

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Accelerating Campus Excellence (ACE) initiative was formed in 2015-16 on the principle that transforming schools through strong leadership and effective teachers enveloped in an environment of high expectations for students and staff members. To accomplish this goal, the Dallas Independent School District (ISD) provided competitive stipends to incentivize top teachers and principals to relocate to some of the district's most challenged campuses.

In 2020-21, all ACE campuses were identified as part of the 80 High Priority Campuses (HPC). The district expanded the ACE program to 23 campuses including four campuses from the original first cohort (ACE 1.0; Anne Webb Blanton, Billy Earl Dade, Umphrey Lee, and Sarah Zumwalt). The four campuses from the second cohort (ACE 2.0; C.F. Carr, J.N. Ervin, Thomas J. Rusk, and Edward Titcher) participated in their fourth year of the program. The seven campuses from the third cohort (ACE 3.0; Cesar Chavez, Paul L. Dunbar, L.L. Hotchkiss, Maple Lawn, Martin Luther King, Jr., Elisha M. Pease, and Joseph J. Rhoads) participated in their third year of the program. Additionally, eight new campuses joined the ACE program (ACE 4.0; John Neely Bryan, Rufus C. Burleson, Cedar Crest, Nancy J. Cochran, Frederick Douglass, Eddie Bernice Johnson, George W. Truett, and Wilmer-Hutchins Elementary). All ACE campuses implemented the same ACE program model beginning in 2020-21. Leadership teams of 12 to 14 teachers at these campuses were offered stipends for eight hours of weekly leadership work in professional development, curriculum alignment, data analysis, positive culture building, and the development of strong parent and community partnerships.

The ACE program aimed to improve student achievement by striving to accelerate learning through a focus on three general components: People, Learning, and Expectations. To support acceleration in the three areas, ACE campuses prioritized balanced literacy, social and emotional development, and professional learning communities (PLCs) with strong data practices.

To accelerate factors related to people, ACE campuses were staffed with strong administrators and effective teachers. The program goal was to recruit, retain, and develop strong teachers as measured by (1) a minimum of 60 percent of teachers on ACE campuses with Proficient I or above Teacher Excellence Initiative (TEI) effectiveness levels, (2) annual teacher retention rates at or above district retention rates, and (3) fourth or fifth quintile scores on the Culture of Feedback and Support section of the district Climate Survey.

To accelerate factors related to learning, ACE staff members participated in supplemental professional

development opportunities and committed to excellence in both academic and social-emotional learning. The program goal was to (1) Improve rates of kindergarten to grade eight students reading and mathematics on grade level as measured by *NWEA Measures of Academic Progress (MAP)*; i.e., rates of Average Quintile and above students at or above district rates), (2) close the achievement gap in assessment scores (i.e., within ten percentage points of district rates on fall and spring *Assessments of Course Performance (ACPs)* and *State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR)*), and (3) close the achievement gap for reading and mathematics growth (i.e., within at least ten percentage points of district rates of students with Expected and Accelerated ratings on *STAAR* reading and mathematics progress measures).

To accelerate factors related to expectations, ACE campuses emphasized relationships among campus community members. The program goal was to increase positive student expectations and parent engagement as measured by having (1) disciplinary offenses at or below the district average, (2) attendance rates at or above 96 percent, (3) Student Experience survey positive response rates at or above district averages, and (4) parent perception positive response rates at or above district averages.

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. To help district students and families access the internet during at-home learning, the Dallas ISD launched "Operation Connectivity" in May 2020, which provided 23,000 hotspots to families by October 2020. In 2020-21, Dallas ISD delayed the start of the 2020-21 school year until September 8, 2020 and implemented at-home learning districtwide for the first four weeks. The district also modified the school calendar from a six-week schedule to a nine-week schedule. 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. In-person and virtual instruction included both synchronous and asynchronous learning activities. The district also continued to implement the Center for Disease Control (CDC) as well as state and local COVID safety protocols.

EVALUATION QUESTIONS/OUTCOMES

What was the source and amount of funding for the ACE program?

The total budget for the 2020-21 ACE program was \$18,850,774 which was a \$10,760,454 increase from \$8,090,320 in 2019-20. This budget was funded through district general operating funds. The cornerstone of the ACE program was recruiting highly effective teachers and leadership teams to work at ACE campuses. The budget included \$15,600,844 for additional personnel and teacher stipends, \$380,250 for uniforms, and \$2,869,680 for professional development and extra duty pay.

What were the student, teacher, and principal characteristics of ACE campuses?

Students

In 2020-21, there were a total of 11,967 students at ACE campuses compared to 6,422 in 2019-20. Over half of 2020-21 students in ACE campuses were male (51%) and a higher proportion were identified as economically disadvantaged (97%) compared to the district (85%, Table 1). ACE campuses also had a larger proportion of African American (48%) students compared to the district (21%) but had a smaller proportion of Hispanic (47%) students compared to the district (71%). ACE campuses had a smaller proportion of students identified as English learners (ELs; 38%) compared to the district (46%), and had a similar proportion enrolled in special education (9%) compared to the district (10%). Student characteristics were mostly comparable for ACE cohorts, although a slightly higher proportion of African American students were enrolled at ACE 3.0 campuses (54%) and ACE 1.0 campuses (49%) than at ACE 2.0 campuses (46%) and ACE 4.0 campuses (42%). In addition, a slightly higher proportion of Hispanic students were enrolled at ACE 4.0 campuses (52%) and ACE 2.0 campuses (50%) than at ACE 1.0 campuses (47%) and ACE 3.0 campuses (40%).

Teachers

In 2020-21, the 835 teachers on ACE campuses were 78 percent female, 83 percent African American or Hispanic (52% and 31%, respectively), and 27 percent held at least a master's degree (Table 2). Over half of teachers (54%) had received a TEI effectiveness level of Proficient I or above, which was lower than the program objective (60%). However, ACE campuses had a higher proportion of teachers who earned a TEI effectiveness level of Proficient I or above compared to the district (48%). A higher rate of ACE 4.0 teachers (64%) than ACE 1.0, ACE 2.0, and ACE 3.0 teachers (47%, 53%, and 49% respectively) earned TEI effectiveness ratings of Proficient I or higher.

Table 1: 2020-21 ACE Student Characteristics

	ACE Overall (N = 11,967)	
	N	%
Sex		
Male	6,140	51.3
Female	5,827	48.7
Race/Ethnicity		
African American	5,718	47.8
Hispanic	5,632	47.1
White	134	1.1
Other/Missing	483	4.0
Special Student Groups		
Economically Disadvantaged	11,571	96.7
English Learner	4,541	37.9
Special Education	1,121	9.4

Source: District Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) demographic data dated 10/30/20.

Table 2: 2020-21 ACE Teacher Characteristics

	ACE Overall (N = 835)	
	N	%
Sex		
Male	187	22.4
Female	648	77.6
Race/Ethnicity		
African American	434	52.0
Hispanic	259	31.0
White	126	15.1
Other/Missing	16	1.9
Highest Degree Earned		
Associate's	7	0.8
Bachelor's	557	66.7
Master's	219	26.2
Doctoral	10	1.2
Other/Missing	42	5.0
TEI Effectiveness Level^a		
Below Proficient I, No Level, or N/A	382	45.7
Proficient I, II, or III	398	47.7
Exemplary I or higher	55	6.6

Source: District personnel file dated 01/05/21 and teacher effectiveness level data file from the Dallas ISD Data Analytics and Control department dated 01/26/21.

Note: Totals include teachers and instructional leads. Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

Principals

There were 23 ACE principals with the majority identifying as female (65%), African American (52%), and Hispanic (35%). Most principals held at least a master's degree (78%). Assigned principals remained with their assigned ACE campus throughout the academic year.

What were the outcomes related to the people component of the ACE program?

Teacher Retention

Overall, teacher retention rates for all ACE cohorts (23% to 73%) were lower than the district rate (77%). Among ACE 1.0 campuses, Blanton and Lee had the highest teacher retention rate (84% and 79%, respectively) while Zumwalt and Dade had the lowest teacher retention rates (65% and 64%, respectively). Among ACE 2.0 campuses, Rusk and Ervin had the highest teacher retention rate (75% and 73%, respectively) while Carr and Titcher had the lowest teacher retention rates (63% and 58%, respectively). Among ACE 3.0 campuses, King had the highest teacher retention rate (97%) while Rhoads and Hotchkiss had the lowest teacher retention rates (54% and 53%, respectively). Among ACE 4.0 campuses, Cedar Crest had the highest teacher retention rate (48%) while Wilmer-Hutchins Elementary School had the lowest teacher retention rates (4%).

District Campus Climate Survey

Overall, 12 of the 23 ACE campuses (52%) had scores in the fourth or fifth quintile (most positive) on the Culture of Feedback and Support section of the spring 2021 climate survey. In spring 2021, three out of four ACE 1.0 campuses (Blanton, Lee, and Dade), two out of four ACE 2.0 campuses (Carr and Ervin), four out of seven ACE 3.0 campuses (Chavez, Dunbar, King, and Pease), and three out of eight ACE 4.0 campuses (Burlinson, Cochran, and Johnson) had scores in the fourth or fifth quintile. Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the district cancelled the administration of the spring and fall 2020 Climate Survey.

What were the outcomes related to the learning component of the ACE program?

Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, Dallas ISD opted to administer the STAAR online for the 2020-21 school year.¹ Additionally, the district cancelled the administration of local assessments and surveys including the district fall 2020 Climate Survey and ACPs.²

NWEA Measures of Academic Progress

Overall, ACE students who performed at the Average Quintile or above in reading had mixed trends for the three assessment periods. EOY Reading - English results showed that one (Martin Luther King Jr.) out of 23 (4.3%) ACE campuses met the goal of having higher than the district rate for the percentage of students reading at the Average Quintile or above. However, 12 out of 23 (52.2%) ACE campuses had increases in the percentage of students reading at the Average Quintile or above from BOY to EOY (range: 1% to 23%). EOY Reading - Spanish³ results showed that 10 out of 19 (52.6%) ACE elementary

campuses met the goal of having higher than the district rate for the percentage of students reading at the Average Quintile or above. Overall, 12 out of 19 (63.2%) ACE elementary campuses had increases in the percentage of students reading at the Average Quintile or above from BOY to EOY (range: 2% to 25%).

Overall, ACE students who performed at the Average Quintile or above in mathematics had mixed trends for the three assessment periods. EOY Mathematics results showed that two (Blanton and Truett) out of 23 (8.7%) ACE campuses met the goal of having higher than the district rate for the percentage of students at the Average Quintile or above in mathematics. However, 22 out of 23 (95.7%) ACE campuses had increases in the percentage of students performing at the Average Quintile or above in mathematics from BOY to EOY (range: 2% to 29%).

State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness

The 2020-21 ACE objective for STAAR was to achieve rates of students at each performance standard within at least ten percentage points of district rates. Overall, two out of the 23 (9%) ACE campuses met the goal of achieving rates of students within at least ten percentage points of the district for all subjects at the Approaches+, Meets+, and Masters Grade Level performance standard. In reading, 14 out of the 23 (61%) ACE campuses met the goal of achieving rates of students within at least ten percentage points of the district at all three performance standards. Fourteen out of the 23 (61%) ACE campuses met the goal of achieving rates of students within at least ten percentage points of the district at all performance standards in mathematics while nine out of the 23 (39%) ACE campuses met the goal of achieving rates of students within at least ten percentage points of the district at all three performance standards in writing. In science, 14 out of the 23 (61%) ACE campuses met the goal of achieving rates of students within at least ten percentage points of the district at all three performance standards. Notably, all three ACE middle school campuses exceeded the district rates for social studies at all three performance standards.

What were the outcomes related to the expectations component of the ACE program?

ACE program leadership designated disciplinary offenses, attendance rates, Student Experience survey results, and Parent/Guardian survey results as metrics to evaluate the 2020-21 expectations component of ACE. Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, Dallas ISD suspended normal disciplinary tracking for 2020-21.

¹ Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, TEA cancelled the STAAR administration for the 2019-20 school year.

² Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the district cancelled the administration of the district spring 2020 Climate survey, Student

Experience survey, Parent/Guardian survey, and spring ACPs for the 2019-20 school year.

³ MAP Reading - Spanish is only administered in Kindergarten to 5th grade.

Attendance Rates

In 2020-21, ACE campuses had an average attendance rate of 94 percent. Overall, eight out of the 23 (35%) ACE campuses met the program objective of having attendance rates at or above 96 percent. All ACE 1.0 and ACE 3.0 campuses exceeded the overall district attendance rate (92%). In addition, three of the four (75%) ACE 2.0 and six of the eight (75%) ACE 4.0 campuses exceeded the overall district attendance rate. While the attendance rate for the district has declined from 2019-20, the attendance rate for ACE 1.0 increased slightly and the attendance rate for ACE 3.0 remained the same.

Student Experience Survey

Overall, ACE students generally responded favorably on the districtwide student survey. Overall, ACE 1.0, ACE 2.0, and ACE 4.0 elementary schools (86%, 85%, and 85% respectively) met the objective of exceeding the overall favorable rate for the district at the elementary school (80%) level. ACE 2.0 middle schools and ACE 3.0 elementary schools favorable response rates (72% and 77%, respectively) were slightly lower than the district rates. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, some administration protocols were waived in response to remote/hybrid learning. Additionally, some campuses had lower participation rates than in prior years. Campuses were only included in analyses if their participation rates were 52 percent or greater. Results should not be compared to prior years and should be reviewed with caution.

Parent/Guardian Survey

Overall, parent perceptions of ACE cohorts were generally positive. Overall, 20 out of the 23 (87%) ACE campuses met the goal of meeting or exceeding the district positive response rate (88%). Notably, all ACE 3.0 campuses met the objective of meeting or exceeding the district positive response rate.

What were the 2020 ACE state accountability ratings?

The ultimate goal of the ACE program was for all ACE campuses to earn or maintain a passing accountability rating letter grade. Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, TEA suspended calculation of accountability ratings for the 2020-21 school year. As a result, all districts and campuses received a 2021 State Accountability Rating of *“Not Rated: Declared State of Disaster.”*

RECOMMENDATIONS

As recommended in previous years, evaluate long-term outcomes. As ACE students move into higher grades at other campuses, long-term outcomes should be evaluated to examine lasting benefit of ACE participation. This could include examining dosage of years enrolled on ACE campuses and comparing ACE students with similar students who were not enrolled on ACE campuses on long-term achievement outcomes (e.g., assessments, college and career readiness, graduation rates, and college enrollment).

Monitor the impact of participation in alternative school calendars. Beginning in 2021-22, five ACE campuses (Bryan ES, Ervin ES, Pease ES, Truett ES, and Wilmer-Hutchins ES) will implement an intersession school year calendar and two ACE campuses (Rusk MS and Maple Lawn ES) will implement a school day redesign school year calendar while the remaining seventeen ACE campuses will remain on a traditional school year calendar. The use of alternative school year calendars is one district initiative aimed at mitigating learning loss due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, it will be important for district leadership and program managers to monitor the impact of participation on achieving ACE program goals.

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