

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Dallas Independent School District (ISD) created an intensive targeted summer experience focused on confidence, culture, and reading comprehension for students during the summer of 2020, from June 1 through 18, focused on key foundational reading skills. Reading instruction took place from 9:00am – 11:15am for rising grade-three students, and from 9:00am – 11:45am for rising grade-six and grade-nine students. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Dallas ISD held all summer programs virtually throughout the district in 2020. The Creating Accelerated Performance (CAP) program utilized at-home learning with a blended format using synchronous and asynchronous instruction.

The CAP program sought to accelerate the achievement of students who had not demonstrated proficiency in reading at critical transitional grades. Rising grade-three, six, and nine students who were African American, two or more races, or English learners (ELs) at select campuses were invited, based on qualifying academic criteria. The main program goal was to increase student reading fluency based on individual student baselines, with an anticipated outcome of increasing each student's pre- to post-assessment average words-correct-per-minute (WCPM) score. Another of the program's goals was to increase students' positive self-perceptions about reading capacity and successful engagement in the reading process.

The purpose of the 2020-21 CAP evaluation was to provide context and implementation data so that program managers could assess the implementation of program components and operations, determine effectiveness, and plan future efforts. The evaluation examined program implementation, program outcomes, and participant perceptions of the programs, as applicable. Data for this report were obtained from interviews with program staff members, a review of program documents, pre- and post- reading fluency assessment data, and student and teacher surveys.

Expenditures for the 2020 summer CAP program totaled \$797,956.51, a notable increase from \$169,369.95 spent for the 2019 CAP program (Watson, 2020).

EVALUATION QUESTIONS/OUTCOMES

What were characteristics of students and teachers participating in the CAP program?

Student identification

Students were identified for invitation if they (1) were African American, two or more races, or English learners; (2) met at

least two of the qualifying academic criteria; and (3) attended selected campuses with the greatest needs.

The CAP instructional team used existing NWEA *Measures of Academic Progress (MAP)* data to create student profiles for eligible students. They used this intentional placement method to place students in appropriate instructional groupings. Each student was assigned to two instructors: one CAP program curriculum teacher, and one dyslexia interventionist who supported students in foundational language skills.

A total of 1,977 students across the three grades met the criteria to be invited to register for the program. Of those, 1,498 (75.8%) completed registration to attend. Ultimately, 1,149 students (58.1% of those who were originally invited to the program) attended at least one day of the summer session. This was an increase of 12.1 percentage points over the attendance rate in 2019 (Watson, 2020).

While students who attended at least one day were included in the overall count of students attended, rates of attendance varied by number of days attended. A total of 57 students (5.0%) attended one total day of the program, while 380 of the 1,149 (33.1%) were present for all 12 days. A total of 917 students (79.8%) attended six or more days, or at least half the program. In 2019, 75.2 percent of students attended at least half of the program days (Watson, 2020).

Student Characteristics

As per the program goal, the majority of CAP program students were African American (69.3%). Hispanic students made up 27.5 percent of participants, and 3.4 percent of students in the program were of other ethnicities. A total of 335 students (29.2%) were English learners (ELs), and 176 (15.3%) received Special Education services. Most CAP program students were economically disadvantaged, including 1,110 of the 1,149 students (96.6%).

Teachers

To prepare for the 1,498 students who registered to attend, the program hired and trained 276 teachers with a Teacher Excellence Initiative effectiveness level of Proficient I or higher. The CAP instructional team planned for low student/teacher ratios (12:1 or lower) to best implement the intensive nature of the reading interventions. A minimum of one Special Education teacher was assigned to each site to address students' unique needs. Additionally, 98 teachers had Bilingual, English as a Second Language (ESL), or English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)

certifications to serve ELs. Notably, 135 teachers (48.9%) were dyslexia interventionists.

How was the Awesome Summer Adventure component implemented?

Advertising and Communications

The CAP program was marketed to parents of invited students as an “Awesome Summer Reading Adventure.” Lists of qualifying students were finalized by campus principals by April 3, 2020. Beginning on April 29, 2020, CAP teachers made phone calls to each invited student’s family. During the phone calls, teachers inquired whether students had appropriate devices, internet connectivity, experience with Google Classroom and/or videoconferencing, and asked for verbal commitment to enroll in the program. CAP principals were responsible for advertising outreach to their campus’s community, utilizing social media outlets and email at their discretion. Each campus hosted virtual informational meetings via Zoom for parents of invited students on May 1-8, 2020.

Professional Development

Professional development sessions were provided to teachers daily from May 12-22, 2020. Sessions were differentiated by grade level and included a range of topics. The first day, May 12, served as an orientation for CAP teachers, covering Google Classroom, program curriculum, goals of the program, and administrative details. During the remaining sessions, topics included Zoom basics, use of Google Forms, training on fluency assessment tools, multi-tier system of supports interventions, culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategies, and how to give students effective feedback.

In addition, CAP principals, known as CAP Champions, received dedicated professional development sessions on May 11, 2020 and May 14-22, 2020. CAP Champions sessions were designed to help principals assist professional learning communities in applying practices to activate, support, and promote professional development, and standardize virtual classroom success criteria when observing teacher instruction.

Provided Materials

Students attending the program were provided clear backpacks containing materials needed to complete the planned activities at home. All grade levels received school supplies. All grade levels also received student practice pages with answer keys and parent tip cards which included additional digital lessons and guidance. Rising grade-three students received five culturally relevant books with topics including Gandhi, Cesar Chavez, George Washington Carver, Wilma Rudolph, and henna design. Rising grade-six students received five culturally relevant books with topics including Malala Yousafzai, women’s suffrage, Sitting Bull, Title IX, and Benjamin Banneker. Rising grade-nine students received three culturally relevant books with topics

including video games, Kwame Alexander, and Heartbreak Sports, along with two novels: Dear Martin and Poet X.

Supplemental STEM Activities

Supplemental activities focused on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) were built into the program day during the CAP program. Supplemental online instruction was offered for grade three from 11:15am - 12:00pm, and grades six and nine from 11:45am – 12:30pm.

What were teacher perceptions of the CAP program?

A teacher survey was constructed to understand the methods and quality of training and preparation, curriculum design, logistics, communication between the CAP program, teachers, and parents of CAP students, and program impact. Overall, approximately 76 percent ($n = 211$ out of 276) of those invited completed the survey.

Training

Respondents indicated that they were satisfied with the quality of training they received (89.9%, $n = 187$ of 208), felt it adequately prepared them to teach the CAP curriculum (87.5%, $n = 182$ of 208) and in a virtual setting (89.4%, $n = 186$ of 208). An open-ended survey item asked for additional feedback regarding training and preparation. A total of 65 teachers provided substantive comments to this item and feedback was generally positive. Some respondents ($n = 9$) expressed that they felt training focused too much on technology and not enough on the CAP curriculum. Conversely, some ($n = 6$) requested more time spent on technology training. Given teachers’ varying levels of technological proficiency, optional supplemental technology training sessions may be helpful in future years, to allow more focus on program content during mandatory training.

Curriculum

A total of 42.7 percent ($n = 87$) of respondents indicated that they adhered to the CAP curriculum 100 percent of the time (45.1% said they adhered to the curriculum about 75 percent of the time and 10.3% indicated they adhered to the curriculum between 50 and 75 percent of the time. A total of four teachers, less than two percent, adhered to the curriculum less than half of the time). An open-ended question asked teachers to share reasons for why they did not adhere to the provided curriculum 100 percent of the time. Several teachers ($n = 19$) indicated that they differentiated their instruction and relied on a variety of lesson components, some outside the provided CAP program curriculum, in order to keep their students engaged.

Another open-ended question asked for additional feedback regarding the curriculum. A total of 48 teachers provided substantive comments to this item and feedback was generally positive. A total of 18 teachers commented that

many of the provided activities were too long to fit into the allotted time, so they had to modify or abbreviate them. A total of 14 teachers commented that selected books were “great” or “excellent.”

Program Impact

A large majority of teachers believed that the CAP program made a positive impact on students’ attitudes toward reading (89.6%, $n = 180$ of 201) and reading ability (87.6%, $n = 176$ of 201). Teachers were also asked for additional feedback regarding program impact. A total of 44 teachers provided substantive comments to this item and feedback was consistently positive, with almost all teachers commenting that the program had a positive impact on students.

Logistics

Teachers reported having adequate curriculum materials (88.0%, $n = 183$ of 208) and technology and internet resources (92.8%, $n = 193$ of 208) to implement all aspects of the program. Another open-ended survey item asked for additional feedback regarding program logistics. A total of 42 teachers provided substantive comments to this item and again feedback was generally positive, with some areas identified for improvement by few teachers. Five teachers expressed concern that their students did not have materials before the first day, with three commenting that students did not have them until the second week of the program. Others offered comments regarding technology concerns, primarily with connectivity.

A total of 74 percent ($n = 148$) of teachers indicated that they were involved in contacting families of registered students who did not attend the first day of the program. After communicating with parents, teachers believed that most parents were well informed about the CAP program’s expectations of students (78.7%, $n = 155$ of 197) but were less confident that parents were well prepared to support their students’ at home learning (59.9%, $n = 118$ of 197).

The final open-ended survey item asked teachers to share any additional feedback parents shared with them about their experiences with the CAP program. A total of 113 teachers provided substantive comments to this item and again feedback was generally positive. A total of 22 teachers expressed frustration with lack of home support for students, although they recognized that many parents were at work and unable to assist students during program hours.

Did CAP program participation increase the reading fluency and accuracy of participating students?

Dallas ISD teachers assessed rising grade-three and rising grade-six CAP students using the NWEA *MAP Reading Fluency* assessment during the first week of the program and again during the final week of the program. *MAP Reading Fluency* is an online, adaptive benchmark and progress monitoring assessment that efficiently measures

oral reading fluency, literal comprehension, and foundational skills.

The *MAP Reading Fluency* assessment was designed to be given at three checkpoints throughout the school year: fall, winter, and spring, roughly four months apart. Although the assessment does offer a test form which is suitable for progress monitoring, the full 20-minute benchmark assessment given during CAP was not designed to reflect changes in student achievement over shorter periods of time.

Grade-three students’ WCPM decreased by an average of 5.3 words per minute (89.6 to 84.3 WCPM) while students in grade six increased by an average of 2.6 words per minute (100.5 to 103.1 WCPM). Analyses of these results for grade three (*Cohen’s $d = 0.16$*) and grade six (*Cohen’s $d = 0.10$*) showed no statistically or practically significant effect. Unsurprisingly, the largest gains were noted for students attending all twelve days of the program.

Reading accuracy between pre- and post-assessments of grade- three students decreased by an average of 0.8 percentage points (95.4% versus 94.6% accurate). Students in grade six decreased by an average of 0.4 percentage points (94.1% versus 93.7% accurate). Analyses of these results for grade three (*Cohen’s $d = 0.19$*) and grade six (*Cohen’s $d = 0.06$*) showed no statistically or practically significant effect.

Students received a performance level rating of “Below,” “Approaches,” “Meets,” or “Exceeds” grade level standards for reading comprehension. A total of 89.5 percent of rising third grade students scored at Approaches or above on the pre-assessment, while 94.7 percent did so on the post-assessment. The total of rising grade six students scoring at Approaches or above decreased by 1.7 percentage points. Analyses of these results for grade three (*Cohen’s $d = 0.11$*) and grade six (*Cohen’s $d = 0.08$*) showed no statistically or practically significant effect.

Did students show an increase in their positive self-perceptions as readers over the duration of the program?

To measure students’ self-perceptions and agency as readers, evaluators constructed a reading self-perception survey. Items explored students’ beliefs about their psychological and physiological responses to reading, their interest in reading, their view of themselves as readers, and their self-perceived reading comprehension level. Students took the survey on their first day of the program (pre-survey) and again on one of the final two days of the program (post-survey). Survey data was analyzed for students who completed both the pre- and post-survey.

Grade Three

The student sample for analyses in grade six included 70 students. At the beginning of the CAP program, 78.6

percent of third graders reported that they “liked” or “loved” to learn from a book. By the end of the three-week intensive program, 84.3 percent reported that they “liked” or “loved” to learn from a book, potentially signaling an improvement in overall comfort with reading. When asked whether they felt they had the ability to figure out the meaning of a hard word, the proportion of students who “mostly agreed” or “totally agreed” improved by 8.6 percentage points (45.7% to 54.3%).

Grade Six

The student sample for analyses in grade six included 94 students. Interestingly, 53.2 percent of sixth graders surveyed stated that they “liked” or “loved” reading for school before the program. After three weeks of intensive reading instruction, this number fell to 39.4 percent. However, more sixth graders reported that they were confident that they could do a good job on important reading tests after attending the program (59.6% to 70.2%). When asked whether they felt they had the ability to figure out the meaning of a hard word in a sentence, the proportion of students who “mostly agreed” or “totally agreed” improved by 9.6 percentage points (48.9% to 58.5%).

Grade Nine

A total of 88 grade-nine students had complete pre- and post-surveys available for analysis. It is important to note that items 11 through 15 were negatively worded, meaning that a response of “strongly agree” or “agree” represented a negative response to the item. After attending CAP, 40.9 percent (an increase of 11.4 percentage points) reported that they liked spending their free time reading books. When asked whether they felt they had the ability to figure out the meaning of a word in a sentence, the proportion of students who “agreed” or “strongly agreed” improved by 11.4 percentage points (69.3% to 80.7%).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the key findings, along with the district’s transition to at-home learning, the following recommendations are offered for stakeholders.

Continue practices aimed at increasing family buy-in. Principals’ focusing advertising, teachers making personal phone calls, and holding campus-based information

sessions create effective community outreach, involving families in the process.

Continue utilizing small student-teacher ratios with highly trained reading instructors. Small student teacher ratios benefit students at all levels and are especially helpful for those with reading difficulties. As communicated through the CAP Teacher Survey, instructors appreciate smaller groups as well. Providing all CAP students with access to the foundational reading expertise of dyslexia interventionists is a strong program asset.

Continue to measure and celebrate improvements in reading motivation and positive self-perception. Although it is and will remain a challenge to measure significant improvements to student achievement scores over the short course of a summer intervention, strides made in motivating a child to develop a habit of reading bear fruit for years to come.

Consider extending the program to follow up with students. A continuation of the CAP program from the last week of June through the remainder of the summer may serve to keep reading motivation high and mitigate potential effects of summer slide. Late summer and/or fall semester CAP extensions could be offered in a virtual format in future years even when the intensive weeks of the program may be held in-person, reducing cost. The additional time of sustained intervention would also allow evaluators to adequately assess the efficacy of support provided by the CAP program based on quantitative student outcomes.

Seek student feedback regarding book selection for rising sixth grade students. On the Student Self-Perception Survey, 53.2 percent of sixth graders surveyed stated that they “liked” or “loved” reading for school before attending the program. After three weeks of intensive reading instruction, this number fell to 39.4 percent. Consider gathering student feedback to inform selection of books or reading materials for rising grade six students.

REFERENCE

Watson, C. E. (2020). 2019-20 Evaluation of Creating Accelerated Performance Program. Dallas, TX. Dallas Independent School District.

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C. Elizabeth Watson, M.P.A., Evaluation Analyst II

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For more information, please contact Program Evaluation at evaluation@dallasisd.org.