



Austin Independent School District

Department of Program Evaluation

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PROJECT ADVANCE SUMMARY REPORT, 2005-2006

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Austin Independent School District's (AISD) Board of Trustees developed Results Policies to articulate the Board's and the community's expectations for student achievement and outcomes. The Results Policies focused on college and career preparation, and stated that "all students will demonstrate and understand the skills, knowledge, work habits, attitude, leadership and teamwork required by employers for success in the global 21st century workplace." To reach this goal, students were expected to explore careers related to their personal interests and talents, to get an early start toward college by participating in rigorous coursework, and to demonstrate the skills and knowledge needed to enroll in postsecondary education and enter a successful career.

In its fourth year of operation, AISD's Project ADVANCE (Assess, Decide, Visit, Apply Now for your College Education) received \$994,775 from the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation (MSDF) to support college and career preparation efforts in all 12 district high schools. During the 2005-2006 school year, the Project ADVANCE staff at each campus worked with high school students and their parents to prepare for postsecondary enrollment. Specifically, Project ADVANCE staff:

- provided opportunities for students to visit college and university campuses and speak with admissions counselors, current college students, and professors;
- supplied in-depth postsecondary preparation, financial aid, and scholarship information to high school students, parents, and teachers;
- assisted students with completing applications for college admissions testing, postsecondary admissions and enrollment, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), and scholarships; and
- provided students with individualized advisement related to postsecondary enrollment.

Project ADVANCE staff provided all services in a manner that took into consideration unique student needs. Staff tailored college preparation information to fit the needs of each grade level. Students who were identified as being the first generation in their families to attend college, as having an economic disadvantage, or as having limited English proficiency were assisted in negotiating the college, financial aid, and scholarship application processes. The Project ADVANCE parent support specialist engaged in community outreach activities and collaborated with other district parent support specialists to provide related parental support.

METHODOLOGY

Evaluation Objectives

This program summary report is intended to provide program stakeholders with information about program implementation outcomes. Stakeholders may use the report to measure progress toward meeting articulated goals and to support ongoing decision making for program improvement.

Data Collection

Staff in AISD’s Department of Program Evaluation collected qualitative and quantitative data pertaining to clearly defined performance measures to assess the program’s progress toward its goals. District information systems provided student enrollment and demographic data, SAT and ACT test results, and information about transcripts sent. A program-specific database, the College Readiness Initiative System (CRIS), was used to collect information regarding project service offerings, and student and parent program participation. AISD’s high school exit survey provided information related to students’ college preparation needs, expectations about postsecondary education, and perceived educational outcomes. Project implementation requirements, quarterly report

summaries, budget records, and meeting notes provided additional information pertaining to overall implementation status.

Data Analyses

Mixed methods were used to describe project implementation processes and to identify associated successes and challenges. Simple descriptive statistics were used to represent the characteristics of the 2006 graduates, to describe student and parent program participation, and to summarize outcomes from the tests and surveys. Content analysis techniques were used to identify important details and themes emerging from the qualitative data sources.

RESULTS

The primary goal for Project ADVANCE was to increase the number and percentage of AISD high school graduates who enroll in postsecondary institutions. Project ADVANCE staff tracked indicators of college preparation and readiness across school years to assess student progress and modify program implementation. Program effectiveness was measured by the outcomes for graduating seniors (Table 1). A summary of outcomes for AISD’s graduating Class of 2006 follows.

Table 1: Description of 2006 Graduates, Austin Independent School District

Native American		Asian/Pacific Islander		African American		Hispanic		White		Economically Disadvantaged		Total	
n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	N	%
14	0.4	127	3.3	440	12.2	1,531	39.6	1,724	44.6	1,038	26.9	3,860	100

Source: 2006 AISD Graduates, prepared by the Office of Accountability, as of September 8, 2006

Note. Includes 2006 graduates from 12 AISD high schools, with exception of the Rosedale campus, where Project ADVANCE did not provide program services.

College Visits

College campus visits were conducted to help students identify areas of future study and the institutions to which they would like to apply and subsequently enroll. For two consecutive years, 63% of GEAR UP survey respondents identified college visits as being a helpful college preparation activity (Alderete, Vaughan, & Coneway, 2006). These visits were considered especially helpful by students who were potentially the first generation in their families to attend college.

AISD seniors had multiple opportunities throughout high school to participate in college visits. In 2005-2006, Project ADVANCE staff took students to different colleges locally; throughout the state; and in a few cases, across the country. Overall, 185 different 11th and 12th grade students participated in those visits.

An examination of college visit participation records during the 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 school years for 2006 graduates showed that 483 (12.5%) of the 2006 graduates participated in at least one college visit sponsored by Project ADVANCE. Of the 483 graduates who participated in these college visits, 2% were Asian/Pacific Islander, 20% were African American, 50% were Hispanic, 28% were White, and almost 57% were identified as economically disadvantaged.

Project ADVANCE staff also worked with other college preparatory program staff (i.e., GEAR UP Austin) to extend program services and to reduce duplication of efforts. As a result, 817 (21%) of the 2006 graduates participated in one or more college visits sponsored by Project ADVANCE and/or GEAR UP (*CRIS* and the *Information GEAR*

UP Project Database as of September 21, 2006). Because the cross-program outreach was examined only for the 2005-2006 school year and GEAR UP provided college visits each year for the Class of 2006, beginning in the 2000-2001 school year, it is likely that additional 2006 graduates participated in a college visit.

ACT and SAT Tests

As part of the college preparation process, Project ADVANCE staff helped students become more knowledgeable about the SAT and ACT tests. Along with school counselors and GEAR UP staff, Project ADVANCE staff assisted students in registering for college admissions tests. Overall, the number of 11th and 12th grade students who took the ACT and/or the SAT increased in 2006, compared with previous school years (*District Summary of ACT High School Profile Report, 2006; District Summary of College Board Profile Report, 2006*).

The American College Testing Program (ACT) was designed to help students make postsecondary enrollment decisions and to provide institutions with an assessment to consider within the student admissions process. The ACT test is curriculum based and has reading, writing, English, mathematics, and science components. In 2006, a total of 1,110 students in the 11th and 12th grades took the ACT (*District Summary of ACT High School Profile Report, 2006*). However, the student-level test results needed to describe the ACT participation of the 2006 graduates were not available at the time of this report.

The College Board's SAT Reasoning Test is another standardized test developed to assess college readiness and to be used by

college admissions staff within the student admissions process. The SAT measures critical reading, writing, and mathematical reasoning skills. In March 2005, the writing section of the SAT was included for the first time. Each section of the SAT was scored on a scale of 200-800. In 2006, a total of 2,476 students in the 11th and 12th grades took the SAT (*District Summary of College Board Profile Report, 2006*).

Overall, 2,347 (60.8%) of the 2006 graduates completed the SAT test one or more times during the 11th or 12th grades. Greater

percentages of graduates who were categorized as Asian/Pacific Islander or White took the SAT test, while lesser percentages of graduates who were Native American, African American, Hispanic, and/or identified as having economic disadvantage took the test (Table 2). The SAT scores for 2006 graduates who were Native American, Asian/Pacific Islander, or White were higher than the 2006 district average, while scores for those who were African American, Hispanic, and/or identified as having economic disadvantage were lower than the district average (Table 3).

Table 2: Number and Percentage of 2006 Graduates Who Took the SAT, by Ethnicity and Economic Status

Native American (n = 14)		Asian/ Pacific Islander (n = 127)		African American (n = 440)		Hispanic (n = 1,531)		White (n = 1,724)		Econ. Disadv. (n = 1,038)		All 2006 Graduates (N = 3,860)	
n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
6	42.8	103	81.1	243	55.2	755	49.3	1,240	71.9	488	47.0	2,347	60.8

Sources: 2006 AISD Graduates, prepared by the Office of Accountability, as of September 8, 2006; College Board's SAT score files, prepared by the Department of Program Evaluation, as of October 1, 2006

Notes: The overall number of SAT participants and average test scores will not match the district 2006 College Board report. The students included in this table were 2006 graduates who could be matched to SAT test records by identification number, first and last name, ethnicity, and address. The SAT test records used within this summary may have spanned across the College Board's report years, 2005 and 2006. Percentages indicate representation within the total of the 2006 student groups.

Table 3: Average SAT Composite Scores for 2006 Graduates, by Ethnicity and Economic Status

SAT Composite	Native American	Asian/ Pacific Islander	African American	Hispanic	White	Econ. Disadv.	All 2006 Graduates	District: All Students in 2006
Verbal and Math (n = 2,347)	1072	1139	818	913	1130	862	1028	1036
Verbal, Math, and Writing (n = 2,276)	1573	1657	1221	1350	1675	1271	1518	1513

Sources: 2006 AISD Graduates, prepared by the Office of Accountability, as of September 8, 2006; College Board's SAT score files, prepared by the Department of Program Evaluation, as of October 1, 2006

Notes: In March 2005, the writing section of the SAT was included for the first time. Seventy-one of the 2006 graduates took the SAT before the writing section was offered.

College Preparation and Financial Aid

Throughout the 2005-2006 school year, Project ADVANCE staff hosted 107 college preparation events and 49 financial aid events that were designed to increase student and parent knowledge of postsecondary preparation, financial aid, and scholarship application processes. These events were generally presented in a workshop or seminar format. They did not include college campus visits, college fairs, or recruiter visits.

Across the 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 school years, 1,315 (34.1%) parents and/or guardians of the 2006 graduates participated in at least one college preparation and/or financial aid event. In many cases, the students attended an event without being accompanied by a parent or guardian. A total of 2,803 (72.6%) graduates either participated and/or their parents participated in a college preparation and/or financial aid event. Parental participation was proportionate to senior student enrollment across all ethnic groups and to the number of seniors identified as economically disadvantaged.

On the 2006 AISD *High School Exit Survey*, students responded to questions related to college preparation. Response choices could range from “1” or “not well” to “3” or “very well.” The average student rating was 2.2, indicating that students were “somewhat well” prepared to meet their college and career goals, navigate the postsecondary application process, and obtain financial aid. Students identified Project ADVANCE and GEAR UP staff as being quite helpful in the college preparation process across individual, group, and classroom settings. The staff members also were rated as

slightly more helpful than school counselors (Schmitt, 2006).

In addition, seniors surveyed identified important college preparation and financial aid issues. They emphasized the importance of gaining knowledge about college requirements and college application processes early in their school careers. Many seniors wished they had understood the significance of taking rigorous courses and making good grades when they began middle school. Both students planning to attend and those not planning to attend postsecondary institutions had concerns about the financial resources needed to do so. Of the seniors planning to enroll in postsecondary institutions, 45.2 % reported that they probably or definitely will borrow money to do so. Approximately 25% of those not planning to attend a postsecondary institution reported that cost was a primary reason (Schmitt, 2006).

Postsecondary Applications

In 2005-2006, Project ADVANCE staff helped seniors complete applications for postsecondary enrollment in 4-year, 2-year, technical, and trade school institutions. Again, Project ADVANCE staff worked with GEAR UP Austin staff and school counselors to extend student outreach services and to reduce duplication of efforts. As a result, almost 93% of the 2006 AISD graduates completed one or more applications to 4-year, 2-year, technical, and/or trade schools (CRIS, 2005-2006; GEAR UP Austin Database, 2005-2006). Of these students (3,580), 3% were Asian/Pacific Islander, 12% were African American, 39% were Hispanic, 46% were White, and 24% were identified as economically disadvantaged. Overall, the percentages of students completing one or more applications

to a postsecondary institution were proportionate to the percentages of students who graduated, when ethnicity and economic disadvantage were taken into consideration.

Postsecondary applications also were examined according to the type of institution to which the graduates applied (Table 4). Eighty-six percent of the 2006 graduates completed an application to a 2-year postsecondary institution, and the completed applications were proportionate to the

percentages of students graduating from high school across student groups. Almost 60% completed an application to a 4-year postsecondary institution. The percentage of graduates completing applications to 4-year institutions was disproportionate across the ethnic groups; relatively more White students completed applications to a 4-year postsecondary institutions. Few students completed an application to a technical or trade school.

Table 4: Number and Percentage of 2006 Graduates Who Completed At Least One Postsecondary Application, by Institution Type, Ethnicity, and Economic Status

Type of Postsecondary Institution	Native American		Asian/Pacific Islander		African American		Hispanic		White		Econ. Disadv.		2006 Graduates (N = 3,860)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
4-Year	7	0.2	90	2.3	257	6.7	668	17.3	1135	29.4	464	12.0	2157	55.9
2-Year	12	0.3	95	2.5	401	10.4	1316	34.1	1507	39.0	895	23.2	3331	86.3
Technical/Trade	*	*	*	*	*	*	14	0.4	*	*	10	0.3	23	0.6

Sources: 2006 AISD Graduates, prepared by the Office of Accountability, as of September 8, 2006; CRIS, as of September 21, 2006; GEAR UP Austin database, as of September 21, 2006

Notes. ADVANCE and GEAR UP program files were merged and matched by student identification numbers. Students may have submitted more than one application type. Percentages indicate proportion of all 2006 graduates. Institution type code was missing for 424 records that were not included in this summary.

* Numbers not reported for fewer than 5 students

Postsecondary Enrollment

An overarching goal for the district and Project ADVANCE was to ensure that each AISD graduate was prepared to apply and enroll in a postsecondary institution. Postsecondary enrollment of AISD graduates has increased incrementally over the years (Alderete, Schmitt, & Coneway, 2006). Approximately 57.2% of the 2005 graduates (N = 2,141) were found to be enrolled within a year of their high school graduation (Coneway, 2006).

In addition to managing their own program services, Project ADVANCE staff spent substantial time assisting district- and campus-level school staff with the Austin

Community College (ACC)–AISD collaborative initiative, called College Connection. This initiative was designed to assist AISD students in becoming accepted by and ready to enroll in the local community college upon high school graduation. College Connection’s student participation and enrollment data for 2006 graduates were unavailable at the time of this report.

Because information pertaining to actual postsecondary enrollment for 2006 AISD graduates was not available at the time of this report, student intent to enroll was measured by student responses on the high school exit survey and by the number of transcript requests. On the 2006 AISD *High School Exit Survey*, 84% of seniors reported the intention

to continue their education after high school graduation, an increase of almost 10 points from the previous year (74.6%). Higher percentages of the 2006 survey respondents reported being accepted to 2-year (45.2%), 4-year (56.5%), and technical/trade (14.7%) schools, compared with 2005 survey respondents. Of the students who were not planning to continue school in the next year, 51.9% said they would probably or definitely pursue postsecondary education at a later time (Schmitt, 2006).

In 2005-2006, high school registrars sent school transcripts to at least one postsecondary

institution for approximately 75% of the 2006 graduates (Table 5). When transcript requests were examined by ethnicity, the percentages of graduates who had a transcript sent to a postsecondary institution were disproportionate to the percentages of students in that group completing high school. Of the 2,904 graduates who had a transcript sent to a postsecondary institution, 4% were Asian/Pacific Islander, 12% were African American, 34% were Hispanic, and 50% were White.

Table 5: Number and Percentage of 2006 Graduates Who Had Their Transcript Sent to a Postsecondary Institution, by Ethnicity and Economic Status

Type of Postsecondary Institution	Native American		Asian/Pacific Islander		African American		Hispanic		White		Econ. Disadv.		2006 Graduates (N = 3,860)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
4-Year	*	*	*	*	219	5.7	534	13.8	1044	27.0	366	35.3	1892	49.0
2-Year/ Technical/Trade	7	0.0	50	1.3	191	4.9	595	15.4	822	21.3	404	38.9	1665	43.1
Any Type	9	0.0	111	2.9	340	8.8	978	25.3	1466	38.0	653	62.9	2904	75.2

Sources: 2006 AISD Graduates, prepared by the Office of Accountability, as of September 8, 2006; AISD transcript files prepared by the Department of Program Evaluation, as of September 20, 2006

Notes. Percentages indicate proportion of all 2006 graduates. * Numbers not reported, as students may be identified.

DISCUSSION

Project ADVANCE staff provided a substantial amount of college preparation services for students and their parents, as measured by college preparation indicators for the 2006 high school graduates. The majority of the 2006 graduates and/or their parents (73%) attended at least one college preparation and/or financial aid event. Increased postsecondary enrollment looks promising for 2006 graduates. Of the 2006 graduates, almost 61% took the SAT test, 86% completed a postsecondary application, and

75% sent a transcript to a postsecondary institution.

Although overall program results were positive, they only provided a basic description of selected postsecondary preparation and enrollment outcomes for AISD's 2006 graduates. Caution should be used when interpreting the results. Levels of student participation, parental involvement, and between-school differences were not examined. Project ADVANCE staff also coordinated their work with other programs

and school staff that offered similar college and career preparation services; thus, student outcomes may not be attributable to any single program.

Nevertheless, the coordination of services and collaboration with other programs may have provided a setting in which school and program staff could efficiently extend their outreach to all high school students, consequently increasing the likelihood that students were well prepared for postsecondary enrollment. This coordination of services may be difficult to establish and maintain because the funding for staff positions and program offerings varies across school years. The changes in programs and personnel may require a redefinition of responsibilities for the Project ADVANCE staff and others. The definitions of roles and responsibilities within the college preparation process may take on a new level of importance when AISD high schools engage in the high school redesign process.

As Project ADVANCE continues to prepare students for postsecondary enrollment, different student needs must be considered. Outcomes were found to be different when students were categorized by ethnicity or according to economic disadvantage. Reasons for these gaps have not been explored within this program summary. However, results from the 2006 AISD *High School Exit Survey* (Schmitt, 2006) may provide some indication.

On the survey, first-generation college status was identified as a factor that may have influenced successful postsecondary preparation and enrollment. Almost 37% of all survey respondents reported that their mothers had not pursued education beyond high school, and almost 28% of those planning to

attend postsecondary institutions will be the first person in their immediate family to attend. Students who were not planning to attend postsecondary institutions were almost twice as likely as those with college plans to report that their mothers did not finish high school (Schmitt, 2006).

The high school seniors surveyed reported that financial concerns influenced their postsecondary enrollment decisions. Affordability (25.0%) and need for income (23.7%) were identified by seniors who were not planning to enroll within a year of completing high school as the top two reasons for not pursuing postsecondary education. Further, 14.2% of all seniors reported that the process of obtaining financial aid was “difficult” or “very difficult” for them and their parents to understand.

Academic preparation also may have influenced students’ decisions to attend or not attend postsecondary institutions. Almost 24% of the survey respondents reported that low grades or test scores played a role in their choices. These academic preparation issues also may have been reflected in the differences in average SAT scores found between student groups.

Students whose parents had high academic expectations and were knowledgeable about college preparation processes were more likely to attend college than were students whose parents had low expectations and were not knowledgeable (The Harvard Family Research Project, 2006). On the 2006 AISD *High School Exit Survey*, 40.8% of the respondents reported that their parents or family attended a college or financial aid event. Project ADVANCE records showed that 34.1% parents and/or

guardians of the 2006 graduates participated in a college or financial aid event. However, the relationship between the 2006 graduates' postsecondary preparation outcomes and parent involvement was not explored as part of this program summary.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Although conclusive results about program effectiveness could not be determined, Project ADVANCE did provide extensive student outreach services. Many of the 2006 AISD graduates experienced positive college preparation and readiness outcomes. The examination of the 2006 graduates' participation in Project ADVANCE revealed specific concerns with respect to the improvement and evaluation of the program. The following recommendations are provided for consideration.

- *Identify barriers to student participation in college preparation services.* Student utilization of Project ADVANCE services may have been influenced by factors such as information availability, academic course expectations, extracurricular activity conflicts, parent and/or teacher permission, student perceptions, funding, and campus administrative support. It is recommended that barriers to student participation be explored and strategies be developed to reduce these barriers.
- *Increase college visit opportunities.* A relatively small proportion of the 2006 graduates participated in college visits sponsored by Project ADVANCE. The fact that many of the 2006 graduates were served in this capacity by GEAR UP may account for this low percentage. Because the GEAR UP program is no longer funded by the Department of Education,

Project ADVANCE staff will need to provide more college visit opportunities to students in the 2006-2007 school year and beyond.

- *Increase ACT and SAT test participation for underrepresented student groups.* College admissions test participation for the 2006 graduates was less representative for African American, Hispanic, and economically disadvantaged student groups than it was for other groups. Project ADVANCE staff should explore barriers to test participation and develop strategies to reduce these barriers for underrepresented student groups. Staff can increase communication with students and parents about the tests, directly assist students with the registration process, help students find transportation to testing sites, and help students obtain fee waivers to cover test administration costs.
- *Provide ACT and SAT test preparation support.* Although Project ADVANCE is not an academic support program, staff are encouraged to explore the possibility of providing ACT and SAT test preparation courses or seminars to foster student participation on the tests. This preparation may be especially important for students who will be the first generation in their family to go to college and who may not understand the purposes or formats of the tests. Preparation may also be important for students who need additional academic support and for students who might not otherwise be able to afford test preparation courses.
- *Provide ongoing, comprehensive financial aid information and intensive support for students applying for federal financial aid*

and/or scholarships. Financial aid application processes can be complex and/or intimidating to students and their families. Because financial aid concerns influence student postsecondary enrollment decisions, intensive student support is warranted, especially for students identified as potentially the first generation in their families to go to college or as having an economic disadvantage.

- *Increase general parental outreach services.* Greater parental involvement and support can improve the chances that students become enrolled in postsecondary institutions. Project ADVANCE staff should explore the barriers to parental participation in program services and develop strategies to address them.
- *Continue to coordinate college preparation services across programs and initiatives operating within the school and throughout the district.* Program staff and school administrators should be thoughtful about using resources effectively, as similar college preparation services are supported by multiple funding sources and personnel within a single school and/or across the district. The bringing together of services across programs and school staff may provide better outreach to all students, consequently increasing the

likelihood that they are well prepared for postsecondary enrollment, while at the same time reducing unproductive duplication of effort. Coordinated and collaborative work also may increase the chances that program services be sustained after grant funding ends or in the event that individuals cease working in a particular school.

- *Coordinate the evaluation of programs with similar goals and objectives operating within individual schools and across the district.* The increasing coordination and collaboration between program services confounds attempts to isolate specific program effects and outcomes for students. Project staff, school administrators, and program evaluators should work together to define measurable objectives, to anchor appropriate outcome measures to those objectives, to coordinate data collection, and to use those shared data across programs. A coordinated approach to the evaluation of multiple programs within schools will lend itself to more comprehensive and complex data analyses and evaluations so that specified program effects and interactions can be identified.

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