

AISD Prekindergarten Expansion Grant Evaluation Report, 2007-2008

PROMOTING SCHOOL READINESS



Austin Independent School District
Department of Program Evaluation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ensuring that children are ready for successful school experiences is one of the most pressing issues in early childhood today (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2004). A high-quality early childhood education program is key to a child's school readiness and success (TEA, 2007). What is school readiness? According to NAEYC, school readiness must be flexibly and broadly defined because children develop in different ways and at different rates (p1). The demand for school readiness comes at a time when early childhood educators are uneasy about the effect that increased performance demands may have on young children's development (National Early Childhood Accountability Task Force, 2007).

The state of Texas, which serves more 4-year-olds than does any other state, is no stranger to this dilemma (Wat & Doctors, 2007). In 2003, the 78th Texas legislature passed Senate Bill 76, which promoted school readiness by requiring certain agencies to coordinate early childhood services, including Head Start agencies, public school prekindergarten (pre-K) programs, and private and nonprofit early childhood programs. The major emphasis of the bill was to cost-effectively serve more Texas children in high-quality preschools. Senate Bill 23 (2005), passed by the 79th Texas legislature, further expanded the school readiness program.

In 2007–2008, free half-day pre-K was available in Texas to 4-year-olds who met one of these eligibility criteria: limited English proficient (LEP), economically disadvantaged, homeless, child of an active duty military parent, or child of member of armed forces who was injured or killed while serving on active duty (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2007). Additional state funding is available to districts through the Prekindergarten Expansion Grant. To qualify for this funding in the 2007–2008 school year, districts were required to develop a School Readiness Integration Plan to describe how the district would accomplish the integration of services for pre-K students and their families. The Austin Independent School District (AISD) qualified for a Cycle 13 Prekindergarten Expansion Grant of more than \$4 million in 2007–2008.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

AISD provided full-day pre-K to 5,132 (i.e., compared with 5,073 in 2006–2007) 4-year-olds in 2007–2008 at 66 elementary campuses and the Read Prekindergarten Demonstration School (Read). According to AISD's 2007–2008 student records, demographic and enrollment information for pre-K students included the following:

- Ninety-four percent of students (n = 4,823) were from low-income families.
- Sixty percent of students (n = 3,057) were English language learners (ELLs), students whose home language was not English.
- Homeless students (n = 109) comprised 2% of all pre-K students.
- Fifty-five percent of pre-K students qualified by both income and language.
- Forty-three languages were reported spoken in the homes of pre-K students.
- Hispanics comprised the largest ethnic group (78%), followed by African Americans (13%), Anglo/other (5%), and Asians (4%).

AISD had 300 pre-K teachers in 2007–2008, with an average of 9.3 years of teaching experience, compared with 9.8 years in 2006–2007. The pre-K teaching staff was composed of

158 bilingual (53%), 96 English-speaking (32%), and 46 English-as-a-second-language- (ESL) certified (15%) teachers. In 2007–2008, 275 (92%) pre-K teachers attended 5,903 hours of professional development activities in 28 courses directly related to pre-K instruction or classroom management (i.e., an average of 21.5 hours).

The estimated cost of the district’s pre-K program (\$15 million) in the 2007–2008 school year was funded as follows: 30% (\$4,484,232) from the Prekindergarten Expansion Grant, 70% (\$10,620,032) from local funds, and less than 1% (\$51,973) from Title I funds. These funds did not include monies for transportation, food services, and indirect costs.

STUDENT ACADEMIC PROGRESS

Student performance gains from pretest to posttest on the English-language Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-III (PPVT-III) and the Spanish-language Test de Vocabulario en Imágenes Peabody (TVIP) determined the effectiveness of language and literacy learning in the pre-K program. The PPVT-III and TVIP measure knowledge of receptive vocabulary in English and in Spanish, respectively. Standard test scores are based on national age norms, with a mean of 100 and a standard deviation of 15, for both tests. A standard score of 85 to 115 points indicates that a student is in the average range. For a student to maintain his or her standing relative to the national average, the gain score from pretest to posttest would be zero. Any gain greater than zero indicates the student’s performance improved compared with the national average.

A total of 1,975 pre-K students had valid PPVT-III/TVIP pre- and posttest scores (920 in English only and 1,055 in English and Spanish). Major student achievement findings from the 2007–2008 PPVT-III and TVIP district testing sample indicate that the AISD pre-K program was effective:

- Seventy-six percent of English-language students made gains from pretest to posttest on the PPVT and 78% of Spanish ELL students made gains on the TVIP.
- Gains for English-language students on the PPVT-III and for Spanish ELL students on the TVIP indicate that students showed growth that was about two times greater than expected for 4-year-olds after a 7-month period of instruction.
- At the posttest, 81% (n = 1,596) of all students were in the average range on tests in their language of instruction (80% in Spanish and 83% in English).

The revised *AISD Pre-K Report Card Assessment Rubrics* (AISD, 2007a) has been a helpful tool for teachers to evaluate the academic progress of pre-K students and to report that progress to parents. In 2007–2008, the academic areas with the highest percentages of students on grade level at the end of the year were mathematics (88%) and writing (86%). Students who received an ESL score showed progress although only 48% of those students met expectations in English at the end of the year. Social development is also important to readiness for kindergarten. Growth in personal development was evident in the increase in the percentages of students meeting expectations on all traits, from 32% at the end of the first 9-week period to 69% at the end of the fourth 9-week period.

An analysis of 2008 Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) reading and mathematics data for a cohort of students who attended pre-K in the 2003–2004 school year indicates those students who attended pre-K, especially English-language low-income students,

had TAKS reading and mathematics passing rates that were higher than district passing rates for low-income students.

ACADEMIC INITIATIVES

AISD is dedicated to improving early learning for disadvantaged 4-year-olds. The district's full-day pre-K program provides a highly qualified (i.e., state-certified, bachelor's degreed) teacher for each pre-K classroom. In addition to state *Prekindergarten Curriculum Guidelines* (TEA, 1999) and the district-adopted *DLM Early Childhood Express* (Lara-Alecio & Irby, 2003) curriculum, AISD pre-K teachers have two additional pre-K specific resources to guide instruction and assessment: *Pre-K Austin ISD Instructional Planning Guide* (IPG) (AISD, 2007b), and *AISD Pre-K Report Card Assessment Rubrics* (AISD, 2007a). The IPGs outline a sequence for instruction in each content area. The assessment rubrics provide ongoing assessment for reporting student progress to parents each 9-week period. Both the IPGs and the assessment rubrics have been written and revised by early childhood teachers. A team of pre-K teachers collaborated to update the IPGs and refine the assessment rubrics in Summer 2007.

Another pre-K academic initiative was a districtwide focus on inquiry-based science instruction. In its second year, pre-K teachers were trained to promote scientific literacy and inquiry-based science under the leadership of the AISD Science Department. Eight pre-K training sessions in science were offered during 2007–2008.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

In the 2007–2008 school year, the AISD pre-K program participated in many innovative programs and partnerships to promote integration of services for pre-K students and their families. Descriptions of some of the AISD pre-K community partnerships with local nonprofit agencies and private day care providers are as follows:

- **Satellite campuses:** AISD placed three pre-K teachers in two Head Start campuses, which served as satellite campuses for 31 4-year-olds who qualified.
- **Head Start (Child, Inc.):** Head Start provided instructional aides in 32 pre-K classrooms and visiting teachers in 21 classrooms. A total of 964 low-income students qualified for instructional support and comprehensive health services.
- **Texas Early Education Model (TEEM):** TEEM is a state Center for Improving the Readiness of Children for Learning and Education (CIRCLE) program that integrates professional development activities and follow-up coaching for teachers in public school, child care, and Head Start. The AISD pre-K program has participated in TEEM since 2003, and 21 pre-K teachers participated in 2007–2008.
- **WorkSource:** The Greater Austin Area Workforce Board offered subsidized child care for eligible parents and training for child care providers. Funding to AISD allowed the hiring of an early childhood specialist to work with identified families and all collaborating child care providers.
- **AmeriCorps for Community Engagement and Education (ACEE):** AmeriCorps participants served AISD pre-K students at Read and Sanchez Elementary Schools.

READ PREKINDERGARTEN DEMONSTRATION CENTER

During its second year of operation in 2007–2008, Read experienced growing pains. The enrollment at Read increased by 53%, from 421 in 2006–2007 to 641 in 2007–2008.

Because the facility was not large enough to absorb these additional students, portable buildings were needed for classrooms. The number of teachers increased from 22 to 30 during the same time. Schedules for use of the other Read facilities (e.g., cafeteria, science lab, and library) were affected. This growth and other factors may have had an impact on student achievement gains on the PPVT-III and the TVIP at Read, which were lower than gains at other schools with pre-K during 2007–2008.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As state and national expectations become more rigorous, the educators of young children face many challenges. The district should continue to implement developmentally appropriate practices for pre-K, while supporting the academic rigor required for these 4-year-olds to read on grade level by grade 3 and thereafter.

Although funding should remain stable for 2008–2009, the AISD pre-K program faces possible challenges with funding in 2009–2010. The Prekindergarten Expansion Grant, which provides 30% of AISD’s pre-K program funding, will become more competitive in 2009–2010 as the state opens the application process to all Texas schools. Integration of services for 4-year-olds by public, private, and nonprofit institutions is expected by the state of Texas. The following recommendations are offered to AISD decision makers to continue a high-quality full-day pre-k program for disadvantaged four-year-old:

- Closely monitor the application process for the 2009–2010 Prekindergarten Expansion Grant and ensure that all requirements are met.
- Work with community organizations to find additional opportunities for integrating services for pre-K students and their families.
- Consider other funding sources for the pre-K program in case Prekindergarten Expansion Grant funds are no longer available.
- Continue to provide high-quality staff development opportunities to all pre-K teachers that will help them accelerate learning for their students and will provide them with opportunities to observe and share teaching strategies with colleagues.
- Provide resources and training to accelerate English language acquisition for Spanish ELL pre-K students in bilingual classrooms.
- Consider reducing the student enrollment at Read because high enrollment has placed a hardship on the campus that serves as a pre-K demonstration site where best practices and innovative strategies can be developed that can be replicated in other schools in the district.
- Consider creating an attendance zone for Read in order to receive Title I funds, which are currently unavailable even though 94% of Read students qualified for free- or reduced-price lunch.

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INTRODUCTION

As the world increasingly is shaped by global competition, early childhood programs will play an even greater role in child development and school readiness (Barnett & Yarosz, 2007). Ensuring that children are ready for successful school experiences is one of the most pressing issues in early childhood today (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2004). A high-quality early childhood education program is key to a child's school readiness and success (Texas Education Agency (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2007). What is school readiness? According to NAEYC, school readiness must be flexibly and broadly defined because children develop in different ways and at different rates (p1). According to TEA, to meet the critical components of school readiness, a preschool program will identify a child's early foundation skills for learning to read, make informed decisions about developing appropriate curricula, and build children's language and literacy skills. The demand for school readiness comes at a time when early childhood educators are uneasy about the effect that increased performance demands may have on young children's development (National Early Childhood Accountability Task Force, 2007).

The state of Texas, which serves more 4-year-olds than does any other state, is no stranger to this dilemma (Wat & Doctors, 2007). In 2003, the 78th Texas legislature passed Senate Bill 76, which promoted school readiness by requiring certain agencies to coordinate early childhood services, including Head Start agencies, public school pre-K programs, and private and nonprofit early childhood programs. The major emphasis of the bill was to cost-effectively serve more Texas children in high-quality preschools. Senate Bill 23 (2005), passed by the 79th Texas legislature, further expanded the school readiness program.

In 2007–2008, free half-day pre-K was available in Texas to eligible 4-year-olds. Additional state funding was available to districts through the Prekindergarten Expansion Grant. To qualify for this funding in the 2007–2008 school year, districts were required to develop a School Readiness Integration Plan to describe how the district would accomplish the integration of services for pre-K students and their families. The Austin Independent School District (AISD) qualified for a Cycle 13 Prekindergarten Expansion Grant of more than \$4 million dollars in 2007–2008. This report summarizes the collaborations and initiatives that were part of the AISD pre-K program during the 2007–2008 school year, as well as the academic progress of pre-K students.

AISD PRE-K PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

AISD provides full-day pre-K for all eligible children who are 4-years-old on or before September 1st of the current school year. To be eligible for public pre-K in Texas, a student must meet one of these eligibility criteria: limited English proficient (LEP), economically disadvantaged, homeless, child of an active duty military parent, or child of member of armed forces who was injured or killed while serving on active duty (TEA, 2007). In this report, LEP students are referred to as English language learners (ELLs) and economically disadvantaged students are referred to as low-income students.

The AISD pre-K program promotes growth in all the areas of physical, social,

emotional, and cognitive development for young children (AISD, 2007c). Learning opportunities occur individually, in small groups, and in large groups. Pre-K students focus on the content areas of language and literacy, mathematics, social studies, science, technology, health, visual arts, music, and physical education to prepare them for success in kindergarten. In addition to academics, breakfast and lunch are provided, as well as outside play and rest time.

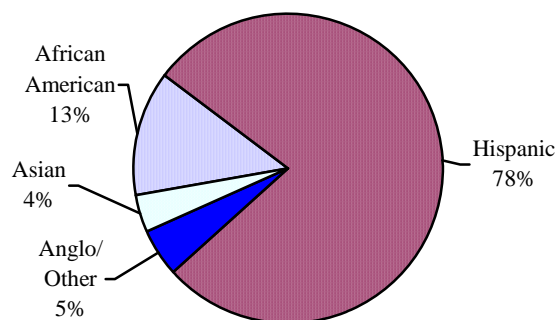
Learning centers are an integral part of the pre-K program in AISD. Centers provide pre-K students with opportunities to learn about new academic concepts, as well as self-responsibility and how to follow directions, complete tasks, share materials, and communicate their needs. Examples of learning centers in the pre-K classroom include home living, creative dramatics, blocks, manipulatives, science, listening, art, library, alphabet centers, writing, storytelling/puppets, pocket chart with poetry, and mathematics.

STUDENT INFORMATION

A total of 5,132 4-year-olds attended AISD pre-K during 2007–2008, compared with 5,073 in 2006–2007. Two new elementary schools offering pre-K classes, Blazier and Overton, opened in the fall of 2007. During 2007–2008, 67 AISD campuses, including Lucy Read Prekindergarten Demonstration School (Read), offered pre-K instruction. In its second year of operation, Read focused on meeting the needs of 4-year-olds from four North Austin elementary schools (i.e., Cook, McBee, Walnut Creek, and Wooldridge). According to AISD student records, demographic information for pre-K children in 2007–2008 included the following:

- Gender was balanced, with 50% male and 50% female.
- Ninety-four percent of students (n = 4,823) were from low-income families.
- Sixty percent of students (n = 3,057) were ELL students whose home language was not English.
- Homeless students (n = 109) comprised 2% of all pre-K students.
- Fifty-five percent (n = 2,839) of students met both the limited-English and low-income criteria.
- As shown in Figure 1, Hispanic students comprised the largest ethnic group (n = 4,002), followed by African American (n = 666), Anglo/other (n = 262), and Asian (n = 202) students.

Figure 1. Prekindergarten Students, by Ethnicity, 2007–2008



Source. AISD student records, 2007–2008

ENROLLMENT AND ATTENDANCE

AISD pre-K enrollment increased by 1%, from 5,073 in 2006–2007 to 5,132 in 2007–2008. Table 1 summarizes 5 years of program data, from 2003–2004 through 2007–2008. These data include all pre-K students served at any point in a given year.

Table 1. Prekindergarten Summary Information, 2003–2004 through 2007–2008

AISD pre-K information	2003– 2004	2004– 2005	2005– 2006	2006– 2007	2007– 2008
Number of schools with pre-K	65	67	66	66*	67**
Number of teachers	262	281	287	293	300
Number of pre-K students	4,499	5,097	5,014	5,073	5,132
Number of low-income students	4,184	4,798	4,632	4,797	4,823
Number of ELL students	2,367	2,555	2,862	3,013	3,057

Source. AISD student and human resource records, 2003–2004 to 2007–2008

Note. Students can be both low income and ELL.

* Read Pre-K Center and Perez Elementary School opened, and Cook and McBee Elementary Schools no longer offered pre-K.

** Blazier and Overton Elementary Schools opened, and Wooldridge Elementary School no longer offered pre-K.

The number of pre-K students served at each of the 67 campuses varied widely in 2007–2008, ranging from 12 at Casis to 621 at Read. See Appendix A for a complete list of schools offering pre-K and the number of students served in 2007–2008.

Considerable variation existed between schools with respect to class size and language of instruction. The estimated pre-K student-teacher ratio in 2007–2008 was 15.5:1, similar to the 2006–2007 rate of 15.6:1. These estimations were based on the active pre-K enrollment and the numbers of pre-K teachers employed during those years. Because of the increase in the district's pre-K ELL population, bilingual classes often were larger than their English and ESL counterparts. In 2007–2008, 58% of bilingual, 30% of English, and 41% of ESL classrooms had enrollments greater than the estimated student-teacher ratio.

Average daily attendance historically has been lower for AISD pre-K than for other elementary grades, perhaps due to the lack of mandatory attendance for pre-K students. Average daily attendance for pre-K students in 2007–2008 was 94.3% (up slightly from 94.2% in 2006–2007), compared with 95.4% for kindergarten and 96.0% for grade 1 students. On the last day of school, 91% (n = 4,660) of all pre-K students who attended AISD pre-K during 2007–2008 were enrolled in AISD pre-K classes.

LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION

AISD offers pre-K instruction in English and Spanish, as well as Vietnamese (at Walnut Creek) and Korean (at Mathews). For students whose primary language was not English or Spanish (5%), English instruction was delivered by an ESL-certified teacher. In 2007–2008, 53% of pre-K students received the majority of their instruction in Spanish.

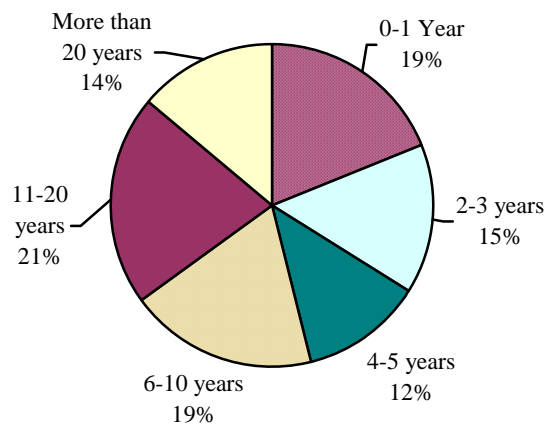
Forty-three languages were reported by parents as spoken in the homes of this year's pre-K students. The languages reported with the most frequency were Spanish (n = 2,910, or 57%); English (n = 1,976, or 39%); Vietnamese (n = 56, or 1%); and Korean (n = 30, or 1%).

TEACHER INFORMATION

The pre-K teaching staff was composed of 158 bilingual (53%), 96 English-speaking (32%), and 46 ESL-certified (15%) teachers. AISD had 300 pre-K teachers in 2007–2008, with an average of 9.3 years of teaching experience (compared with 9.8 in 2006–2007). The overall average years of teaching experience for AISD elementary teachers was 12.0 in 2007–2008, which was 2.7 years more than the average for pre-K teachers.

The majority (n = 162, or 54%) of pre-K teachers in AISD had 6 or more years of teaching experience. In 2007–2008, all AISD pre-K teachers met the highly qualified criteria for No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001). To be deemed highly qualified by NCLB, teachers must have a bachelor's degree and full state certification or licensure. The percentage of teachers at each teaching experience level is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Prekindergarten Teachers, by Years of Teaching Experience, 2007–2008

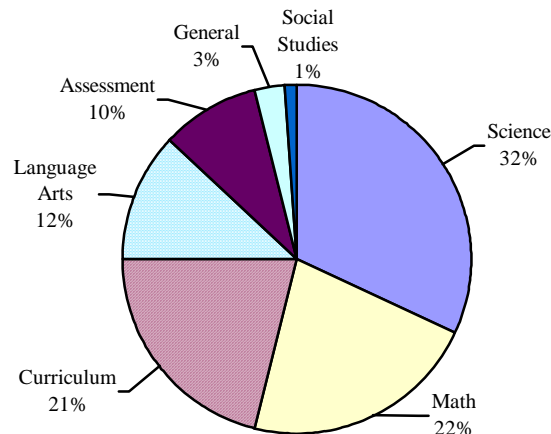


Source. AISD human resource files, 2007–2008

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Availability of pre-K-specific training is important to pre-K teachers. During each of the 9-week periods in 2007–2008, pre-K teachers received training in the use of the newly revised IPGs and assessment rubrics. In 2007–2008, 275 (92%) pre-K teachers attended 5,903 hours of professional development activities in 28 courses directly related to pre-K instruction or classroom management (i.e., an average of 21.5 hours of completed professional development activities). Science was the subject for the highest number of hours (n = 1,898) of training for pre-K teachers, followed by math (n = 1,275) and curriculum (n = 1,268). Figure 3 shows the percentage of professional development activity hours per subject area in 2007–2008.

Figure 3. Percentage of Professional Development Activity Hours in Prekindergarten-Specific Training, 2007–2008



Source. AISD professional development center records, 2007–2008

AISD PRE-K INITIATIVES

Community Partnerships

AISD has a long history of collaborating with the community. In the 2007–2008 school year, the AISD pre-K program participated in many innovative programs and partnerships to promote integration of services for pre-K students and their families. Community members, local nonprofit agencies, and private day care providers were involved in these initiatives.

- Satellite campuses:** AISD placed three pre-K teachers in community preschools. Two Head Start campuses served as satellite campuses for 31 4-year-olds who qualified. The satellite teachers used the same curriculum as did AISD teachers to plan instruction.
- Head Start (Child, Inc.):** Head Start provided instructional aides in 32 pre-K classrooms and visiting teachers in 21 classrooms during 2007–2008. A total of 964 low-income students qualified and received instructional support and comprehensive health services.
- Texas Early Education Model (TEEM):** TEEM is a state Center for Improving the Readiness of Children for Learning and Education (CIRCLE) program that integrates professional development activities and follow-up coaching for public school, child care, and Head Start. The AISD pre-K program has been participating in TEEM since 2003, and 21 pre-K teachers participated in the training during 2007–2008. Eighteen pre-K classrooms have Texas School Ready™ certification from CIRCLE.
- AmeriCorps for Community Engagement and Education (ACEE):** AmeriCorps participants served AISD pre-K students at Read and Sanchez during 2007–2008. The training/work-study program was offered through University of Texas Charles Dana Center. At Read, 42 ACEE members attended literacy training and worked directly with students in small groups in the classrooms, library, and science laboratory. In their first year at Sanchez, ACEE members worked in five classrooms

3 hours per day, providing literacy lessons and ongoing literacy support. ACEE members met with parents and helped them to provide a whole class literacy lesson during the teacher planning time each day.

- **WorkSource:** The Greater Austin Area Workforce Board offered subsidized child care for eligible parents and training for child care providers. Funding to AISD allowed the hiring of an early childhood specialist to work with identified families and all collaborating child care providers.
- **Tuition-based expansion of Becker Elementary Pre-K:** During 2007–2008, the Becker pre-K program had three tuition-paying pre-K students. A proposal to expand Becker Elementary School’s pre-K program to include tuition-paying students was developed by district staff, parents, and neighborhood representatives beginning in the fall of 2006. This collaboration satisfied the neighborhood’s interest in retaining Becker as an elementary school and the district’s need to maximize resources and facility use.
- **Early Learning Opportunities Act (ELOA):** This grant, through United Way Success by 6 (a joint partnership with AISD Parent Support Office), provided one-stop services for local area parents, as well as parent training sessions.
- **E3 Alliance:** The E3 Alliance is a regional task force to create and adopt standards for school readiness in Central Texas. Austin early childhood staff met with the group to discuss what it means to be “school ready” and to network and share information among participating members.
- **Early Childhood Advisory Committee:** This committee, which emerged from the 2006 Early Childhood Task Force, convened by the AISD superintendent, met during 2007–2008 to discuss how best to serve the needs of Austin’s youngest learners. Those attending the meetings included AISD staff; community members; a Region XIII educational specialist; and faith-based, nonprofit, and private child care representatives.
- **Reading is Fundamental (RIF):** RIF is a nonprofit organization that promotes literacy by delivering free books and literacy resources to children and families at high-poverty AISD schools. This is a long-standing literacy collaborative in AISD.

Curriculum and Academic Initiatives

To add more academic rigor to the program, AISD early childhood leaders provided pre-K teachers with opportunities to revise the pre-K assessment rubrics and attend pre-K-specific professional development activities to enhance classroom instruction and student learning. The 2007–2008 academic initiatives for pre-K are described here.

- **Instructional planning guides (IPGs):** The state-adopted curriculum used in AISD pre-K classrooms is the *DLM Early Childhood Express* (Lara-Alecio & Irby, 2003), which is an integrated curriculum aligned to the state *Prekindergarten Curriculum Guidelines* (TEA, 1999). The *Pre-K Austin ISD Instructional Planning Guide* (IPG) (AISD, 2007b) is aligned to the curriculum (AISD, 2005). The IPGs, written by early childhood educators and implemented in the fall of 2004, outline a sequence for instruction in each content area. During the summer of 2007, a team of teachers

from diverse backgrounds and areas of expertise collaborated to create the revised AISD Pre-K IPGs. In an effort to make the document more teacher friendly, the team changed the format of the IPGs and added suggestions for teacher talk and assessments, clarifying activities, and differentiated instruction to supplement the student expectations for each week.

- **Assessment rubrics:** The *AISD Pre-K Report Card Assessment Rubrics* (AISD, 2007a), developed and refined by a team of pre-K teachers, provided consistency in assessment across the district. The Pre-K Assessment Task Force has met each summer since the original rubrics were drafted in 2004 to revise these assessment guidelines based on teacher experience and feedback. The 2007 revisions provided more rigor in measurement of student outcomes in oral language and writing. The rubrics provided ongoing assessment for reporting student progress each 9-week period on the Prekindergarten Report to Parents.
- **Inquiry-based science instruction:** For the second year, science exploration continued to be a major initiative for pre-K teachers at all AISD campuses. With eight professional development courses available, science exploration was the most requested pre-K specific topic during 2007–2008.

PRE-K BUDGET

The Texas Foundation School Program provides funding for half-day pre-K to districts with at least 15 students who qualify. AISD applied for and received the state Cycle 13 Prekindergarten Expansion Grant in 2007–2008 to fund an additional half day of instruction. The grant funded full-day instruction at 47 of the 67 AISD schools with pre-K programs. Additional full-day pre-K classes had not been added to the grant since 2000 due to state budget constraints. Therefore, additional local funds were needed to fund the full-day program at the remaining schools.

The estimated cost of the district’s pre-K program (\$15 million) in the 2007–2008 school year was funded as follows: 30% (\$4,484,232) from the Prekindergarten Expansion Grant, 70% (\$10,620,032) from local funds, and less than 1% (\$51,973) from Title I funds. These funds did not include monies for transportation, food services, and indirect costs.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

EVALUATION OBJECTIVES

This evaluation of the AISD pre-K program included the following objectives:

- Describe pre-K program participants and services, per local, state, and federal reporting requirements
- Provide information for decision makers about program effectiveness to facilitate decisions about program modification
- Provide additional evaluation support for the Lucy Read Prekindergarten Demonstration School

DATA COLLECTION

Department of Program Evaluation (DPE) staff collected quantitative and qualitative data to determine program effectiveness, as well as to identify areas in need of improvement. A

description of the types of data collected and the method(s) used to collect them follows.

- **Peabody Picture Vocabulary Tests:** Student performance gains from pretest to posttest on the English-language Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-III (PPVT-III) and the Spanish-language Test de Vocabulario en Imágenes Peabody (TVIP) determined the effectiveness of language and literacy learning in the pre-K program.
- **Pre-K grade reports:** The *AISD Pre-K Report Card Assessment Rubrics* (AISD, 2007a) was used districtwide to report student performance in academic areas in 2007–2008. A sample of students' grades for academic subjects and personal development traits during each 9-week period was analyzed.
- **Teacher surveys:** Pre-K teachers were asked to respond to an online survey to give feedback about the strengths of the program and areas for improvement; Read teachers responded to a separate survey. Specific topics included professional development opportunities, curriculum and materials, effectiveness of the *AISD Pre-K Report Card Assessment Rubrics*, and district support of the pre-K program.
- **2008 Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS):** To determine the long-term impact of the pre-K program, the 2008 TAKS reading scores for a cohort of grade 3 students who had attended an AISD pre-K program in 2003–2004 were compared with those of district grade 3 students who took 2008 TAKS reading and who were ELL and/or low income.

STUDENT ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

LANGUAGE ARTS/PRE-READING

The importance of vocabulary knowledge has long been recognized in the development of reading skills. For this reason, the main assessment tools used to evaluate the AISD pre-K program were tests that measured growth in receptive (hearing) vocabulary as the foundation for later reading skills.

Background and Description of Assessments

The PPVT-III and the TVIP measure knowledge of receptive vocabulary in English and in Spanish, respectively (Dunn & Dunn, 1997). The PPVT-III has two parallel forms and the TVIP has one form. Each administration is individualized for the student, depending on the number of correct responses given. The tests were designed for persons 2 ½ through 90+ years of age and serve two purposes: (a) an achievement test of receptive vocabulary attainment for standard English and (b) a screening test of verbal ability.

Standard test scores are based on national age norms, with a mean of 100 and a standard deviation of 15 for both tests. A standard score of 85 to 115 points indicates that a student is in the average range. For a student to maintain his or her standing relative to the national average, the gain score from pretest to posttest must be zero. Because these tests are age-normed, a student must have a raw score about 8 to 10 points higher in the spring to get the same standard score as in the fall. Any gain greater than zero indicates the student's performance improved compared with the national average. Evidence of gains greater than zero, on average, can be used to infer AISD pre-K program effectiveness.

Administration of PPVT-III and TVIP in AISD

In the fall of 2007, the PPVT-III was administered to pre-K students at Read and to a random sample of pre-K students at the other 66 campuses with pre-K classes. Spanish ELL students were also tested in Spanish (TVIP). Although the PPVT-III is not normed for ELL students, Spanish ELL students were tested in English (in addition to Spanish) to measure growth in English language acquisition, which is part of the ESL component of pre-K. The posttest was administered in April and May 2008 to pretested students who were enrolled in AISD. The testing sample was designed to closely match the demographic characteristics of students in the AISD pre-K population.

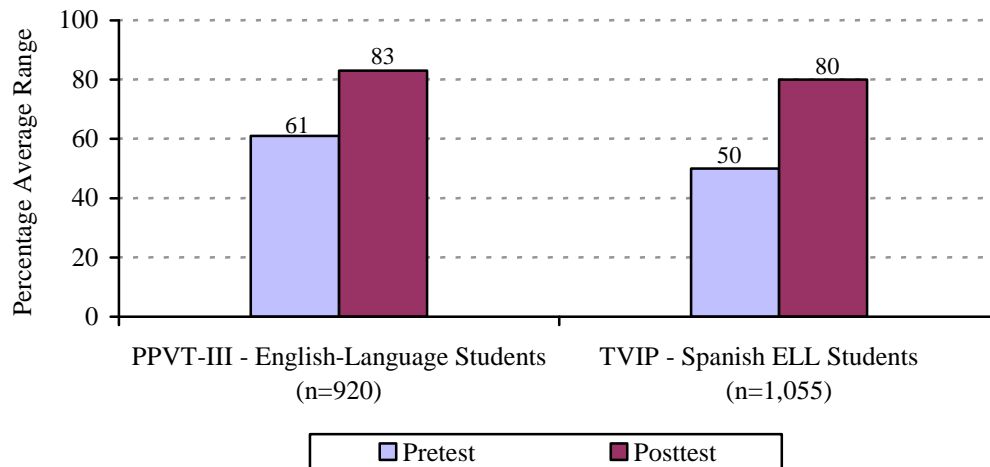
2007–2008 PRE-K TEST RESULTS

A total of 1,975 (compared with 1,718 in 2006–2007) pre-K students had valid PPVT-III/TVIP pre- and posttest scores (920 in English only and 1,055 in English and Spanish). This sample size represented 38% of AISD pre-K students. Of the students tested, 391 were students at Read (112 in English only and 279 in English and Spanish). Findings from the 2007–2008 PPVT-III and TVIP district testing sample, including Read, are discussed in this section.

Students Scoring in the Average Range

It is important to know how prepared pre-K students will be when they start kindergarten. Although 100 is the national average score, both the PPVT-III and the TVIP have an average range of 85 to 115 standard score points. The assumption is that students who advance to the average range in the test of their language of instruction will be ready to accelerate future literacy learning in kindergarten. At the posttest in the spring of 2008, 81% (n = 1,596) of all students were in the average range on tests in their language of instruction (80% in Spanish and 83% in English). A 58% increase was noted from pretest to posttest in the number of Spanish ELL students in the average range, and a 35% increase was noted in the number of English-language students scoring in the average range. Figure 4 shows the percentages of pre-K students in the average range at the pretest and posttest during the 2007–2008 school year.

Figure 4. Percentages of Prekindergarten Students in the PPVT-III and TVIP Average Range at Pretest and Posttest, 2007–2008



Source. 2007–2008 DPE PPVT-III and TVIP data files

Results for English-Language Students

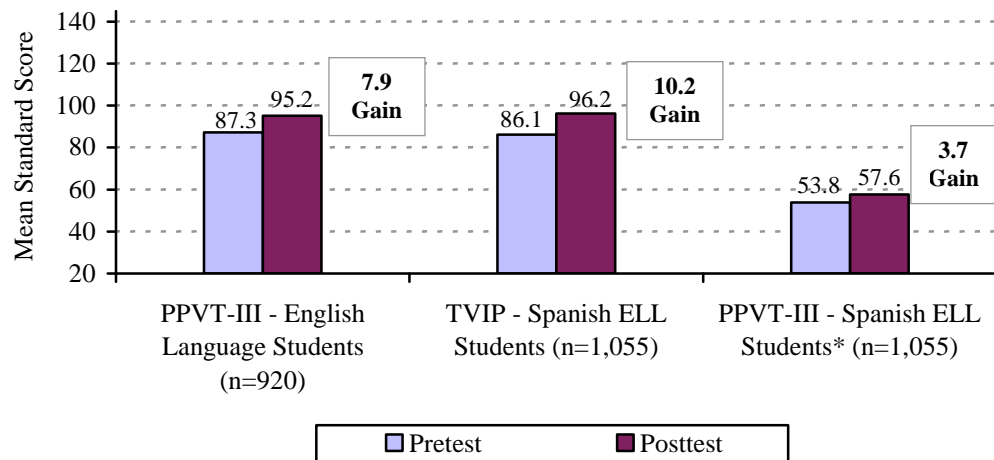
- Seventy-six percent of English-language students made gains on the PPVT-III from pretest to posttest.
- Average growth in receptive vocabulary on the PPVT-III for English-language students was 1 year, 3 months, which showed growth more than two times that expected for 4-year-olds in a 7-month period.
- The average posttest standard score on the PPVT-III for English-language students was 95.2 (94.3 in 2006–2007), with a mean gain of 7.9 (7.9 in 2006–2007).

Results for Spanish ELL Students

- Seventy-eight percent of all Spanish ELL students made gains on the TVIP from pretest to posttest.
- Average growth for Spanish ELL students on the TVIP was 1 year, 2 months, which showed growth two times that expected for 4-year-olds in a 7-month period.
- The average posttest standard score on the TVIP for Spanish ELL students tested was 96.2 (94.8 in 2006–2007), with a mean gain of 10.2 (10.7 in 2006–2007).
- The average posttest standard score on the PPVT-III for Spanish ELL students was 57.6 (58.5 in 2006–2007), with a mean gain of 3.7 (5.7 in 2006–2007).

Figure 5 shows the 2007–2008 average standard scores at pretest and posttest for pre-K students by language and type of test, as well as the average gain.

Figure 5. PPVT-III and TVIP Results for English-Language and Spanish ELL Students, 2007–2008



Source. 2007–2008 DPE PPVT-III and TVIP data files

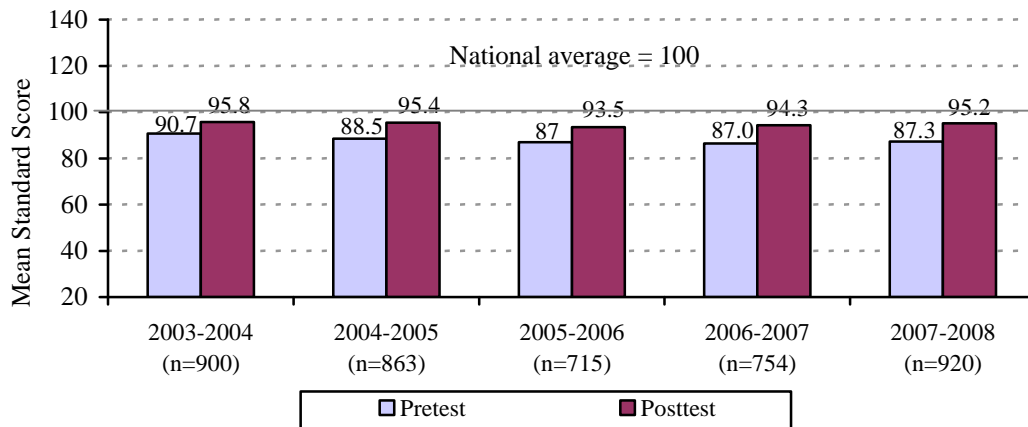
Note. This is baseline information because the PPVT-III is not normed for Spanish speakers.

DISTRICT 5-YEAR REVIEW OF PROGRESS IN LANGUAGE ARTS/PRE-READING

Five years of PPVT-III and TVIP data are presented in Figures 6, 7, and 8. Major findings for the testing sample include the following:

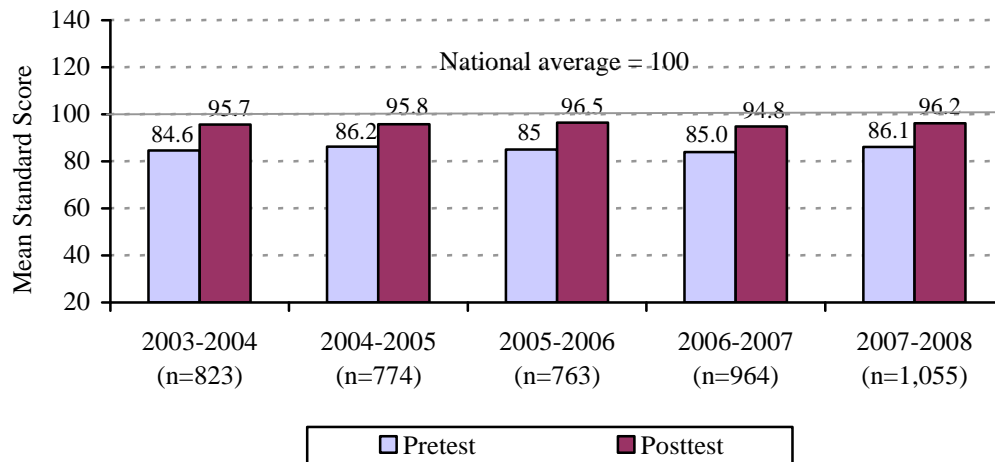
- The PPVT-III posttest average for English-language students increased to 95.2 in 2007–2008 after posttest averages of 93.5 in 2005-2006 and 94.3 in 2006–2007 (Figure 6).
- The TVIP posttest average for the Spanish ELL students increased to 96.2 in 2007–2008 after declining in 2006–2007 (Figure 7).
- The PPVT-III posttest average for Spanish ELL students decreased for the second year in a row from 58.5 in 2006–2007 to 57.6 in 2007–2008 (Figure 8).

Figure 6. Average Pretest and Posttest Scores for English-Language Pre-K Students Tested on PPVT-III, 2003–2004 through 2007–2008



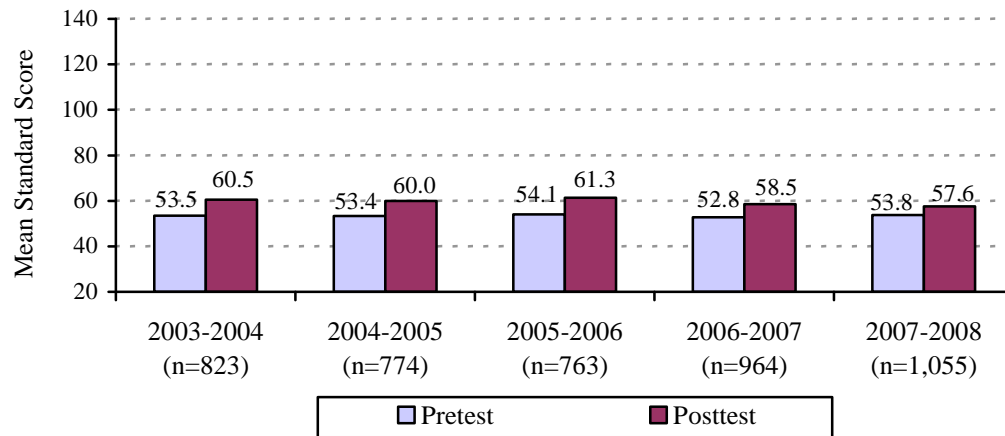
Source. DPE PPVT-III records, 2003–2004 through 2007–2008

Figure 7. Average Pretest and Posttest Scores for Spanish ELL Prekindergarten Students Tested on TVIP, 2003–2004 through 2007–2008



Source. DPE TVIP records, 2003–2004 through 2007–2008

Figure 8. Average Pretest and Posttest Scores for Spanish ELL Students Tested on PPVT-III, 2003–2004 through 2007–2008

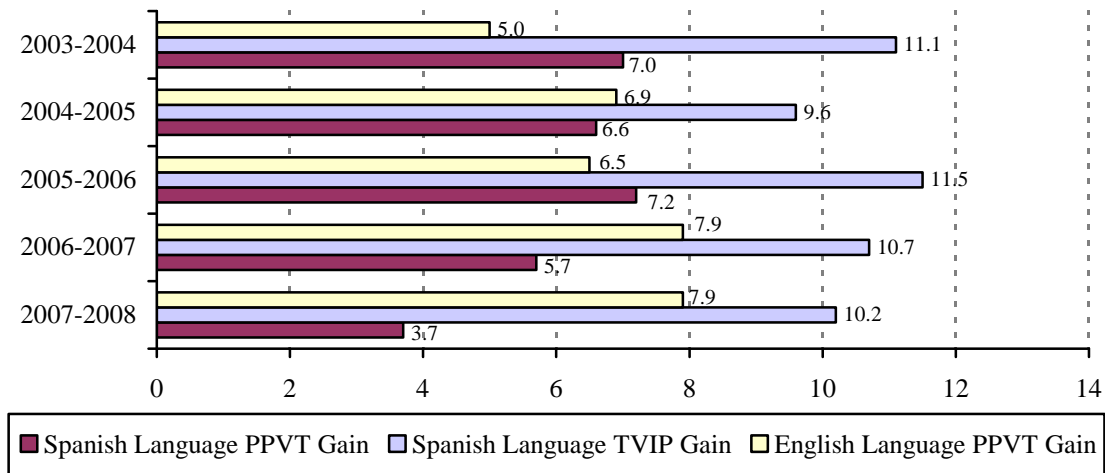


Source. DPE PPVT-III records, 2003–2004 through 2007–2008

Note. This is baseline information because the PPVT-III is not normed for Spanish speakers.

The average gains from pretest to posttest for pre-K students varied over the past 5 years. Until 2007–2008, the PPVT-III and TVIP average gains were consistently 5 or more points when the PPVT-III gain for Spanish ELLs decreased to a 3.7 standard score point gain. Each standard score point gain represents about 1 month of growth beyond what is expected for a child of that age. The average TVIP gains for Spanish ELL students (10.2 points) surpassed PPVT-III gains for English-language students (7.9) in 2007–2008, as in previous years. English-language students have shown their greatest gains in 2006–2007 and 2007–2008 (Figure 9).

Figure 9. Average Standard Score Gains on PPVT-III and TVIP for Prekindergarten Students, 2003–2004 through 2007–2008



Source. DPE PPVT-III/TVIP records, 2003–2004 through 2007–2008

The 2007–2008 student achievement data for pre-K students provides evidence that the pre-K program was effective. Pre-K students made gains in receptive vocabulary twice the expected growth on the national tests in a seven-month period when tested in the language of instruction. In addition, 81% of all pre-K students in the testing sample were in the average

range at the posttest when tested in the language of instruction. However, because PPVT-III gains for Spanish ELL students have declined for the second year in a row, there is a need for increased rigor in English instruction in bilingual classrooms.

LONG-TERM IMPACT ON READING AND MATHEMATICS

A review of 2008 grade 3 TAKS reading and mathematics data for students who attended AISD pre-K in 2003–2004 provided information about the possible long-term impact of the pre-K program on reading and mathematics achievement. Sixty-three percent ($n = 2,593$) of the 2003–2004 pre-K cohort were enrolled in AISD in 2008 and took the grade 3 TAKS tests.

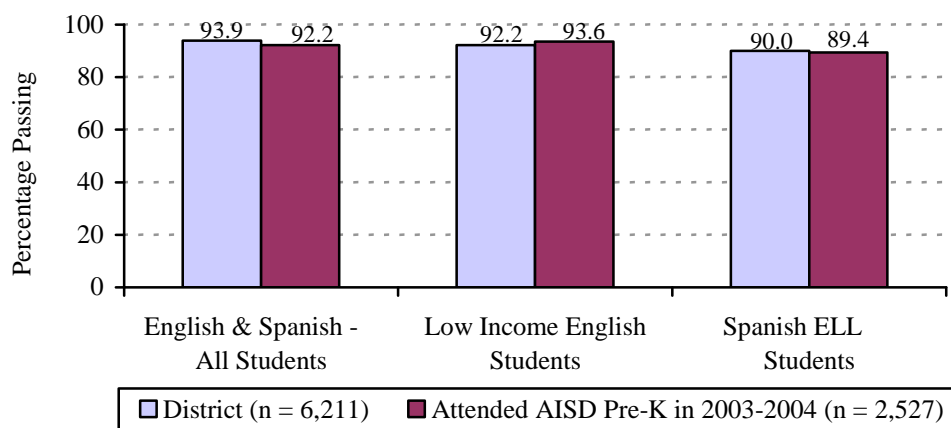
To provide comparisons of TAKS reading and mathematics passing percentages that would closely match the demographics of the students who attended pre-K (i.e., limited English or low income), the following results were analyzed:

- Overall results for all grade 3 students in AISD and grade 3 students who had attended AISD pre-K
- English TAKS results for grade 3 low-income students in the district and low-income grade 3 students who had attended pre-K
- Spanish TAKS results for grade 3 Spanish ELL students in the district and grade 3 Spanish ELL students who had attended pre-K

Results of the TAKS review provided the following insights (Figures 10 and 11):

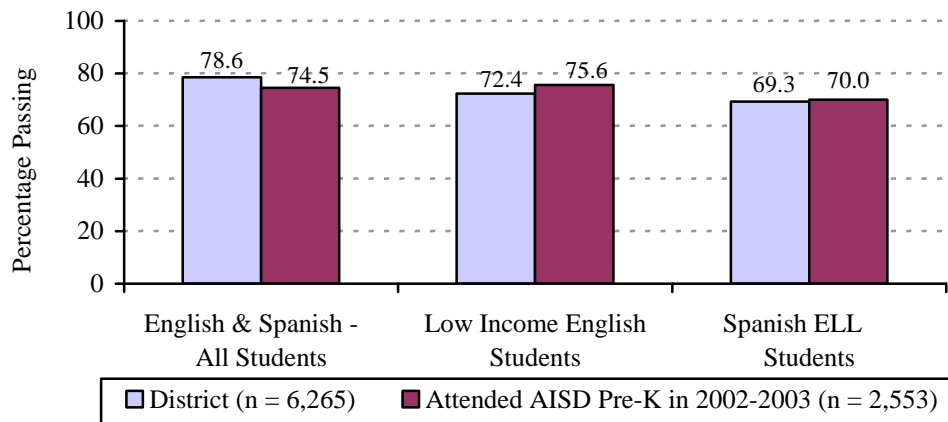
- Overall passing percentages were higher in reading and mathematics for the district (93.9% and 78.6%, respectively) than for the pre-K group (92.2% and 74.5%, respectively).
- Low-income grade 3 students who attended AISD pre-K and took the TAKS tests in English more often passed reading and mathematics (93.6% and 75.6%, respectively) than did district grade 3 low-income English students (92.2% and 72.4%, respectively).
- Spanish ELL grade 3 students in both groups had similar passing percentages.

Figure 10. Percentage of Students Passing 2008 Grade 3 TAKS Reading for All AISD Students and for Students Who Attended AISD Pre-K in 2003–2004



Source. AISD SASI student records and 2008 TAKS reading data

Figure 11. Percentage of Students Passing 2008 Grade 3 TAKS Mathematics for All AISD Students and for Students Who Attended AISD Pre-K in 2003–2004



Source. AISD SASI student records and 2008 TAKS mathematics data

Although it is not possible to attribute these differences entirely to the attendance in pre-K for these students because other grades and teachers could have influenced their achievement, these results indicate that pre-K attendance in AISD may be positively associated with subsequent student achievement in reading and mathematics for low-income students who receive instruction in English. The impact seems to be greater for math than for reading.

COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT IN OTHER AREAS

The *AISD Pre-K Report Card Assessment Rubrics* (AISD, 2007a), developed by pre-K teachers and piloted in 2004–2005, was designed to provide consistency in scoring academic progress on the Prekindergarten Report to Parents each 9-week period in oral language, pre-reading/concepts of print, listening, writing, mathematics, science, social studies, ESL, and personal development. The various rubrics were aligned with the district IPGs; the state *Prekindergarten Curriculum Guidelines* (TEA, 1999); and the district-aligned PK–12 Matrix of Essential Knowledge and Skills.

The performance scale used for rating academic progress was as follows: 1 = needs improvement, 2 = basic understanding, 3 = skilled, and 4 = advanced. Being “on grade level” was defined by a score of 3 or 4. The skills evaluated became progressively more difficult each 9 weeks. After collecting feedback from teachers, the Pre-K Assessment Task Force implemented changes to improve the rigor on the rubrics used during the 2007–2008 school year. Academic rigor was increased for the advanced score of 4 because it applied to student expectations in many content areas and was especially noticeable for student outcomes in concepts of print.

AISD completed implementation of the electronic grade reporting software, InteGrade Pro, districtwide during 2007–2008. Report card data for approximately 2,700 pre-K students who were part of the electronic grade reporting for all 9 weeks in 2007–2008 were analyzed. Although the numbers of students in a content area were the same for all 9-week periods, the numbers of students varied by content areas. Science and social studies grades were averaged

together as science/social studies/health on the report card. Fewer science and social studies (n = 2,373) grades were analyzed than were grades for other subject areas due to variations in teacher reporting.

In 2007–2008, the academic areas with the highest percentages of students on grade level at the end of the year were mathematics (88%) and writing (86%). Although progress was made by students who received an ESL score, only 48% of those students met expectations in English at the end of the year. The subject areas that showed the greatest growth from the 1st 9-week period to the 4th 9-week period included science, math, and ESL. Table 2 shows that the largest percentages of students on grade level in each subject area occurred in the fourth 9-week period.

Table 2. Percentage of Pre-K Students on Grade Level in Each Content Area, by 9-Week Period, 2007–2008

Content area	Percentage of pre-K students on grade level			
	1 st 9 weeks	2 nd 9 weeks	3 rd 9 weeks	4 th 9 weeks
Oral language (n = 2,727)	67	78	77	81
Listening (n = 2,733)	65	69	73	82
Concepts of print (n = 2,683)	58	75	78	85
Writing (n = 2,735)	64	79	79	86
Mathematics (n = 2,706)	59	72	86	88
Science (n = 2,373)*	51	66	72	82
Social studies (n = 2,373)*	64	70	84	85
ESL (n = 1,491)	19	32	42	48

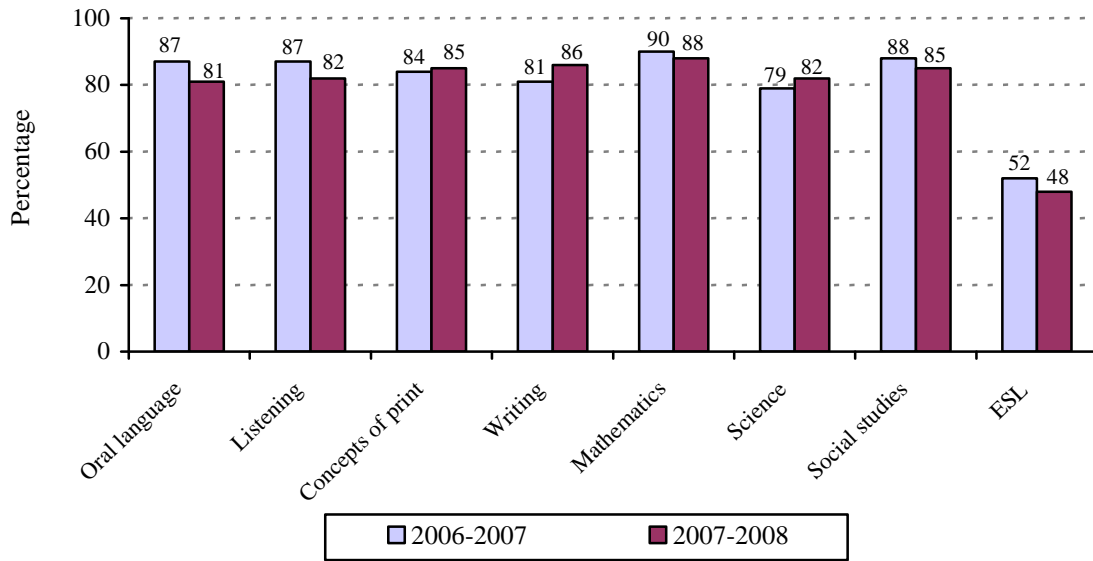
Source. InteGrade Pro grade reporting software data, as reported by pre-K teachers, 2007–2008

* Only students with separate science and social studies grades were included.

In the fall of 2006, AISD implemented a districtwide science initiative for pre-K. At the end of 2007–2008, 82% of pre-K students received a 3 or 4 in science, compared with 79% who did so in 2006–2007. Other academic areas with an increase in the percentage of students on grade level from 2006–2007 to 2007–2008 were oral language and writing.

The academic areas that showed a decline in the percentages of students on grade level from 2006–2007 to 2007–2008 included oral language, listening, math, social studies, and ESL. It is possible that the decline in the percentages of students on grade level in 5 of the 8 academic areas shown in Figure 12 may be the result of increased rigor on the rubrics implemented in 2007–2008.

Figure 12. Percentage of Pre-K Students on Grade Level in Each Content Area at End of Year, 2006–2007 and 2007–2008

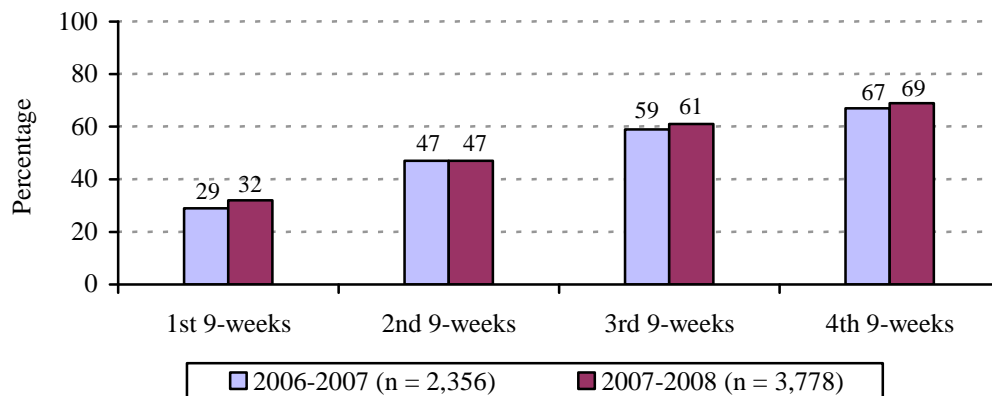


Source. InteGrade Pro grade reporting software data, 2006–2007 and 2007–2008

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Social development for a 4-year-old is important for success in kindergarten. Personal development scores were analyzed for students ($n = 3,778$) with grades for each 9-week period. The performance scale used for rating progress in personal development was as follows: 1 = rarely, 2 = occasionally, 3 = frequently, and 4 = consistently. As with academic performance, a score of 3 or 4 indicated meeting expectations. Progress in 14 personal development goals was reported to parents each 9-week period. The goals included such traits as working with others, exhibiting fine and gross motor skills, following directions, accepting responsibility, and participating in class. Figure 13 shows that 32% of pre-K students in the sample received scores of 3 or 4 in all personal development traits at the end of the first 9-week period. By the end of the school year, 69% (up from 67% in 2006–2007) of the students met expectations for student behavior in all personal development traits.

Figure 13. Percentage of Pre-K Students Receiving a Score of 3 or 4 on All Personal Development Traits, by 9-Week Period, 2006–2007 and 2007–2008



Source. InteGrade Pro grade reporting software data, 2006–2007 and 2007–2008

TEACHER SURVEYS: WHAT DO TEACHERS THINK?

In April 2008, pre-K teachers gave input about the effectiveness of the pre-K program through the online 2007–2008 Prekindergarten Teacher Survey. Specific topics included professional development opportunities, curriculum and materials, assessment rubric, electronic report card, and district support of the pre-K program. A separate teacher survey was sent to Read teachers, with some questions specific to the first year of the pre-K center. A total of 220 pre-K teachers (23 from Read and 197 from other schools, or a response rate of 73%) responded to the teacher surveys. Teacher feedback was shared with program managers.

STRENGTHS OF THE PRE-K PROGRAM

The 2007–2008 school year continued to bring changes to the program for disadvantaged 4-year-olds. Pre-K teachers were given revised IPGs and assessment rubrics to be used as guides for instruction and assessment. Pre-K teachers were asked to reflect on the school year and to describe areas of strength for the program. One teacher summarized her thoughts about the AISD pre-K program as follows: “As a grade level, we are more organized than any other grade with regard to assessments and communication among campuses via team leader meetings.” Pre-K teachers (n = 109) at schools other than Read reported the following major program strengths.

Dedicated teachers and administrative support staff (n = 28). AISD has a dedicated team of pre-K teachers. One teacher explained that the strength of the program is “the great teachers, who do whatever it takes to help the students learn to learn.” Pre-K support staff also received praise from teachers. One teacher said, “The district’s pre-K program is fabulous. The administrators who work for or with the pre-K program really put a lot of thought and effort into what would be best for it.”

IPGs (n = 26). Teachers expressed appreciation for the revised IPGs that describe student expectations and help guide instruction. One teacher wrote, “The IPGs delineate and describe the progressive stages in young children’s acquisition of numeracy and literacy and provide helpful illustrations of ways to make the learning accessible through a wide variety of learning modes.”

Rubrics/electronic gradebook (n = 25). The revised rubrics and their alignment to the IPGs were considered strengths of the 2007–2008 pre-K program. One teacher wrote, “All the rubrics are aligned to the instructional planning guides so teachers can monitor student progress and plan and differentiate instruction based on the students needs.” Respondents expressed varied agreement (i.e., from 73% to 87%, agreed or strongly agreed) that the rubrics reflected an accurate assessment in the academic subject areas. Teachers agreed that math (87%) and language arts (86%) rubrics represented the most accurate assessments of a student’s ability, while science (78%) and ESL (74%) represented less accurate assessments.

Another tool that pre-K teachers had available in 2007–2008 was the InteGrade Pro grade reporting software. Eighty-two percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the grade reporting software was a helpful tool for reporting grades to pre-K parents each 9 weeks.

Structure/focus of program (n = 24). The structure and focus of the full-day program also were reported to be strengths of the pre-K program. Teachers reported that they were

especially pleased that age-appropriate activities were intertwined with academics. A teacher stated, “We value the importance of play as learning. We strive to help children achieve learning on demand, but don’t require them to learn things that are not developmentally appropriate.” Another teacher said, “The program provides the necessary skills the children need to be successful in the beginning of their academic journey.”

Professional development opportunities (n = 19). Pre-K teachers reported the most agreement (92.5% agreed or strongly agreed) with the statement, “The prekindergarten-specific training that I attended provided useful information that I use in my classroom.” As one teacher stated, “The professional development that is offered is always in line with the needs of our students.” Many of the professional development opportunities were presented by teachers who had participated in the TEEM project. Teachers most often requested additional training opportunities in student behavior and classroom management; science, math, and writing instruction; and bilingual/ESL strategies appropriate for 4-year-olds.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Although teachers offered praise for the pre-K program, they also had suggestions for program improvements. According to the 96 pre-K teachers at schools other than Read who made comments, the following areas were most in need of improvement.

Materials/resources (n = 39). Many teachers expressed a need for more resources, including manipulatives, books, science materials, a phonics program, and classroom library resources. One teacher stated, “I think that if we were given more materials to use in our classrooms we would be able to do much more with our students.” Funds for field trips and for more classroom activities should be increased, according to many teachers, who said they spend much of their own money to buy materials for the classroom. One teacher said, “We went to a wonderful PE training, but we don’t have the materials necessary to implement it, like balls or parachutes.”

Parent involvement (n = 30). Teachers had many good ideas for involving parents more with their child’s education. As one teacher suggested,

I would love some districtwide academic information nights for parents to discuss ways to help children prepare for a lifetime of learning. I want to give the parents lots of ideas about giving their kids as many experiences as possible with whatever resources they’ve got.

Other teachers suggested that a parent meeting at the beginning of the school year would help parents know what is expected of them for a successful first year in school. Other suggestions included parent meetings to give ideas for homework activities that allow parents to work closely with students or to discuss parenting skills in discipline. Seventy-two percent (n = 134) of pre-K teachers responding to the survey agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “At my campus, parents of pre-K students are actively involved with their children’s education.”

Practices and Procedures (n = 30). Many teachers expressed frustration with district policies/practices regarding the pre-K program. Class size is one of those practices. One teacher said, “I think that the district needs to look at hiring more teachers to reduce class size or hiring aids to assist every pre-K teacher if class sizes are going to remain the same.” Other teachers suggested that the pre-K program have a director who has a background in early

childhood education. Several teachers expressed frustration that pre-K teachers could not meet as a grade level during the school year, especially on the districtwide staff development day at the beginning of the school year.

READ PREKINDERGARTEN DEMONSTRATION SCHOOL: REFLECTION AFTER TWO YEARS

AISD opened its first pre-K center in 2006–2007, and 421 4-year-olds were transported by bus from their home schools of Cook, McBee, and Walnut Creek to the Read pre-K center to relieve overcrowding at those campuses. The campus had a full staff, including an administrative supervisor, assistant principal, instructional coach, parent specialist, four teacher assistants, secretary, and attendance clerk. The administration and staff at Read were fully devoted to the physical, emotional, and cognitive development of 4-year-olds. The facility was remodeled to meet the needs of 4-year-olds. The library, cafeteria, science lab, and indoor and outdoor play equipment were built specifically to meet the needs of 4-year-olds.

PROGRAM CHANGES

Because of overcrowding, Wooldridge Elementary pre-K students attended Read during 2007–2008. The enrollment at Read increased by 53% from 421 in 2006–2007 to 641 in 2007–2008. Teachers from Wooldridge came with the students. Because the facility was not large enough to absorb these additional students, portable buildings were needed for classrooms. In addition to the strain on facilities, resources were stretched by the 66% increase in ELL students attending Read from 2006–2007 to 2007–2008. Table 3 shows a 2-year summary of Read data.

Table 3. Read Pre-K Summary Information, 2006–2007 and 2007–2008

Read pre-K information	2006– 2007	2007– 2008	% Increase
Number of pre-K students	421	645	53
Number of teachers	22	31	41
Number of low income students	391	587	50
Number of ELL students	292	485	66

Source. AISD student and human resource records, 2006–2007 and 2007–2008

Note. Students can be both low income and ELL.

CAMPUS INITIATIVES AND PARTNERSHIPS

Academic Initiatives

Read staff continued these academic initiatives in the 2007–2008 school year.

- **Science focus:** Teachers focused on science through bimonthly staff development sessions with an AISD science department trainer. The goal was to develop scientific thinking among all students through weekly visits to the science laboratory. Students participated in hands-on activities using state-of-the-art equipment.
- **Full-inclusion Preschool program for children with disabilities (PPCD):** Highly qualified special education teachers and teacher assistants co-taught with AISD pre-

K teachers. Four-year-olds with disabilities were mainstreamed with typically developing 4-year-olds.

Parent and Community Partnerships

The Lucy Read Family Literacy Collaborative enlists the support of service providers, community advocates, and policy leaders. Program components of the literacy collaborative include adult education, early education, and parenting education. Read had a rich blend of community partnerships to benefit students and their families. Highlighted here are two efforts that had a large impact on Read, AmeriCorps, and the parent support specialist.

AmeriCorps (ACEE): Forty-two AmeriCorps participants served AISD pre-K students at Read. ACEE tutors were in most Read classroom 10 to 12 hours each week, providing small group early literacy lessons aligned with the *Prekindergarten Curriculum Guidelines* (TEA, 1999). In the second year of pre-K involvement, ACEE tutors and ACEE staff (with support from AISD, Silverton Foundation, KDK-Harman Foundation, and 3M) provided the following services to Read students, parents, and staff:

- **Science lab:** ACEE tutors coordinated and ran the science lab with hands-on science lessons that incorporated a reading and writing component.
- **Library:** ACEE tutors supported the Read library by assisting the librarian with hands-on activities to support read alouds.
- **Family Literacy Nights:** In conjunction with RIF and KLRU-PBS, ACEE tutors participated in Family Literacy Nights. ACEE tutors also provided child care for events such as KLRU Ready to Learn and RIF Book Club.
- **ESL Classes:** ACEE tutors provided ESL classes (beginner and intermediate) and child care for Read parents twice a week in the evenings.
- **Adult Literacy Classes:** ACEE staff taught a 12-session parent literacy class to English- and Spanish-speaking parents. Classes were offered in the morning and the evening.
- **Communities in Schools:** ACEE tutors provided support to the Communities in Schools-ASPIRE family literacy program at Read by teaching parents the weekly lesson/song/finger plays that their children were learning in their classroom.
- **Assistance with breakfast:** ACEE tutors and bus monitors supported Read staff each morning by helping 600 children get through breakfast and into their classrooms.

Parent support specialist: Read has a parent support specialist dedicated to supporting the integration of these services for the families of these 4-year-olds. The parent support specialist provided strong parent support through education for parents (e.g., classes in ESL, nutrition, science, teaching children to read) and services (e.g., health support and dental assistance). Approximately 100 Read parents completed adult literacy courses during 2007–2008 (in total, 280 participated). In addition, the parent support specialist coordinated community and parent volunteer efforts at Read. An example of coordinating parents and volunteers occurred at the end of school program, when the children performed a Mexican folk dance. Volunteers sewed vests and skirts for the children’s performance. According to the

parent support specialist, volunteers provided 1,500 hours of in-kind services for teachers and students during 2007–2008.

PPVT-III AND TVIP RESULTS FOR READ PRE-K STUDENTS

As part of a district program research plan to do a long-term follow-up study on AISD students in early elementary years, students in all Read classrooms were tested with the PPVT-III, and the Spanish ELL students were tested with the TVIP. Of the 1,975 pre-K students with valid pre- and posttests, 391 were students at Read (112 in English only and 279 in English and Spanish). The following is a summary of results for Read students, as compared with other district pre-K program students.

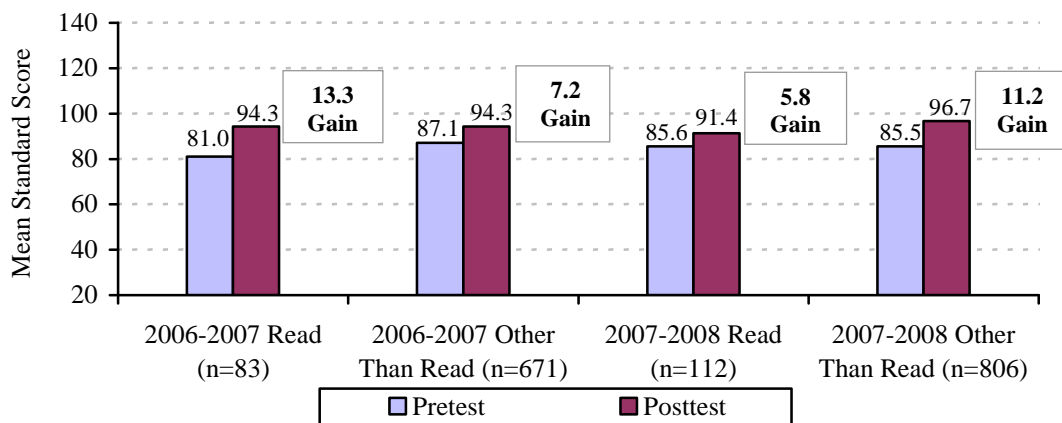
Overall Results

- Seventy percent of Read pre-K students who were tested made gains from pretest to posttest when tested in their language of instruction, compared with 77% for pre-K students from schools other than Read.
- Seventy-four percent of Read pre-K students were in the average range (85 to 115 standard score points) at the posttest when tested in their language of instruction, compared with 83% for pre-K students from schools other than Read. The number of students scoring in the average range increased by 40% from pretest to posttest for Read and by 48% for pre-K students from schools other than Read.

Results for English-Language Students

- The average raw score on the PPVT-III for English-only Read students increased from 42.4 in the fall to 56.9 in the spring, compared with 42.4 and 63.2, respectively, for English-only students from schools other than Read. This increase reflects an average growth in receptive vocabulary of 1 year, 1 month in a 7-month period for English-only students from Read, compared with 1 year, 6 months for English-only students from schools other than Read.
- The average PPVT-III posttest standard score for English-language Read students was 91.4, with a mean gain of 5.8, relative to 85.6, compared with a mean gain of 11.2 for English-language students from schools other than Read (Figure 14).

Figure 14. PPVT-III Pretest and Posttest Comparison for English-Language Pre-K Students at Read Pre-K Center and at Schools Other Than Read, 2006–2007 and 2007–2008

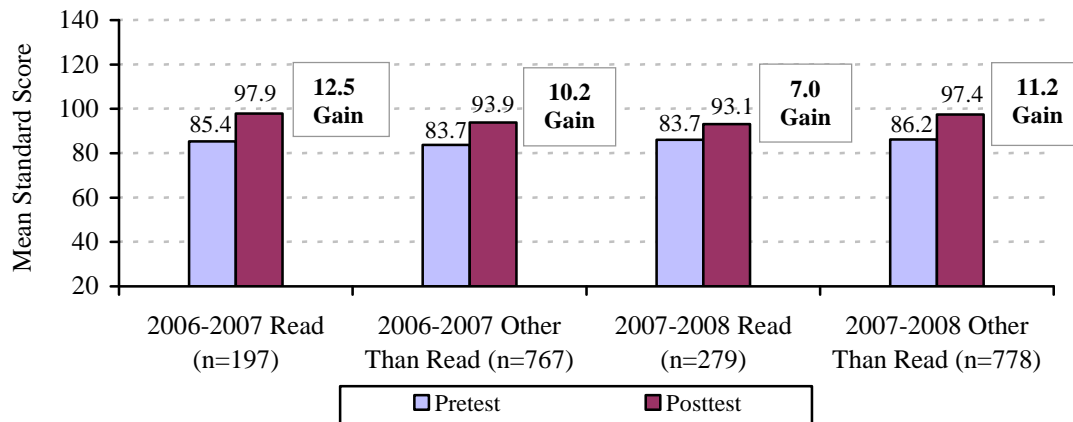


Source. DPE PPVT-III & TVIP 2006-2007 and 2007–2008 records

Results for Spanish ELL Students

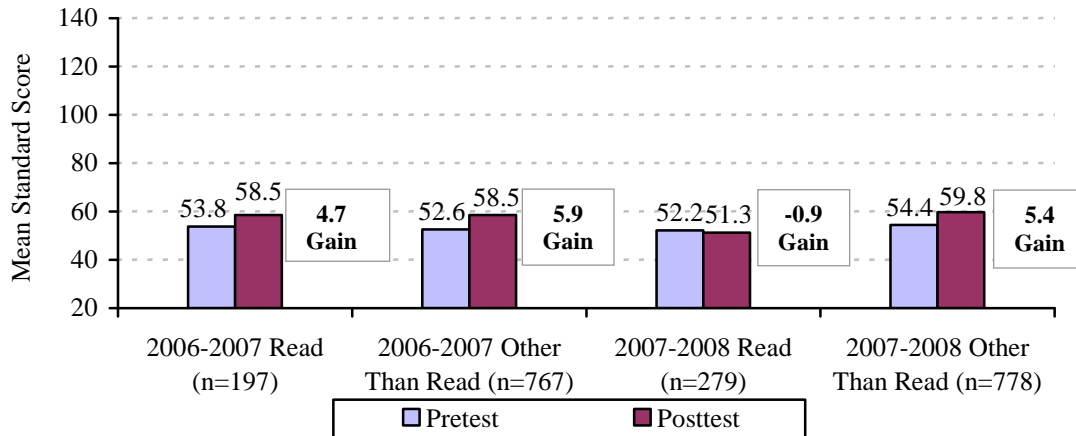
- The average raw score on the TVIP for Spanish ELL Read students increased from 19.7 in the fall to 31.2 in the spring, contrasted with 19.5 to 34.3, respectively, for Spanish ELL students from schools other than Read. This increase reflects an average growth in receptive vocabulary of 1 year in a 7-month period for Spanish ELL students from Read, and of 1 year, 3 months for Spanish ELL students from schools other than Read.
- The average posttest standard score on the TVIP for Spanish ELL Read students tested was 93.1, with a mean gain of 7.0 points, compared with 97.4 and a mean gain of 11.2 for Spanish ELL students from schools other than Read (Figure 15).
- The average posttest standard score on the PPVT-III for Spanish ELL Read students was 51.3, with a mean gain of -0.9, in contrast with an average posttest standard score of 59.8 and a gain of 5.4 for Spanish ELL students from schools other than Read (Figure 16).

Figure 15. TVIP Pretest and Posttest Comparison for Spanish ELL Pre-K Students at Read and at Schools Other Than Read, 2006–2007 and 2007–2008



Source. DPE PPVT-III & TVIP 2006–2007 and 2007–2008 records

Figure 16. PPVT-III Pretest and Posttest Comparison for Spanish ELL Pre-K Students at Read Pre-K Center and at Schools Other Than Read, 2006–2007 and 2007–2008



Source. DPE PPVT-III & TVIP 2006–2007 and 2007–2008 records

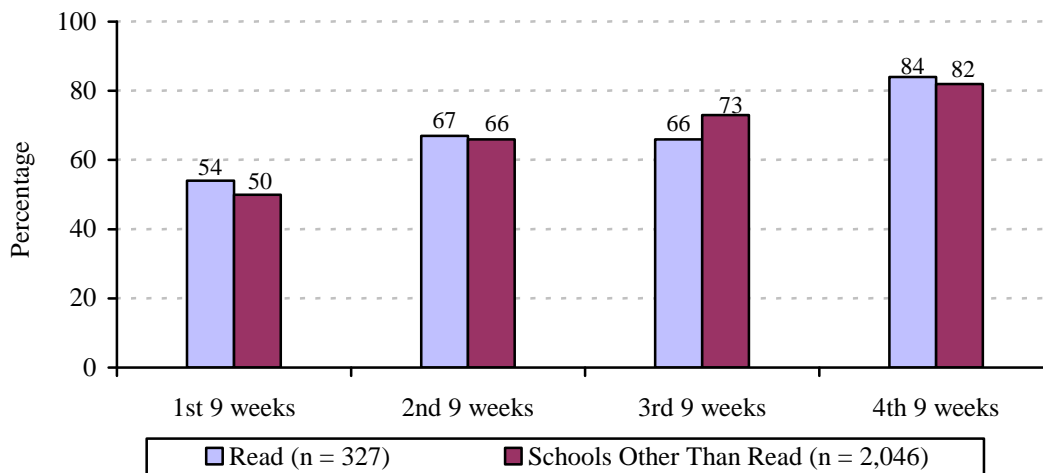
Note. TVIP is not normed for Spanish ELL students.

After achieving remarkable gains the first year, the 2007–2008 PPVT-III and TVIP gains for Read students were surpassed by pre-K students at schools other than Read. The increased enrollment experienced at Read along with the strains on facilities and schedules may have had an impact on Read’s student achievement during 2007–2008.

SCIENCE FOCUS

In 2007–2008, the Read campus continued its focus on science professional development opportunities. At Read, teachers and ACEE tutors took students to a specially designed science laboratory once each week and received on-site training in science-based inquiry. The science report card data were analyzed to see if variation was evident in science grades between pre-K students at Read and pre-K students at other AISD schools. At the end of the 2006–2007 school year, the percentage of students on grade level in science was higher at Read (82%) than at schools other than Read (59%). In the second year of the districtwide science initiative, science achievement for all pre-K students increased. As shown in Figure 17, 84% of Read students and 82% of students at other schools were on grade level in science at the end of 2007–2008.

Figure 17. Percentage of Pre-K Students at Read and Other Schools on Grade Level in Science Each 9-Week Period, 2007–2008



Source. AISD InteGrade Pro electronic report card data for pre-K, 2007–2008

READ TEACHER SURVEY

Seventy-seven percent (n = 23) of the Read teachers responded to the online 2007–2008 Prekindergarten Teacher Survey in April 2008. Some of the questions asked were specific to the second year at the demonstration school. One teacher summed up the atmosphere at Read this way:

The focus of Read is not only on academic rigor, but also on building character education and life skills. These educational elements are essential in helping children academically as well as socially. Since the administration is also schooled in the importance of early childhood education, they are able to support and train teachers in real, meaningful ways.

Strengths of the Pre-K Program at Read

When asked to respond to statements about the Read campus, 95% to 100% of the teachers agreed or strongly agreed with the following statements:

- At Read, we have the necessary curriculum and resources that are needed to meet the academic needs of our pre-K students (95.5%).
- The professional development opportunities provided at Read expanded my knowledge of developmentally appropriate practices for accelerating the learning of disadvantaged 4-year-olds (95.5%).
- Read teachers work together to plan and share ideas for an effective pre-K program (95.5%).
- The science lab at Read has a positive impact on science learning for pre-K students (100%).

According to Read teachers (n = 17), the greatest strength of the pre-K center was the early childhood focus for the entire campus. One Read teacher said,

Both students and teachers benefit from the fact that the entire focus of the school is pre-K. Everyone is on the same track as far as curriculum, and the whole staff works together to provide the highest quality of education to Read students.

Another teacher said that the “great set of teachers, aides, and administrators at this campus makes it a great learning environment for all of our students here at Lucy Read.”

Suggestions for Improvement of the Pre-K Program at Read

Read teachers indicated that more instructional time needs to be available during the school day for instruction. One teacher said that Read administrators “continue to keep every possible teaching minute available for instruction.” According to another teacher, “Our school is overcrowded. Learning is compromised when a school is overcrowded. We need a cap on the number of children that Lucy Read can accommodate.”

The two items on the Read teacher survey that received the least agreement in the survey were the following statements about class size and student attendance:

- My class size has stayed at or below the recommended number of 18 students most of the year (45% disagreed or strongly disagreed).
- The logistics of managing almost 600 4-year-olds at Read this year did not detract from instructional time available to students (41% disagreed or strongly disagreed).

Read Administrator Input

The Read administrative supervisor was asked to respond to the Read Administrator Survey. When asked what benefits students and teachers receive from the early childhood focus at Read, the principal said, “I think the biggest benefit is the ability of the administrative staff to focus on the needs of the young child, and being able to create a community of learners, teachers as well as students, who meet those needs.”

In its second year, Read had many challenges to work through. According to the principal, “Our biggest challenge was the increased number of students and staff that we received by adding a fourth school.”

Another big challenge was lack of money. According to the principal, “There are many things that we had to do without, or budget tightly, because we receive no Title I money.” This was the case in spite of the fact that 91% of Read pre-K students qualified for free- or reduced-price lunch. The Title I funds for these students are received at their home campus. Some of the other difficulties that resulted from lack of funds included the following, according to the principal:

- No budget existed for art or PE materials because the school did not have any special area teachers (i.e., art, music, and PE).
- Administrators spent many hours working in the cafeteria because of the inability to find permanent cafeteria monitors who were willing to stay and work for the low pay offered by the district.

SUMMARY

AISD is committed to improving early learning for disadvantaged 4-year-olds. The full-day program provides a highly qualified teacher for each pre-K classroom. Pre-K teachers have been involved in writing and revising the IPGs and the pre-K assessment rubrics, which are excellent tools to guide instruction and ongoing assessment in pre-K classrooms.

AISD has provided additional resources to make it possible for 4-year-olds who qualify to attend a full-day pre-K program. In 2007–2008, 5,132 4-year-olds attended pre-K at 67 elementary campuses, including the Read Prekindergarten Demonstration School. The two program eligibility criteria most often met were limited English proficiency and economically disadvantaged requirements: In 2007–2008, 94% of students were from low-income families, 60% were ELLs, and 55% qualified by both income and language.

AISD has a long history of collaborating with the community. In the 2007–2008 school year, the AISD pre-K program participated in many innovative programs and partnerships to promote integration of services for pre-K students and their families. In addition to community partnerships, AISD placed three pre-K teachers in community preschools, serving 31 4-year-olds who would not have had the benefit of instruction by a certified teacher.

The district pre-K program evaluates the progress of its students by two types of assessments. Pre-K teachers use the pre-K assessment rubrics to monitor student progress and report academic progress to parents each 9-week period in oral language, pre-reading/concepts of print, listening, writing, mathematics, science, social studies, ESL, and personal development. The district uses the PPVT-III and TVIP assessments on a sample of district pre-K students as a program evaluation of student progress in language and literacy. Growth in receptive vocabulary is measured from pretest to posttest on the one-on-one assessment across years.

A total of 1,975 pre-K students had valid PPVT-III/TVIP pre- and posttest scores (920 in English only and 1,055 in English and Spanish). Major student achievement findings from the 2007–2008 PPVT-III and TVIP district testing sample indicate that the AISD pre-K program was effective:

- Seventy-six percent of English-language students made gains on the PPVT and 78% of all Spanish ELL students made gains on the TVIP, as measured from pretest to posttest.
- Gains for English-language students on the PPVT-III and for Spanish ELL students on the TVIP indicate that students showed growth that was about two times greater than expected for 4-year-olds after a 7-month period of instruction.
- At the posttest, 81% (n = 1,596) of all students were in the average range on tests in their language of instruction (80% in Spanish and 83% in English).

The revised *AISD Pre-K Report Card Assessment Rubrics* (AISD, 2007a) have been helpful tools for teachers to evaluate the academic progress of pre-K students. Mathematics and writing had the highest percentages of students on grade level at the end of the year (88% and 86%, respectively), compared with other content areas. The percentage of pre-K students on grade level in science at the end of the year increased from 79% in 2006–2007 to 82% in 2007–2008. Although progress was made by students who received an ESL score, only 48% of those students were on grade level in English at the end of the year.

Also important to readiness for kindergarten is social development. The growth in personal development was evident in the increase in the percentages of students meeting expectations on all traits, from 32% at the end of the first 9-week period to 69% at the end of the school year.

An analysis of 2008 TAKS reading and mathematics data at grade 3 for a cohort of students who attended pre-K in 2003–2004 indicates that those students who attended pre-K, especially English-language low-income students, had TAKS reading and mathematics passing rates above district passing rates for low-income students.

During its second year of operation in 2007–2008, Read experienced growing pains. The enrollment at Read increased by 53%, from 421 in 2006–2007 to 641 in 2007–2008. Because the facility was not large enough to absorb these additional students, portable buildings were needed for classrooms. The number of teachers increased from 22 to 30 during the same time. Schedules for use of the other Read facilities (e.g., cafeteria, science lab, and library) were affected. This growth and other factors may have had an impact on student achievement gains on the PPVT-III and the TVIP at Read, which were lower than gains at other schools with pre-K during 2007–2008.

The 2007–2008 student achievement data for pre-K students provides evidence that the pre-K program was effective. However, there are academic areas of concern to be addressed including the following:

- The percentages of students on grade level at the end of the year decreased in 5 of 8 academic areas from 2006–2007 to 2007–2008, as reported by teachers on the Pre-K Report Card.
- After an impressive first year, the Read PPVT-III and TVIP posttest averages and gains declined in 2007–2008.
- After two years of decline in PPVT-III gains for Spanish ELL students, there is a need for increased rigor in the English instruction in bilingual classrooms.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As state and national expectations become more rigorous, the educators of young children face many challenges. The district should continue to implement developmentally appropriate practices for pre-K, while supporting the academic rigor required for these 4-year-olds to read on grade level by grade 3 and thereafter.

The AISD pre-K program faces possible challenges with funding in 2009–2010. TEA has announced that the Prekindergarten Expansion Grant, which provides 30% of AISD funding, will no longer be a continuation grant with the current grantees. According to a TEA communication in July 2008,

Cycle 14 (2008–2009) is expected to be the last year that the Prekindergarten Expansion Grant will be a continuation grant with the current eligible grantees. Cycle 14 grantees will not be guaranteed eligibility for a grant in 2009–2010. Applicants for the 2009–2010 school year will be ranked based on criteria to be determined through the commissioner’s rule-making process. In case they are not selected to receive a grant for 2009–2010, Cycle 14 grantees should consider alternative resources to continue funding their full-day prekindergarten programs beyond the 2008–2009 program year.

Integration of services for 4-year-olds by public, private, and nonprofit institutions will continue to be the expectation of the state of Texas. The following recommendations are offered to AISD decision makers to continue a high-quality full-day pre-k program for disadvantaged four-year-old:

- Closely monitor the application process for the 2009–2010 Prekindergarten Expansion Grant and ensure that all requirements are met.
- Work with community organizations to find additional opportunities for integrating services for pre-K students and their families.
- Consider other funding sources for the pre-K program in case Prekindergarten Expansion Grant funds are no longer available.
- Continue to provide high-quality staff development opportunities to all pre-K teachers that will help them accelerate learning for their students and will provide them with opportunities to observe and share teaching strategies with colleagues.
- Provide resources and training to accelerate English language acquisition for Spanish ELL pre-K students in bilingual classrooms.
- Consider reducing the student enrollment at Read because high enrollment has placed a hardship on the campus that serves as a pre-K demonstration site where best practices and innovative strategies can be developed that can be replicated in other schools in the district.
- Consider creating an attendance zone for Read in order to receive Title I funds. In 2007-2008, 94% of Read pre-K students qualified for free- or reduced-price lunch. However, the Title I funds for these students are received at their home campuses.

APPENDICES

**APPENDIX A: 2007–2008 AUSTIN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT PREKINDERGARTEN
PROGRAMS: NUMBER OF STUDENTS AND CAMPUS FUNDING**

Schools with a pre-K program	Number of pre-K students served	Title I elementary school	Pre-K Expansion Grant funding*
Allan	66	x	x
Allison	84	x	x
Andrews	102	x	x
Barrington	125	x	x
Becker	31	x	x
Blackshear	38	x	x
Blanton	85	x	
Blazier	61	x	
Boone	32		
Brentwood	29		x
Brooke	48	x	x
Brown	80	x	x
Campbell	56	x	x
Casey	70	x	x
Casis	12		
Cowan	32		
Cunningham	39	x	x
Davis	35		
Dawson	34	x	x
Doss	19		
Galindo	100	x	x
Govalle	59	x	x
Graham	95	x	x
Harris	120	x	x
Hart	132	x	
Hill	18		
Houston	133	x	x
Jordan	101	x	x
Joslin	40	x	
Kocurek	60	x	x
Langford	116	x	x
Linder	166	x	x
Maplewood	34	x	x
Mathews	43	x	x
Menchaca	57		x
Metz	86	x	X
Mills	58		

Schools with a pre-K program	Number of pre-K students served	Title I elementary school	Pre-K Expansion Grant funding*
Norman	61	x	x
Oak Hill	66		x
Oak Springs	53	x	x
Odom	99	x	
Ortega	31	x	x
Overton	81	x	
Palm	75	x	x
Patton	43		
Pecan Springs	90	x	x
Perez	117	x	
Pickle	118	x	x
Pillow	66	x	
Pleasant Hill	83	x	
Read Pre-K Center**	621		
Reilly	45	x	x
Ridgetop	29	x	x
Rodriguez	138	x	
St. Elmo	61	x	
Sanchez	83	x	x
Sims	60	x	x
Summitt	40		x
Sunset Valley	60	x	x
Travis Heights	66	x	x
Walnut Creek	39	x	x
Widen	112	x	x
Williams	55	x	
Winn	72	x	x
Wooten	99	x	x
Zavala	50	x	x
Zilker	23		x
Total (67 schools)	5,132	53	47*

Source. AISD program evaluation pre-K student records, 2007–2008

Note. Elementary schools without pre-K programs in 2007–2008 were Baranoff, Barton Hills, Bryker Woods, Clayton, Cook, Gullett, Highland Park, Kiker, Lee, McBee, Pease, and Wooldridge.

* Forty-seven schools were part of the Prekindergarten Expansion Grant as of 2001–2002. The additional schools that moved to full-day programs after 2002–2003 were not part of the grant. Local and federal funds are used to supplement the pre-K budget.

** Read Pre-K Center serves students from 4 Title I schools: Cook, McBee, Walnut Creek, and Wooldridge.

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