

2017-18 Evaluation of AVANCE

Sarah Hinkley, Ph.D.

EA18-609-4

At-a-Glance¹

AVANCE – Dallas is a non-profit organization providing education, coaching, and tools to at-risk families. The primary goal of the program is to train parents to become the first teachers for their infant to three-year-old children. The program, currently housed in 51 classrooms in 16 elementary schools in the Dallas Independent School District (Dallas ISD), strives to engage parents, inspire children, and build communities in at-risk neighborhoods. The AVANCE curriculum consists of 32 weeks of four-hour classroom sessions during which parents attend instruction while children engage in educational and culturally- and age-appropriate activities focused on their social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development. Families also participate in six monthly home visits per year during which an instructor engages in educational play with families. In addition to parent/child education and home visitation, AVANCE offers weekly book clubs for families who are not enrolled in AVANCE as well as enrichment programs for parent graduates, including workplace English courses and a leadership academy.

The budget for the AVANCE Parent and Child Program in Dallas ISD was \$1,463,135 for program year 2017-18. Of this, \$551,304 was from the United Way; \$400,000 was from government, state, and local grants; and \$511,831 was from other external grant funding, contributions, and general donations.²

Purpose of the Evaluation

This evaluation describes the AVANCE program as it was implemented in the Dallas ISD. This information was collected through interviews with AVANCE leadership staff members. This evaluation also reports data regarding participant characteristics, the percentage of children who met or exceeded age-appropriate benchmarks at the beginning and end of the 2017-18 academic year, key findings from a survey of parent involvement, and progress results from home

visit checklists. All participant and assessment data were provided by the AVANCE program office.

What were the characteristics of the AVANCE program and participants?

Eligibility and Recruitment

No cultural or financial requirements governed eligibility of families who participated in AVANCE. Most recruiting took place door-to-door in neighborhoods around campuses with high poverty rates. The lessons were taught in the language of the classroom.³ The core AVANCE parenting program lasted one year, and parents were allowed to re-enroll in the program after three years in the event of a new child.⁴

Classroom Sessions

Parents and children generally were separated during four-hour classroom sessions. Each of these hours typically had a different purpose. The first hour was dedicated to learning toy-making.⁵ The second was dedicated to learning a parenting skill supporting social, cognitive, physical, or emotional child development. In the third hour, either visitors were invited to inform parents about available community resources or AVANCE instructors presented useful topics (e.g., nutrition, finances). In alternating weeks, the fourth hour was used either for volunteer leadership projects in schools or for parent/child literacy-related activities (e.g., storytelling, active listening).⁶

Children in classroom sessions were grouped into three age groups (birth to one-year-olds, two-year-olds to younger three-year-olds, and older three-year-olds to four-year-olds). Classrooms were separated into several learning centers, where children participated in self-directed activities per individualized, assessment-based plans.

¹ Portions of this evaluation were adapted from Palladino (2016) and Turner (2017).

² Provided by AVANCE on December 8, 2017.

³ AVANCE is primarily a Spanish-language program. The English program will be expanded once funds are secured.

⁴ A reason some parents would do this is to provide the experience for their children.

⁵ Participants made 17 toys during the course of the program with household materials or kits provided by AVANCE. The goal was to teach parents that they did not need to spend a lot of money to make toys that helped engage and educate their children. These toys also helped

tie the parents' child development curriculum to their children in the real world. For example, parents, with their children, made small storybooks out of used file folders and then read and shared these stories on topics related to the curriculum (e.g., feelings, shapes, colors). They also made culturally-correct dolls and pillows that were used for the same purpose.

⁶ Children were allowed to keep the books that they used in these joint sessions, and parents learned that they could use storytelling if they were uncomfortable reading. Sometimes these sessions involved performing skits or crafts to connect the book to real life experiences.

Home Visits

Parents and children participated together in six home visits per year. In these sessions, the home visitor engaged parents and children in educational play to encourage bonding. Sessions were recorded and videos were played for parents as the year progressed to show them how much interactions with their children had changed.

Personnel

As of December 2017, AVANCE employed 54 staff members (44 full-time, 4 part-time, and 6 contract). These staff members included six administrators, one coordinator who led the Workplace English program, and one coordinator/director who led the core AVANCE program and presided over five teams. Each team served five schools and included a parent educator, a toy-making home visitor, a lead early childhood teacher, and at least three additional teachers.

Other AVANCE Programs

After completing the one-year core program, parents could participate in additional programs. One was a 29-class leadership academy that primarily instructed parents about volunteering in schools through development of personal skills (e.g., self-esteem) and leadership skills (e.g., teamwork, money management, people skills). AVANCE also offered 90-minute weekly book clubs⁷ and workplace English language classes. In addition, the Promotoras program offered an opportunity to participate in a year of training to become home visitors who coach families on infant mental health. Last, AVANCE continued a summer 2017 pilot of the Full STEAM Ahead curriculum into the summer of 2018. The program occurred in four-hour blocks and was open to four-year old AVANCE graduates. The curriculum included conscious discussion, nutrition, and parent engagement. The parent engagement portion included meetings and activity cards. The activity cards were designed to function as an extension of the curriculum and contained vocabulary words, activities, and explanations of concepts covered in class (e.g., breathing techniques used for self-regulation).

Parents

Frequency analyses indicated that of the 744 parents enrolled in AVANCE in 2017-18, 466 (63%) resided within Dallas ISD. Of those, 396 (85%) graduated from the program. Parents were an average of 32 years old (range: 19 to 68). See Table 1 for a summary of

demographics based on the parents who attended at least three courses and were counted as “committed.”

Table 1: 2017-18 Dallas AVANCE Parent Characteristics

Characteristic	<i>n</i>	%
Female	455	97.6
Hispanic/ Latino	457	98.1
Married/Living with Spouse	324	69.5
Living in Apartment	136	29.2
Own Home	177	38.0
Primary Home Language: Spanish	345	74.0
Homemaker	366	78.5
Primary Income Source: Job Wages	453	97.2
Family Annual Income Under \$24,000	136	29.2
Family Annual Income \$24,000-\$48,000	278	59.7
Number of People Living in Home*		
Three	55	11.8
Four	131	28.1
Five	134	28.8
Six	65	13.9
Seven	34	7.3
Eight	24	5.2
Nine or more	21	4.5

Source: AVANCE program office data files received on January 11, 2018.

Note: *N* = 466; the sample includes parents who reside in Dallas ISD and who were committed to the program in 2017-18. *= percentages do not add to 100 due to missing data.

Children

Frequency analyses indicated that AVANCE parents in Dallas ISD participated with one (*n* = 384, 82%) or two (*n* = 75, 16%) children,⁸ for a total of 534 child participants. These children were an average of 2.2 years old (range: 0 to 6), were 50 percent female (*n* = 269), and 97 percent Hispanic (*n* = 518). Most (*n* = 513, 96%) were born in the United States.

What changes in age-appropriate development occurred?

AVANCE staff members administered two assessments at both the beginning (pre-test) and the end (post-test) of the academic year to measure age-appropriate development. The *Ages and Stages Questionnaires (ASQ-3)*⁹ were used for children ages zero to two, and the *School Readiness Survey (SRS)* was administered for children ages three and above.

Ages & Stages Questionnaires (ASQ-3)

Methodology. The ASQ-3 is a developmental and social-emotional screening instrument for children from birth to age six in five areas (Figure 1). AVANCE used

⁷ Book clubs also welcomed parents who had not graduated from the AVANCE core program.

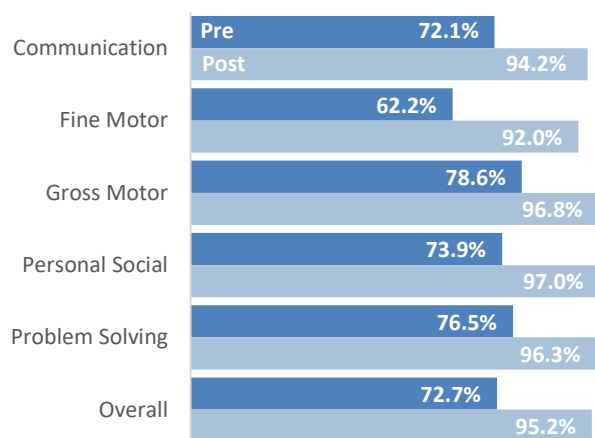
⁸ No child demographic data were available for seven families, and they were excluded from analyses. Some demographic data were unavailable for individual children.

⁹ For more information, see <http://www.agesandstages.com/>.

this 30-item instrument to screen children from birth to two years. The number of positive (“Sometimes” or “Yes”) responses were counted as a percentage of the total number of responses for each of the developmental areas and overall.¹⁰

Results. As shown in Figure 1, a higher percentage of AVANCE children performed at or above age-level on the ASQ-3 post-test than on the pre-test across all development areas and overall. Overall, almost all AVANCE children (95%) were at or above age-level by the time of the post-test. The largest gains were observed in fine motor development (30%) and personal social development (23%).

Figure 1: 2017-18 Pre- and Post-Test Percentage of Children Ages Zero to Two at or Above Age-Appropriate Development Level on ASQ-3



Source: AVANCE program office data files dated June 18, 2018.

Note: N = 218; the sample includes children of the parents who resided in Dallas ISD with complete matched pre- and post-test scores. ASQ-3=Agnes and Stages Ages Questionnaires.

School Readiness Survey (SRS)

Methodology. The SRS is an informal tool developed by AVANCE that incorporates best practices from several validated developmental assessment instruments. It was administered to AVANCE children who were at least three years old. The skills were grouped into the following categories: listening, oral language development, early literacy, written expression, and cognitive development. To complete this assessment, AVANCE staff members rated children on 40 skills as *mastered*, *making progress*, or *needs help*. AVANCE considered children at or above age level if they were rated as “mastered” or “making

progress” on at least 75 percent of instrument items. This threshold was used for this evaluation.

The AVANCE office provided SRS data for 208 children with complete pre- and post-test results. Using these data, the evaluator calculated the percentage of children at or above age-level for both pre- and post-test data.¹¹

Results. A higher percentage of AVANCE children scored at or above age-level on the SRS at post-test (98%) compared to pre-test (14%). Overall, almost all AVANCE children (98%) were at or above age-level by the time of the post-test.

What were changes in parent involvement from the beginning to the end of the year?

Methodology

The AVANCE Parent Inventory (API) is an inventory of questions that measures parenting knowledge and behavior.¹² This instrument was administered both at the beginning and the end of the academic year to all AVANCE parents. This evaluation focused on the survey’s behavioral questions. These questions asked the number of days per week or number of times per month the parent or child engaged in healthy behaviors and parent/child engagement activities.

Results

Weekly activities. Compared to the pre-test, at post-test the average days per week parents engaged in activities with their children increased across the board, except for the average days per week the child consumed sugary drinks or sweets, which decreased, and the average days per week the child consumed fast food, which remained the same. The largest increases included the average number of days a parent read or showed pictures (2.7 days per week average increase) and counted using numbers with their children (2.3 days per week average increase).

Monthly activities. The average number of times parents engaged their children in a variety of activities per month increased across the board. The largest gains occurred in the average number of times a parent volunteered with an individual (4.2 times per month average increase) and the average number of times parents took their children to the library (3.0 times per month average increase).

¹⁰ A child could also receive a “No” or have no response for an item. These items, or items with multiple response items, were excluded from percentage computations.

¹¹ Data were provided by the AVANCE program office on June 18, 2018.

¹² Data were provided by the AVANCE program office on June 18, 2018.

Are home visit ratings improving throughout the program year?

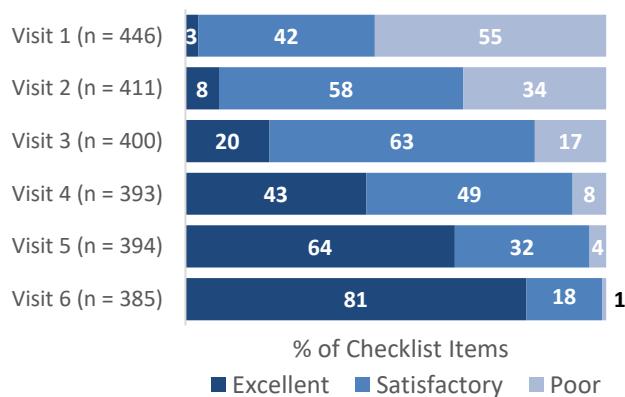
Methodology

AVANCE staff members tracked home visits to observe mothers' interactions with their infant aged one to nine months old and/or toddler aged 10 months to four years old. Data were coded by an AVANCE staff member on a rating scale of *excellent*, *satisfactory*, or *poor*. The 40 items were grouped into categories including a mother's positive attention, language stimulation, senses, demonstration, and mother's action and attitude. For each visit, item rating (excellent, satisfactory, and poor) frequencies were computed as a percentage of total ratings by visit. The infant and toddler checklists were consolidated for analysis.

Results

Staff members completed six home visits to each household for a total of 2,429 home visits.¹³ As shown in Figure 2, the frequencies for the checklist items that were rated "excellent" increased from $n = 584$ (3%) responses to $n = 12,464$ (81%) from visit one to six. The largest increase in "excellent" ratings was observed between visits three and four.

Figure 2: 2017-18 Home Visit Checklist Progress



Source: AVANCE program data file dated June 18, 2018.

Note: The number shown is the percentage of each rating for all items by each visit.

Recommendations

- **Include AVANCE participation in evaluation of other major Dallas ISD early childhood programs.** Parents in the Dallas ISD have a wide variety of early childhood options available to their children (e.g., HIPPIY, Dallas ISD prekindergarten), and many children attend more than one program before enrolling in kindergarten. Thus, it is

becoming more difficult to evaluate the efficacy of any one early childhood program exclusively, particularly with regard to long-term outcomes. Evaluators and program managers should consider dosage of participation and review data structures and systems to support this goal.

- **Continue improvements in data integrity.** Data management should seek more efficient methods. Using individual child and/or parent identifiers as opposed to family identifiers will allow the evaluator to filter and explore data more effectively, as required. In addition, working with Dallas ISD to create an AVANCE flag in the district's database will allow the district to perform long-term outcome analyses on former participants.

References

Palladino, D. K. (2016). Evaluation of AVANCE 2015-16. Dallas, TX. Dallas Independent School District.

Turner, H. (2017). Evaluation of AVANCE 2016-17. Dallas, TX. Dallas Independent School District.

An electronic version of this 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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Dallas ISD

Department of Evaluation and Assessment

H. B. Bell School Support Service Center

2909 N. Buckner Blvd.

Box 10

Dallas, TX 75228

¹³ One family had seven visits; the last visit was excluded from analysis.