



Question: Are there any notable differences between students who participated in BEST transition camps during the summer of 2007 and their 6th grade peers who did not attend the camps? What do BEST teachers and counselors report about camp effectiveness?

Response: During the summer of 2007, five AISD middle school campuses¹ offered transition camps for incoming sixth graders. These camps are one component of AISD's BEST Initiative² and will be referred to as BEST transition camps throughout this report. The camps were designed to take a multifaceted approach to easing students' transition to middle school by: providing students and faculty an opportunity to build relationships, contributing to a positive campus culture, preparing students for middle school academic work, and exposing students to campus organizational routines. To examine the impact of camp participation, the demographic, enrollment, attendance, and discipline records of the 560 sixth grade students who were enrolled at Dobie, Pearce, or Webb Middle Schools at any time between August 27 and December 20, 2007 were assembled and merged with the BEST rosters from the summer of 2007. Also, an electronic survey was administered to a convenience sample of 44 BEST teachers and counselors in January 2008.

Key Findings

- The percentage of male and female students participating in the BEST transition camps was the same as the percentage in the overall 6th grade population at the sample campuses.
- African American students participated at higher rates than would be expected given their overall campus representation.
- BEST camp participants were more likely to be enrolled within the first few days of the semester and were less mobile throughout the first semester compared other 6th grade students.
- BEST camp participants had fewer unexcused absences and tardies than did other 6th grade students.
- Teachers believe that camp participation was a positive experience for students and that it was particularly valuable with regard to easing the transition to middle school and promoting a connection to the campus community.

Recommendations

- Disseminate the list of activities that teachers and counselors report were most effective at achieving program goals (included in Appendix A) to all staff responsible for planning and implementing future transition camps.
- Ensure that transition camp objectives are clear and consistently implemented across campuses. It may be the case that not all of the larger BEST program goals can or should be addressed at the transition camps (e.g., creating a college-going culture).
- A more formal evaluation of the impact of transition camp participation on student outcomes should control for total days enrolled, prior year disciplinary referral and attendance rates, and

¹ Transition camps were offered at Dobie, Garcia, Kealing, Pearce, and Webb Middle Schools; however student rosters from Garcia and Kealing were not available at the time of these analyses.

² BEST stands for: Belief in our students, Effort creates ability, Supporting families, Targeting college

as many other educationally important individual level characteristics as is reasonably possible.

Student demographics, enrollment, attendance, and discipline

The gender distribution did not differ significantly between participants and non-participants. However, a chi-square test showed that more African American students participated in the BEST camps than would be expected given their overall representation among 6th graders at the sample schools.

Table 1: Student Demographics for BEST Participants and Peers

		BEST (n = 128) ³	Non-BEST (n =432)
Gender	Female	44%	44%
	Male	56%	56%
Ethnicity	Asian	0%	<1%
	African American	23%	16%
	Hispanic	75%	80%
	Native American	<1%	0%
	White	2%	4%

Students who participated in BEST transition camps were more likely to be enrolled within the first few days of school and to be non-mobile throughout the first semester than were students who did not participate in the camps. Although there may be other plausible explanations for these patterns (e.g. students who enrolled late were not yet living in Austin and therefore were unable to attend the camps), there is a possibility that the camp objectives did ease the transition to middle school and increase campus community ties for camp participants and their families.

Table 2: Enrollment and Mobility Patterns for BEST Participants and Peers throughout Fall 2007

	BEST (n = 128)	Non-BEST (n =432)
Enrolled after August 31, 2007	< 1%	15%
Non-mobile	95%	86%
Mobile within AISD	3%	8%
Enrolled in Non-AISD Public School in TX	2%	3%
Enrolled in School Out of Texas	0%	1%
Return to Home Country	0%	< 1%
Moved to ALC	0%	1%
Enrolled in Private School in Texas	0%	< 1%
Unknown	< 1%	< 1%

Among all students included in the analysis, there was an average of less than one disciplinary referral throughout the first semester. However, students who did not participate

³ BEST rosters included a total of 132 students, but 2 students did not enroll in AISD for the fall semester and 2 students enrolled at a non-BEST middle school campus and thus are not included in these analyses.

in a BEST camp had a greater range in the number of referrals and a slightly, but not significantly, higher average number of referrals per student than did the BEST participants. Future analyses should control for total days enrolled because a more thorough examination of discipline referral rates may yield evidence of a clear benefit to camp participation.

Table 3: Disciplinary Referrals for BEST Participants and Peers

	BEST (n = 128)	Non-BEST (n =432)
Range	0 - 7	0 - 21
Average	.63	.83
Percentage with No Referrals	75%	69%
Percentage with One or Fewer Referrals	87%	86%

Table 4: Student Unexcused Absences and Tardies

	BEST (n = 128)	Non-BEST (n =432)
Range of Unexcused Absences	1 - 11	0 - 40
Average Unexcused Absences	.99	2.4
Percentage with No Absences	56%	37%
Range of Unexcused Tardies	0 - 6	0- 22
Average Unexcused Tardies	.41	.93
Percentage with No Tardies	77%	71%

Even without accounting for total days enrolled, students who attended BEST camps had less than half the average number of unexcused absences of students who did not attend the camps. In fact, over half of the BEST students had no unexcused absences during the first semester. Camp participants also had less than half the average number of unexcused tardies of those who did not attend. This strongly suggests that transition camp participation may have a positive effect on student attendance during the school year. Alternatively, families who encouraged their children to attend the BEST camps may have characteristics that promote higher attendance rates. Future analyses should control for prior year attendance patterns to better account for family factors.

Teacher Survey

In January 2008, a link to an electronic survey was emailed to a convenience sample⁴ of 44 BEST transition camp teachers and counselors; 22 responded to the survey for a response rate of 50%⁵. Not every respondent answered every question, so the exact number of responses is noted in each table. Open-ended responses are included in Appendix A.

Overall, teachers and counselors agreed or strongly agreed with statements that BEST camps helped students make a smooth transition to middle school. However, there were relatively high rates of “Don’t Know or N/A” responses to some items, which may reflect the fact that transition camp implementation varied somewhat across campuses, and that not all

⁴ Teacher and counselor names were taken from campus rosters that had been compiled early in the summer of 2007.

⁵ The number of responses are in parentheses after the campus name: Dobie (10), Garcia (2), Kealing (3), Pearce (3) and Webb (3).

of the larger BEST initiative goals were addressed at every camp. For example, 25% of survey respondents chose “Don’t Know or N/A” on the item asking if camp participants “have a better understanding of the path to college.” Although the creation of a college-going culture is an important component of the overall BEST initiative, the survey responses and open-ended comments suggest that this was a very small part of transition camp objectives and curricula. Open-ended comments also suggest that there is some confusion about whether the camps are most accurately referred to as BEST or WEB transition camps. Future planning, implementation, and evaluation should ensure that camp objectives and program terminology are consistent across campuses.

Table 5. Percentage of Item Responses for the Stem: “In Comparison to 6th Grade Students Who Did Not Attend the Transition Camp, Students Who Did Participate...”

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know or N/A
Showed Evidence of Effective Leadership During the School Year (n = 20)	0% (n = 0)	10% (n = 2)	55% (n = 11)	30% (n = 6)	<1% (n = 1)
Made a Smoother Transition to Middle School (n = 20)	0% (n = 0)	<1% (n = 1)	35% (n = 7)	55% (n = 11)	<1% (n = 1)
Felt More Strongly Connected to the Campus Community (n = 20)	0% (n = 0)	<1% (n = 1)	20% (n = 4)	70% (n = 14)	<1% (n = 1)
Were More Competent in Dealing with 6th, 7th and 8th Grade Peers (n = 20)	0% (n = 0)	10% (n = 2)	30% (n = 6)	40% (n = 8)	20% (n = 4)
Were Better Prepared for 6th Grade Academic Work (n = 20)	0% (n = 0)	10% (n = 2)	45% (n = 9)	20% (n = 4)	25% (n = 5)
Were Better Prepared for Middle School Campus Routines (n = 19)	<1% (n = 1)	<1% (n = 1)	42% (n = 8)	37% (n = 7)	11% (n = 2)
Have a Better Understanding of the Academic Path to College (n = 20)	<1% (n = 1)	10% (n = 2)	35% (n = 7)	25% (n = 5)	25% (n = 5)

Appendix A.

Teacher and Counselor Responses to Open-ended Questions about Program Effectiveness and Opportunities for Improvement

Item 1. Which camp activities were most successful at promoting student leadership during the school year?

- Decision-making regarding proposals for school improvement (physical plant).
- Students working with teachers.
- Getting to know teachers, other students.
- Team Building Games, session on how to keep their agendas (organizers, "Reputation" dragon scales).
- Advisory lessons and the team building activities.
- Get to know you games.
- Student presentations gave students opportunity to speak in front of peers. This gave them a role of responsibility.
- Hands on activities, preparing graphical representations.
- I thought that the collaboration during the campus re-design was very strong.
- In general, building relationships with their core teachers promoted student leadership.
- I think that leaders came to the front during the design of a project to improve Dobie.
- The group activities.
- Not sure; kids worked on projects and then were responsible for a part of a whole, so I think that helped.
- We worked on murals that reflected our campus changes. I think students were able to take leadership roles here.

Item 2. Which camp activities were most effective at promoting a smooth transition to middle school?

- The virtual tour of the school and explanation of their schedules.
- Team building activities.
- Following schedule similar to the one used during the school year. Using the same time for passing periods.
- School tours, etc..
- Team building, how to get organized, session on how the school was laid out.
- All of the activities.
- It was not on our campus, but I think locker usage would have been huge.
- The camp as a whole. It introduced them to the campus and where everything is located. Students were able to meet some teachers and develop relationships with them. The same is true for getting to know their peers before starting the school year.
- I don't know.
- Familiarizing themselves with the entire campus during the "research tour" for the re-design project was useful.
- Attending actual classes before the start of school and learning the layout of the school made for a smoother transition.
- Same activity (campus improvement). They chose an area and decided how to make it better.
- Just getting to know the 6th grade teachers helped.

Item 2. (continued)

● Again, I really think that the camp helped the kids decide on some electives that they weren't sure they signed up for during their 5th grade year. In other words, they didn't really know about wanting to be in AVID or art or choir. This camp actually opened up some of those possibilities for them (we did art, music and academics).

Item 3. Which camp activities were most effective at promoting students' connection to the campus community?

- Meetings with campus teachers and daily small group activities.
- Students working with 8th graders.
- Meeting their teachers.
- Team building, how to get organized, session on how the school was laid out, WEB games where they met their teachers.
- Being able to identify with peers as well as becoming familiar with the campus.
- Creating presentations for improving the Dobie Campus with beautification ideas and more.
- Orientation as to the floor plan of the school, also, having parents visit the school and meet the teachers during summer.
- We did lots of warm-up activities that were very positive.
- The cumulative effect of attending 10 half days of class promoted connection to the campus community.
- The main project we did had the students learning about the history of Dobie and then redesigning a campus area to make it look better.
- Not sure.
- The campus improvement project allowed them to familiarize themselves.

Item 4. Which camp activities were most effective at promoting students' peer competence during the school year?

- The poems using their first names.
- Small group sessions led by 8th graders.
- Activities used during Advisory, which was conducted by the 8th graders.
- How to get organized, session on how the school was laid out, homework and athletics sessions.
- Advisory and team building lessons.
- Students socializing with each other on a daily basis gave them a stronger connection to each other. This helped participating students begin the school year with a stronger foundation.
- Most activities required team work, I think that this was very helpful.
- Que?
- The different group activities they did: relay and story telling, my world.

Item 4 (continued).

- Students socializing with each other on a daily basis, gave them a stronger connection to each other. This helped participating students begin the school year with a stronger foundation.
- I'm not really sure I have an answer for that one.
- The dance activities were a great opportunity for some students who were less a leader to shine.

Item 5. Which camp activities were most effective at preparing students' for middle school academic work?

- The different group activities they did: creating dragon.
- Social Studies lessons on reading a map.
- Classroom cross-curricular lessons.
- Science labs, math and LA activities.
- How to get organized, homework and athletics sessions.
- The teacher led lessons.
- Stations on different components of middle school.
- Each day, students had a schedule for activities and lessons. These lessons introduced students to academic life at middle school. Having a scheduled routine also provided an introduction to the daily structure that comes with school.
- I do not know.
- We used Cornell notes during introduction and directions for activities.
- Learning Cornell Notes and expectations (SLANT).
- I was not present for all activities.
- They learned how to do Cornell Notes, how to complete a learning log, and what a quick write is---this increased their competence during the school year.
- I suppose the Cornell note-taking business and some of the thinking-through that we had to do to get to the meat of the project.
- Each day the students had a schedule for activities and lessons. The lessons introduced students to academic life at middle school. Having a scheduled routine also provided an introduction to the daily structure that comes with school.
- We took Cornell notes!

Item 6. Which camp activities were most effective at preparing students' for middle school campus routines?

- Question and answer session.
- Practicing routines.
- Having four periods/classes and lunch.
- How to get organized, school map, athletics, how to keep agendas.
- The students rotating classes daily and going to lunch.
- Stations.
- Lunch lines, bathroom breaks, a daily routine, scheduled and rigorous lessons and activities, student expectation for behavior during academic time and other parts of the day.

Item 6 (continued).

- I do not know.
- We explained these routines and walked them through the activities directly.
- Just learning the campus and expectations of teachers when they enter the classroom.
- I don't think we did a good job of that.

Item 7. Which camp activities were most effective at getting students on the path to college?

- Exposure to students previously enrolled in AVID.
- How to get organized.
- Them having the opportunity to ask teachers questions about their experiences.
- Students were introduced to the concept as a group and individually. The AVID teacher was part of the summer camp staff, and she really helped introduce the students to this concept and helped introduce rigor into the daily lessons.
- I was not present for all activities.
- Cornell notes!
- ?
- None.
- The AVID teacher spoke to many of the students and was able to sign them up for her class.
- Students were introduced to the concept as a group and individually. The AVID teacher was part of the summer camp staff, and she really helped introduce the students to this concept and helped introduce rigor into the daily lessons.
- Again, we took Cornell notes.

Item 8. Please let us know if you have any specific recommendations for improving BEST Professional Development or the BEST Transition Camps.

- Continue to plan rigorous engaging thematic lessons.
 - Get an early start. End of program trip to Austin Parks & Pizza was nice, but how about the caves/park or Sea World.
 - More assistance in what you want us to do with the camps - how can we structure them better? What should we include? How much of an academic component should be part of the camp?
 - We did a camp called "WEB" and I don't know if this is the same thing.
- I don't...
- Expand the transition camp and include 7th and 8th grade students to help. Other students would also be able to identify problems they experienced when beginning middle school.
- A movie outing might get more kids involved.
Ask teachers what skills they think are necessary for the students to know prior to middle school.
Skill assessment for necessary skills.
- More prizes???

Item 8 (continued).

- I would like to see next year's 6th graders signed up with parent acknowledgements well before the end of this school year.
- Expand the transition camp to include 7th and 8th grade students to help. Other students would also be able to identify problems they experienced when beginning middle school. A movie outing might get more kids involved. Ask teachers what skills they think are necessary for the students to know prior to middle school. Skill assessment for necessary skills.
- We need to stop confusing the WEB program with the BEST Summer Camp. They are not the same thing even if some campuses mistakenly tried to meld the two programs together.
- I don't exactly know. I teach choir and language arts, so I am really coming at this from two different sides. We used my knowledge of elementary songs and games for icebreakers and relaxation, along with community participation for my folk songs and dancing. I would like to see perhaps more of a mini-school day for the camp, interspersed with "fun" activities like the folk dancing and maybe some whole class team building games along on the physical activity side, like little relays. Maybe our final project could be a little play, a "Readers' Theater: that the students write themselves, since that incorporates all sorts of academic and leadership skills.

We didn't know what we should do or how to do what we did, (it being the first camp and all) and worked on a Beautification project for our school: what we'd like to see done to make our school a nicer place, etc. and then worked on what it would take to implement it. Unfortunately, we weren't able to actually realize any of the ideas we worked on, so I think that in itself is a tiny bit self-defeating.

I don't know what any of the other schools' Summer Camp looked like, and maybe that would help me to compare what they did to what we did and how best to go from there. I'm interested in teaching again during the summer, so I'm open to how best to help our new 6th graders evolve.