged from one to seven; actual scores spanned the entire range. Across domains, and overall, increases between semesters were statistically, but not practically, significant.

Student Outcomes on *ISIP*

More students that tested in Spanish than English on *Istation's Indicators of Progress (ISIP)* performed at or above grade level in reading. For the English and Spanish administrations combined, the overall percentage of students at or above grade level in 2016-17 ranged from 52 percent to 58 percent (54% to 57% for PK, 55% to 57% for K, 52% to 58% for grade one, and 56% to 57% for grade two).

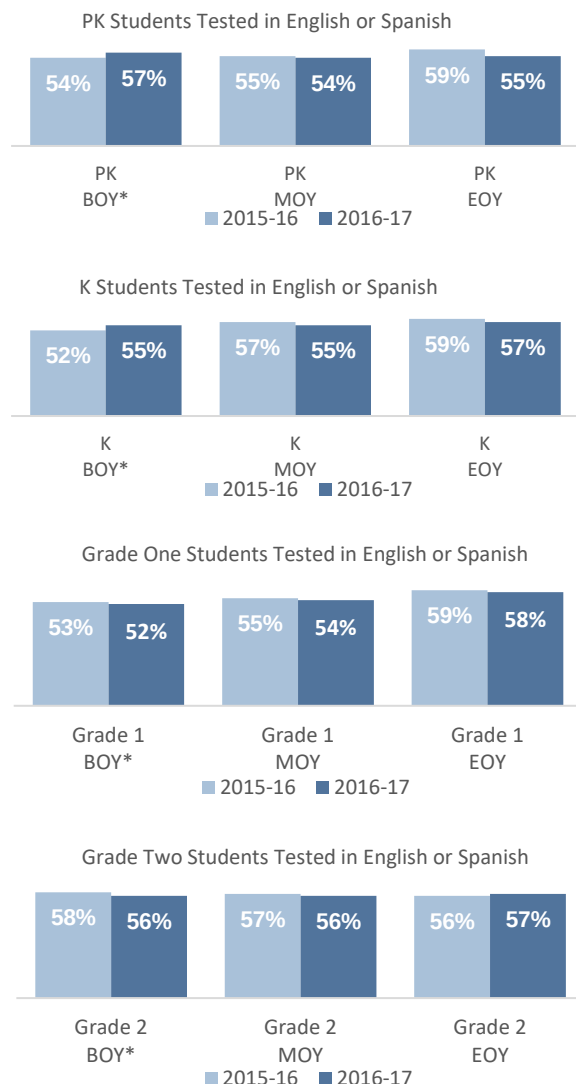
In 2016-17, results showed small positive changes from the beginning to the middle to the end of the year (BOY, MOY, and EOY, respectively) for grade one but not for other grades (PK, K, or grade two). The percentage of PK students at or above grade level dropped from BOY to MOY and then slightly increased from MOY to EOY. The percentages of K and grade two students at or above grade level remained the same from BOY to MOY but then slightly increased from MOY to EOY.

⁷ To allow for accurate comparison between *DISD PK* and *No DISD PK* groups, only those K students who met the PK eligibility requirements were included in this sample.

⁸ Cohen's d is a measure of effect size and is indicative of practical significance; small=.20, medium=.50, and large=.80 (Cohen, 1988).

When compared to 2015-16, the percentages of students at or above grade level were slightly lower in 2016-17, across *ISIP* administrations (BOY, MOY, and EOY) with three exceptions (BOY for PK and K, and EOY for grade two - see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Percentage of Students in Grades PK through Two Performing At or Above Grade Level on *ISIP* by Year



Source: PEIMS district database: 10/30/15 and 10/31/16. *ISIP*: 1/31/17 (2015-16 BOY), 06/17/16 (2015-16 MOY and EOY), 10/18/16 (2016-17 BOY), 02/16/17 (2016-17 MOY), and 05/30/17 (2016-17 EOY).

Note: BOY=beginning of year. MOY=middle of year. EOY=end of year. *Istation provided recalibrated data for the fall 2015 English administration in January 2017. If a student completed the assessment in both languages, departmental guidelines were used to determine which assessment to include in the combined dataset. If a student took the test more than once, the latest score was used.

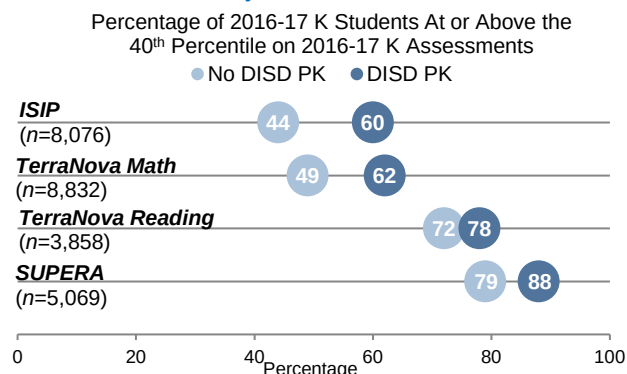
⁹ *SUPERA* file dated 8/10/2017 for 2016-17; first- and second-grade data were missing for two schools.

¹⁰ For *ISIP*, *TerraNova*, and *SUPERA*, scores were considered at or above grade level if they were at or above

Differences in Achievement by PK Enrollment Status

For all comparisons between the *DISD PK* and *No DISD PK* cohort groups on *ISIP*, *TerraNova*, *SUPERA*, and *State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness* (*STAAR*), more students who attended district PK were at or above grade level in reading and mathematics than students who did not attend district PK (Figures 3 to 6).¹⁰

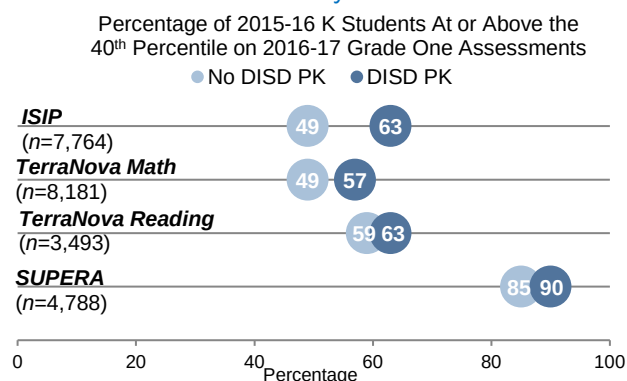
Figure 3: 2016-17 Percentage of K Students At or Above Grade Level on Assessments for the 2016-17 K Cohort by *DISD PK* Enrollment



Source: PEIMS district database: 10/31/16; *ISIP*: 5/30/17; *TerraNova*: 7/19/17; *SUPERA*: 8/10/17.

Note: In this figure, *ISIP* includes the English and Spanish combined End-of-Year data to allow for examination of overall student performance.

Figure 4: 2016-17 Percentage of Grade One Students At or Above Grade Level on Assessments for the 2015-16 K Cohort by *DISD PK* Enrollment

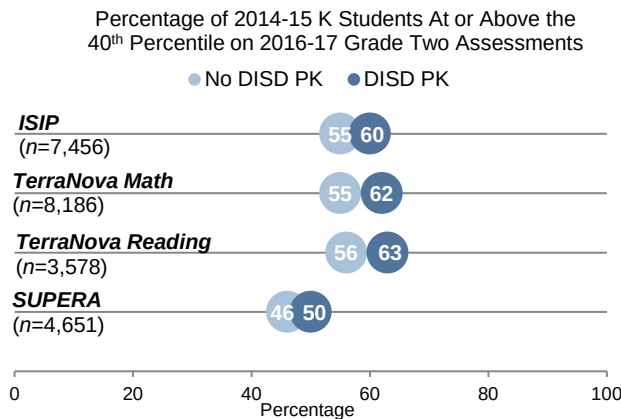


Source: PEIMS district database: 10/31/16; *ISIP*: 5/30/17; *TerraNova*: 7/19/17; *SUPERA*: 8/10/17 (2016-17 *SUPERA* data were missing for two schools).

Note: In this figure, *ISIP* includes the English and Spanish combined End-of-Year data to allow for examination of overall student performance.

the 40th percentile. On *STAAR* scores were considered at or above grade level if the scores met or exceeded the Approaches standard.

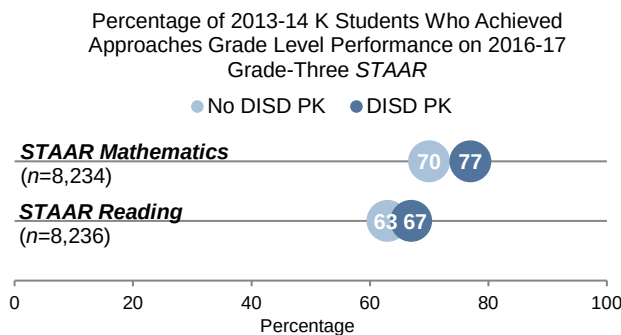
Figure 5: 2016-17 Percentage of Grade Two Students At or Above Grade Level on Assessments for the 2014-15 K Cohort by DISD PK Enrollment



Source: PEIMS district database: 10/31/16; ISIP: 5/30/17; TerraNova: 7/19/17; SUPERA: 8/10/17 (2016-17 SUPERA data were missing for two schools).

Note: In this figure, ISIP includes the English and Spanish combined End-of-Year data to allow for examination of overall student performance.

Figure 6: 2016-17 Percentage of Grade Three Students Who Achieved Approaches Grade Level Performance on STAAR for the 2013-14 K Cohort by DISD PK Enrollment



Source: PEIMS district database: 10/31/16; STAAR: 6/15/17.

Kindergarten Readiness

Overall Kindergarten Readiness

There were 10,212 Dallas ISD K students who took BOY ISIP in 2016. About 55 percent of these students were K ready (scored at or above grade level). More students tested in Spanish (62%) were K ready than those tested in English (48%).

Kindergarten Readiness Based on PK Attendance

There were 8,460 K students who took BOY ISIP in 2016 that were previously eligible to attend Dallas ISD PK. About 53 percent of these students were K ready (scored at or above grade level; Table 1). A higher percentage of students who were previously enrolled in Dallas ISD PK (DISD PK; 60%) were K ready than students who were eligible but did not attend Dallas ISD PK (No DISD PK; 34%).

Table 1: 2016-17 Percentage of PK Eligible K Students Performing At or Above Grade Level on ISIP by Version and Enrollment Status¹¹

Version	DISD PK	No DISD PK	Total
	n tested (%)	n tested (%)	n tested (%)
English	2,175 (50)	1,503 (28)	3,678 (41)
Spanish	3,955 (66)	827 (44)	4,782 (62)
Combined	6,130 (60)	2,330 (34)	8,460 (53)

Source: PEIMS district database: 10/31/16; ISIP: 10/18/16.

Note: Time period – BOY. District ISIP data were pulled for both the English and Spanish administrations and were combined into one file to allow for examination of overall student performance. If a student completed the assessment in both languages, departmental guidelines were used to determine which assessment to include in the combined dataset. If a student took the test more than once, the latest score was used in all datasets.

Student Outcomes on TerraNova, SUPERA¹², and STAAR¹³

On the 2016-17 TerraNova mathematics exam, 61 percent of the K students performed at or above grade level, as did 55 percent in grade one, and 59 percent in grade two. On 2016-17 STAAR mathematics, 71 percent of grade three students met the Approaches grade level standard.

On the 2016-17 TerraNova reading exam, 78 percent of the K students performed at or above grade level, as did 64 percent in grade one, and 61 percent in grade two. On 2016-17 SUPERA, 86 percent of the K students performed at or above grade level, as did 88 percent in grade one, and 47 percent in grade two. On 2016-17 STAAR reading, 63 percent of grade three students met the Approaches grade level standard. A notable portion of students at all grade levels did not achieve grade level or above scores in 2016-17.

Recommendations

Recommendations were to (1) continue implementing the district plan, using specialists, and providing group PD for teachers; (2) train teachers to provide more

¹¹ To allow for accurate comparison between DISD PK and No DISD PK groups, only those K students who met the PK eligibility requirements were included in this sample.

¹² SUPERA file dated 8/10/2017 for 2016-17; first- and second-grade data were missing for two schools.

¹³ For ISIP, TerraNova, and SUPERA, scores were considered at or above grade level if they were at or above the 40th percentile. On STAAR scores were considered at or above grade level if the scores met or exceeded the Approaches standard.

effective instructional support for students; (3) continue the district focus on increasing access to PK and improving PK quality; (4) create a standardized testing protocol to ensure the accuracy of PK student achievement data; and (5) continue to focus on early language and literacy development and to align birth to five and K through two efforts.

References

Cohen, J. (1988). Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences (2nd ed.). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

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The full 2016-17 report can be found at www.dallasisd.org/Page/888. For more information, please contact Program Evaluation at evaluation@dallasisd.org.

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