

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The goals of the Early Learning Department are to improve kindergarten (K) readiness and to ensure that all students are performing at or above grade level in reading and mathematics by the end of grade two. The budget for the department in 2020-21 was \$26,296,009, an increase from 2019-20 (\$22,309,917).

The purpose of this report is to summarize the 2020-21 context, process, and outcomes of the Dallas Independent School District (ISD) Early Learning initiatives.¹ Contextual information about the services provided to children from birth through grade two was gathered through review of internal documents and interviews with Early Learning central staff members. Process information was examined through analyses of *Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)* and teacher retention data. Outcome data included results of the *CIRCLE, Texas Kindergarten Entry Assessment (TX-KEA), Measures of Academic Progress (MAP),* and *State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR)*. When applicable, the report also examined early learning related goal progress measures and student outcome goals.

On March 13, 2020, in alignment with federal recommendations, the Governor of Texas issued a disaster proclamation certifying that the novel coronavirus COVID-19 posed an imminent threat of disaster for all counties in the state of Texas. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Dallas ISD transitioned students to at-home learning on March 23 following spring break (March 16 – 20) until the end of the 2019-20 school year. The start of the 2020-21 school year was delayed until September 8, 2020; at-home learning was implemented districtwide for the first four weeks. On October 22, 2020, the district announced that campuses would provide in-person and virtual learning throughout the rest of the school year, and parents could choose whether their children participated in in-person or virtual instruction.²

EVALUATION QUESTIONS/OUTCOMES

What was the context of the Early Learning programs and the related 2020-21 initiatives?

The first Early Learning Department goal was increasing K readiness through the provision of educational 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 performing on grade level in reading and mathematics by the end of grade two. Thus, early learning staff members endeavored to increase demand for and access to PK through increased enrollment, extend the continuum of care through community resources to support children from birth, increase classroom quality, and support reading and language acquisition and mathematical concepts mastery in K and beyond.

To increase access and demand through enrollment, the district piloted full-day three-year-old PK at five campuses and continued to add partner sites. The number of PK partnerships increased from 32 in 2018-19, to 37 in 2019-20, and to 39 in 2020-21.³ To expand the continuum of care, the Dallas ISD continued to operate the Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) program for children from three to five years old.⁴ Early learning staff members also fostered community partnerships with Concilio and PK partnership sites.⁵

To improve classroom quality, the Early Learning Department continued using PK and K through grade-two specialists. Specialists provided individual support for teachers. The district employed 41 PK specialists, 66 K through grade-two specialists (55 of whom also supported grade-three classrooms at selected high-need campuses), four special education/talented and gifted specialists, two bilingual specialists, and 19 campus lead specialists. Specialists participated in professional development (PD) and then provided teachers with training.⁶ Department staff members also provided 2020 summer PD for PK through grade-two teachers, PK partnership teachers, and teaching assistants at the Early Learning Expo.

Another attempt to improve quality was a focus on assessing teacher-student interactions. The *CLASS*, an observation instrument, was administered by Southern

¹ Detailed methodologies are available in the full report. Portions of this report have been adapted from Hinkley and Rowles (2019) and Tyree and Hinkley (2020).

² More detailed information about changes due to COVID-19 is available in the full report.

³ As of November 2020. Dallas ISD teachers taught students in all settings.

⁴ For more information about the HIPPY program, see the HIPPY evaluation report (Tyree, 2020).

⁵ For more information about Concilio, see <https://www.theconcilio.org/>.

⁶ A list of training given to and provided by specialists is available in the full report.

Methodist University (SMU) to measure the quality of teacher-student interactions.⁷

Finally, to ensure that students were performing on grade level in reading and mathematics by the end of grade two, there was an increased focus on reading and language acquisition⁸ as well as provision of supplemental mathematics manipulatives to students. Teachers also continued to receive specialist coaching and other PD.

What were the characteristics and continuous enrollment rates of early learning students?

In 2020-21, 40,583 students enrolled in early childhood education through grade two, a decline from 45,549 in 2019-20. A similar pattern of decline was observed in K (10,938 in 2019-20 to 10,276 in 2020-21). Over half of the 2020-21 students were male (51%) and/or Hispanic (68%), and most were economically disadvantaged (88%). English learners comprised 48 percent of students. Seventy-nine percent of students who attended Dallas ISD PK in 2019-20 returned to Dallas ISD for K in 2020-21. This means that over a fifth of 2019-20 PK students did not remain in the district in 2020-21. Sixty-nine percent of students were continuously enrolled from 2017-18 (their K year) to 2020-21 (most students' grade-three year).

What were the early learning teacher retention rates?

A sizeable proportion of early learning teachers were no longer teaching in early learning grades or left the district over the past three years. Of the 2017-18 early learning teachers, 66 percent continued to teach in an early learning grade level in 2018-19, but this rate dropped to 52 percent after two years and to 47 percent after three years. The early learning teacher retention rate was slightly higher for 2018-19 teachers, with 67 percent of early learning teachers remaining in an early learning grade level in 2019-20, and 58 percent continuing after two years. In comparison to 2018-19, a higher percentage (73%) of 2019-20 teachers continued teaching an early learning grade level in 2020-21. This means the district has provided PD and extended support to many early learning teachers who have moved to non-early learning positions in the district or who have left the Dallas ISD, though the retention rates of early learning teachers have improved over time.

What was the quality of early learning instruction as measured by CLASS?⁹

Consistent with past years, overall results of CLASS indicated that district teachers were strongest in emotional support (99% of PK teachers and 92% of K through grade-two teachers met the threshold in spring 2021,

respectively) and classroom organization (97% of PK teachers and 90% of K through grade-two teachers) and weakest in instructional support (81% of PK teachers and 75% of K through grade-two teachers). Over time, the percentage of teachers who met or exceeded quality thresholds trended upward from fall 2020 to spring 2021 for all three domains for all grades. When reviewed by grade and for grades K through two combined, the average scores of the observed teachers were at or above the quality thresholds for both semesters on all three domains (emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support) with the exception of grade-one teachers in instructional support for fall 2020.

In spring 2021, 80 percent of PK teachers and 71 percent of K through grade-two teachers met or exceeded the quality threshold in all three domains. Compared to spring 2019 and 2020, increased percentages of teachers met or exceeded the quality threshold for each domain and for all three domains combined in 2021 with few exceptions. From spring 2020 to spring 2021, there was a substantial increase in the percentage of PK and K through grade-two teachers who met the threshold for instructional support (+21 percentage points). Even so, 19 percent of PK and 25 percent of K through grade-two teachers did not meet the threshold.

How did early learning student scores change throughout the 2020-21 school year?

On the Literacy Screener, the new K-readiness standard within TX-KEA, 8,622 students were tested, and 69 percent of tested students were K ready. A higher percentage of Dallas ISD PK students (71%) were K ready than No DISD PK students (45%). Even so, 29 percent of DISD PK students did not meet the K-ready standard on TX-KEA.

More K students than PK, grade-one and grade-two students scored at or above their respective standards at the beginning, middle and end of year in 2020-21 (BOY, MOY and EOY, respectively) with the exception of PK mathematics and BOY grade one mathematics (Table 1). The percentage of PK students scoring *On Track* on CIRCLE increased from BOY to EOY on vocabulary (42% to 68%) and mathematics (58% to 74%). The percentage of K students scoring *On Track* on TX-KEA increased from BOY to EOY on vocabulary (59% to 69%) and mathematics (39% to 67%). This met the board-approved student progress measure that 40 percent of K students would score at or above grade level on TX-KEA EOY mathematics.¹⁰ The percentage of grade-one students scoring at or above grade level on MAP decreased from BOY to EOY on reading (50% to 43%) and increased from BOY to EOY on mathematics (41% to 44%). The percentage of grade-two students scoring at or above grade level on MAP decreased

⁷ For more information, see <http://teachstone.com/classroom-assessment-scoring-system/>.

⁸ K through grade-two teachers at 56 campuses attended House Bill Three Reading Academies which provided training on concepts and methods that support the science of teaching reading (see Mickelson, 2021).

⁹ SMU conducted CLASS observations in person and virtually.

¹⁰ Goal progress monitor 3.2 was revised from 55 percent to 40 percent in 2020-21 because of learning loss due to COVID-19.

from BOY to EOY on reading (48% to 45%) and mathematics (38% to 35%).

In comparison to 2019-20, the percentage of students who scored at or above grade level was lower in 2020-21 for PK and K students, with the exception of BOY PK mathematics, and higher for grade-two students.

Table 1: 2019-20 and 2020-21 Percentage of Students Performing At or Above Grade Level on Reading and Mathematics Assessments by Grade

Exam	BOY		MOY		EOY	
	2019	2020	2019	2020	2019	2020-
	-20	-21	-20	-21	-20	21
	%	%	%	%	%	%
PK						
CIRCLE-V	46.9	42.2	60.8	51.1		67.7
CIRCLE-M	56.7	57.9	66.5	64.5		73.8
K						
TX-KEA-V	61.1	58.7	74.6	73.4		69.3
TX-KEA-M	49.1	39.2	65.0	54.6		67.0
Grade One*						
MAP-R		49.6		50.1		43.1
MAP-M		41.1		44.8		43.7
Grade Two						
MAP-R	46.2	48.1	49.3	49.7		44.6
MAP-M	35.9	37.5	31.1	38.5		35.0

Source: Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) district database: 10/31/19 (2019-20) and 10/30/20 (2020-21). CIRCLE: 05/08/20 (2019-20) and 06/29/21 (2020-21). TX-KEA: 10/29/19 (2019-20 BOY mathematics), 02/13/20 (2019-20 BOY and MOY except for BOY mathematics), 10/28/20 (2020-21 BOY), 02/02/21 (2020-21 MOY), and 06/30/21 (2020-21 EOY). MAP: 02/11/20 (2019-20 BOY and MOY), 11/05/20 (2020-21 BOY), 02/03/21 (2020-21 MOY), and 06/23/21 (2020-21 EOY). None of these assessments were given at EOY in 2019-20.

Note: % = Percentage of students On Track (CIRCLE and TX-KEA) or at or above the 50th percentile on MAP. V = the vocabulary subscale of TX-KEA and CIRCLE, a component of the reading assessment given over time. M = mathematics. R = the reading subscale of MAP. * = MAP was not administered in grade one in 2019-20. Grey = the assessment was not administered in that timeframe. Ns are available in the full report.

The board-approved goal progress measure that 35 percent of grade-two African American students would score at or above the 50th percentile on EOY MAP reading was not met (33%). The board-approved goal progress measure that 30 percent of grade-two African American students would score at or above grade the 50th percentile on EOY MAP mathematics was not met (22%).

Did student reading and mathematics performance differ by Dallas ISD PK enrollment status?

Comparisons between DISD PK and No DISD PK groups on MAP showed that students who attended district PK attained at or above grade level (the 50th percentile) in reading and mathematics at higher rates than those who did

not attend district PK (Table 2). On STAAR reading and mathematics, students who attended district PK attained Approaches Grade Level or Above (Approaches+) or Meets Grade Level or Above (Meets+) at higher rates than those who did not attend (Table 2).

Table 2: 2020-21 Percentage of Students At or Above the 50th Percentile, Approaches+, or Meets+ on Assessments by Cohort and PK Enrollment Status

		DISD	No DISD
Exam (n)	Total N	PK %	PK %
Kindergarten Data for 2020-21 K Cohort			
MAP Reading	7,351	45.9	38.4
MAP Math	7,862	52.9	42.5
Grade-One Data for 2019-20 K Cohort			
MAP Reading	7,269	41.3	34.9
MAP Math	7,364	41.6	34.8
Grade-Two Data for 2018-19 K Cohort			
MAP Reading	6,629	42.4	38.9
MAP Math	6,777	33.9	29.9
Grade-Three Data for 2017-18 K Cohort			
STAAR Reading Approaches+	6,007	59.4	58.5
STAAR Reading Meets+	5,894	30.4	27.6
STAAR Math Approaches+	6,026	60.3	54.9
STAAR Math Meets+	5,913	26.1	22.0

Source: PEIMS district data file dated 10/30/20. MAP data file dated 06/23/21. STAAR data file dated 06/28/21.

Note: % = Percentage of students at or above the 50th percentile on MAP and Approaches Grade Level or Above (App+) or Meets+ on STAAR. Math = mathematics. Approaches+ results included Alternate 2. Alternate 2 test scores are not assessed for the Meets+ performance standard, resulting in a difference in the number of students tested for Approaches+ and Meets+.

Did students attain Approaches or Meets Grade Level or Above scores as measured by STAAR?

On 2020-21 STAAR reading, 61 percent of grade-three students scored Approaches+, which was lower than state results for Approaches+ (66%). Thirty-two percent scored Meets+. This did not meet the board-approved student outcome goal that 40 percent of grade-three students would achieve Meets+ on STAAR reading.¹¹ In comparison to 2018-19, a lower percentage of grade-three students performed at Approaches+ and Meets+ in 2020-21 with minimal exceptions.

On 2020-21 STAAR mathematics, 58 percent of grade-three students scored Approaches+, which was lower than state results for Approaches+ (61%). Twenty-six percent (25.8%) scored Meets+. When rounded, this met the board-approved student outcome goal that 26 percent of grade-three students would achieve Meets+ on STAAR mathematics.¹² In comparison to 2018-19, a lower percentage of grade-three students performed at Approaches+ and Meets+ in 2020-21.

¹¹ Goal two was revised from 42 percent to 40 percent in 2020-21 because of learning loss due to COVID-19.

¹² Goal three was revised from 44 percent to 26 percent in 2020-21 because of learning loss due to COVID-19.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Continue efforts to retain Dallas ISD PK students in the district. Over twenty percent of 2018-19 and 2019-20 PK students did not remain in the district the following year for K. Efforts to increase enrollment (partnership sites, etc.) should continue. There was a substantial decrease in enrollment in 2020-21 due to COVID-19 and the Early Learning Department launched a marketing campaign aimed at increasing enrollment; these additional efforts should also continue.

Continue efforts to retain Dallas ISD early learning teachers in early learning grades. Although retention rates for early learning teachers continue to improve over time, over a quarter of 2019-20 teachers did not continue teaching an early learning grade in 2020-21. Of the 2017-18 early learning teachers, over half were not teaching an early learning grade after three years. Due to the PD and extended support provided to early learning teachers, the Early Learning Department should continue efforts to retain early learning teachers in early learning grades.

Continue to implement the early learning initiatives with a focus on language and literacy development to drive K readiness and on-level performance by the end of grade two. The percentage of students scoring at or above grade level on TX-KEA Emergent Literacy: Reading at BOY declined from 2019-20 to 2020-21 for students in grade K (72% to 55%). Grade-two student performance on MAP reading increased from 2019-20 to 2020-21 BOY (46% to 48%) but decreased from 2020-21 BOY to EOY (48% to 45%). Grade-two student performance on MAP mathematics followed a similar pattern and increased from 2019-20 to 2020-21 BOY (36% to 38%) but decreased from 2020-21 BOY to EOY (38% to 35%). The Early Learning

Department should continue its focus on increasing K readiness and ensuring students are on grade level by the end of grade two. In particular, the district should continue increasing K readiness by increasing access to and the quality of PK. As in previous years, a higher percentage of students who attended Dallas ISD PK (71%) were K ready in comparison to those who did not attend (45%).

Continue to train teachers to provide more effective instructional support for students. Overall, the district performed well on CLASS with an upward trend in scores over time; however, 19 percent of PK teachers and 25 percent of K to grade two teachers did not meet the quality threshold for instructional support in spring 2021. Thus, the department should continue efforts to improve these scores.

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