

BACKGROUND

In the 2012–2013 school year, Austin Independent School District’s (AISD) High-Dosage Tutoring (HDT) Program continued into its second year. The AISD Office of Turnaround Schools developed HDT to boost students’ achievement across 10 campuses in the district. The goals of the HDT initiative were:

- Provide regularly scheduled tutoring to students in targeted grade levels or subjects
- Base tutoring on students’ unique academic needs
- Improve academic achievement in targeted subject areas

HDT is one of the five tenets researched and recommended by the Harvard Education Innovation Laboratory to improve academic achievement. In 2012–2013, HDT reached four elementary schools (Govalle, Langford, Ortega, and Widen); three middle schools (Burnet, Martin, and Mendez); and three high schools (Eastside Memorial, Lanier, and Travis). The program targeted 3rd graders in reading, 6th graders in mathematics (math), and students taking Algebra I in high school (primarily 9th graders).

The AISD HDT Program was supported by a combination of district funds, Title I funds, and federal Texas Title I Priority Schools (TTIPS) improvement grants. With support from federal TTIPS grants, Lanier High School and Burnet Middle School joined the initiative in November, 2011.

TUTORING PROGRAM OVERVIEW

A combination of internal, district-employed tutors and external tutoring service providers offered tutoring services to the 10 campuses. Tutors were required to have earned at least a bachelor’s degree. External tutors received at least 2 days of training, plus a day for campus orientation, before starting to work. Internal tutors received 5 days of training before beginning work. The initiative aimed to provide personalized, frequent tutoring in small group settings, with an average of at least 45 minutes of tutoring per student every day. Tutors worked with small groups of students (in a 2:1 or 3:1 student-to-tutor ratio) during the school day to provide guided instruction that reinforced classroom lesson plans. Tutors worked to identify and work on students’ unique learning needs and adjusted instruction for each student, as appropriate. Tutoring service providers are shown in Table 1.

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Table 1. Summary of Campus High-Dosage Tutoring (HDT), 2012–2013

Campus	Grade/Subject	Provider	Students Served
Eastside Memorial High School	Algebra I	Sylvan Learning	78
Lanier High School	Algebra I	Catapult Learning, District tutors	366
Travis High School	Algebra I	Sylvan Learning	302
Burnet Middle School	6th-grade mathematics	Princeton Review	460
Martin Middle School	6th-grade mathematics	Princeton Review	203
Mendez Middle School	6th-grade mathematics	Catapult Learning, District tutors	312
Govalle Elementary	3rd-grade reading	Sylvan Learning	91
Langford Elementary	3rd-grade reading	District tutors	127
Ortega Elementary	3rd-grade reading	Sylvan Learning	53
Widen Elementary	3rd-grade reading	District tutors	100
Total students			2,092

Source. AISD Student Enrollment Records, 2012–2013

Note. The numbers of students served are approximate because the number of students enrolled in HDT programs fluctuated throughout the year.

ASSESSMENTS OF STUDENTS' PROGRESS

Various assessments were used to gauge students' progress during the course of the year. Third graders were tested throughout the year using the Diagnostic Reading Assessment (DRA). At the end of the school year, students in each HDT area took the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) exam in their respective subject.

DATA LIMITATIONS

Before examining results of this study, it is important to consider limitations of the data. A matched comparison analysis of outcomes for HDT students and for students from non-HDT schools was outside the scope of this evaluation because an appropriate comparison group could not be determined. However, this evaluation determined the outcomes for students who were in the program during the year. This report presents end-of-year results on state assessments, in terms of students' ability to meet each standard. The DRA describes changes in meeting grade-level expectations at the beginning and end of the year. This report looks at students' outcomes at the end of their year within the HDT Program; it does not follow students to study long-lasting effects. Researchers did not spend time analyzing tutors' fidelity to the program and curriculum, thus limiting the conclusions that can be drawn from the student outcomes.

ALGEBRA I PROGRAM SUMMARY

Algebra I Tutoring Overview

The Algebra I HDT program at Eastside Memorial was facilitated by Sylvan Learning staff. Staff included 15 tutors and a site manager, serving approximately 78 students. Two teachers at Eastside Memorial participated in the program. Students received 90 minutes of tutoring services every other school day (225 minutes per week) and met with their tutors on 178 days during the year.

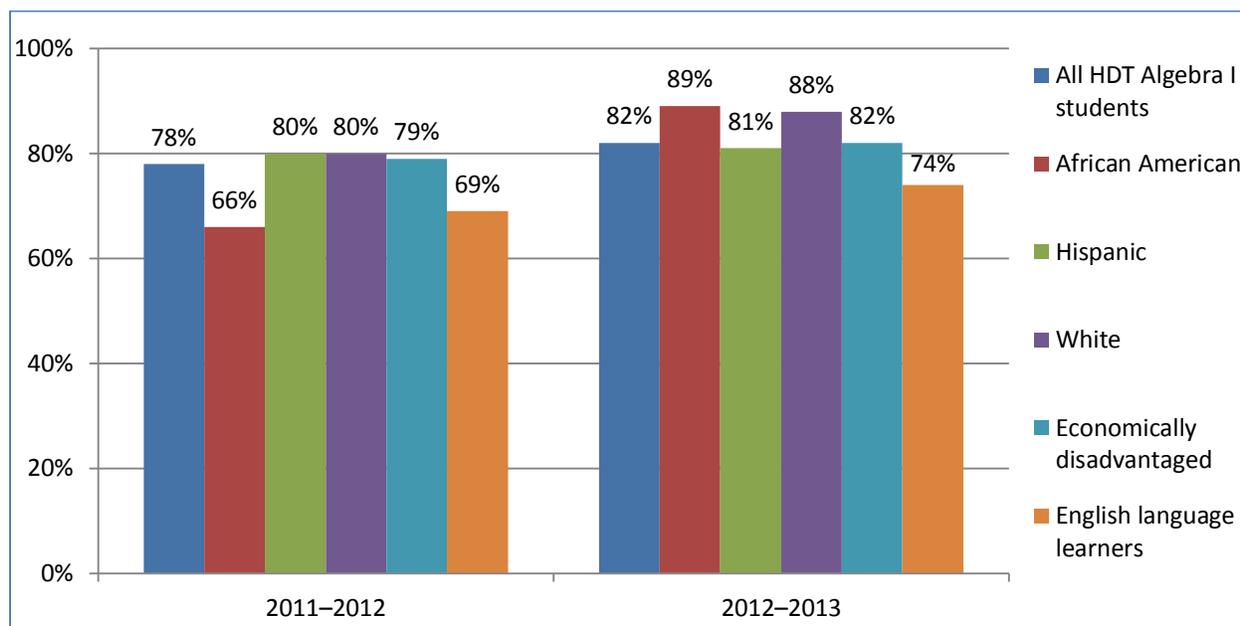
Lanier used Catapult Learning for their Algebra I HDT program. Staff included 46 tutors and an education coordinator, and provided services to approximately 366 students. Six teachers took part at Lanier. Catapult provided 148 days of service, including 75 minutes per day and meetings 3 days per week (225 minutes per week).

Travis used Sylvan Learning to facilitate the HDT program. Thirty-three tutors and a site supervisor served approximately 302 Algebra I students. Six teachers participated at this site. Tutors provided 154 days of service, including 90 minutes every other school day (225 minutes per week).

Algebra I End-of-Course Assessment Results

High school students enrolled in Algebra I took the STAAR end-of-course (EOC) test for Algebra I at the end of the 2012–2013 school year. Eighty-two percent of the students participating in the HDT Algebra I program met the EOC standard. Results varied according to ethnicity, native language, and economic status (Figure 1). In the 2012–2013 school year, English language learners in HDT schools scored significantly¹ lower on the Algebra I EOC exam compared with the average for students at HDT schools. English language learners passed at a rate of 74%, compared with 82% of all HDT students. Student outcomes varied only slightly across schools in 2012–2013 (Figure 2); no school had a passing rate significantly different than the 82% passing rate for all HDT students.

Figure 1. High-Dosage Tutoring (HDT) Students Who Met End-of-Course (EOC) Algebra I Standard, 2011–2012, 2012–2013

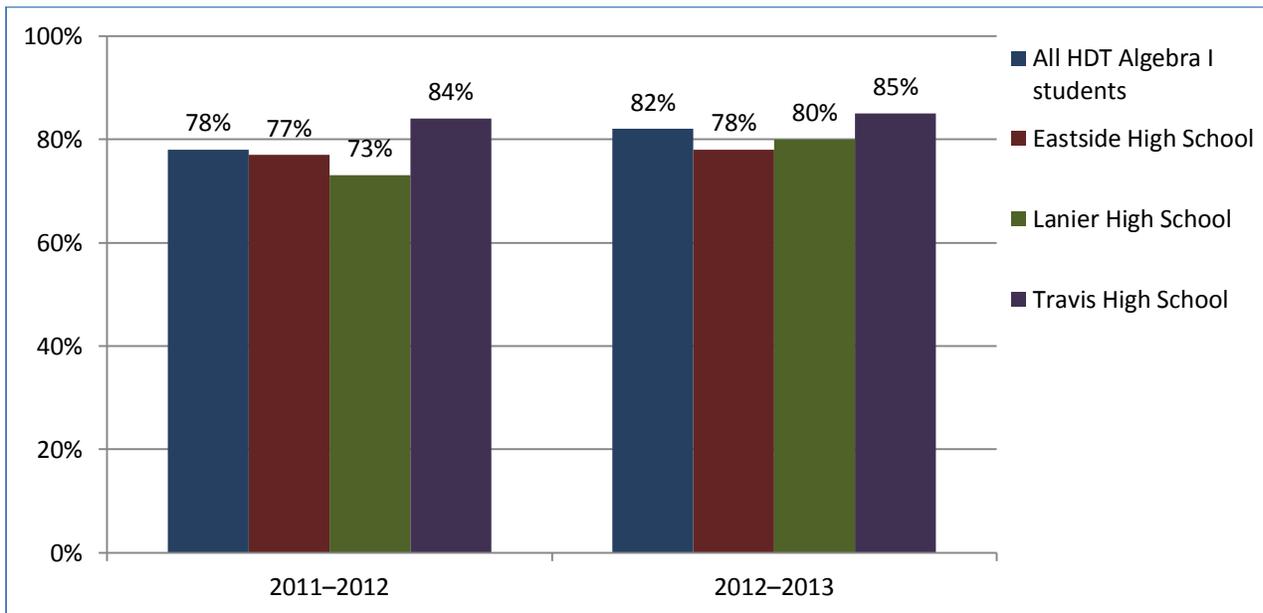


Source. District STAAR, EOC Results, 2012, 2013

Note. Not all students in each HDT program were tested, so percentages may not align with the total number of students.

¹ “Significant” refers to a statistically significant difference at the 95% confidence interval.

Figure 2. High-Dosage Tutoring (HDT) Students Who Met End-of-Course (EOC) Algebra I Standard, by School, 2011–2012, 2012–2013



Source. District STAAR, EOC Results, 2012, 2013

Note. Not all students in each HDT program were tested, so percentages may not align with the total number of students.

SIXTH-GRADE MATH PROGRAM SUMMARY

Sixth-Grade Math Tutoring Overview

Burnet administrators selected Princeton Review to provide math tutoring services for their 6th graders. Princeton Review employed 23 full-time tutors, 12 part-time tutors (35 tutors total), and a site supervisor at Burnet, reaching approximately 460 students. Four teachers participated at Burnet. Students received 45 minutes of tutoring services every other school day, as well as push-in tutors in every math classroom.

Martin also used Princeton Review, employing 16 tutors who served approximately 203 students. Two teachers took part at Martin. Tutors provided 171 days of service, offering 90-minute sessions every other school day (an average of 225 minutes per week).

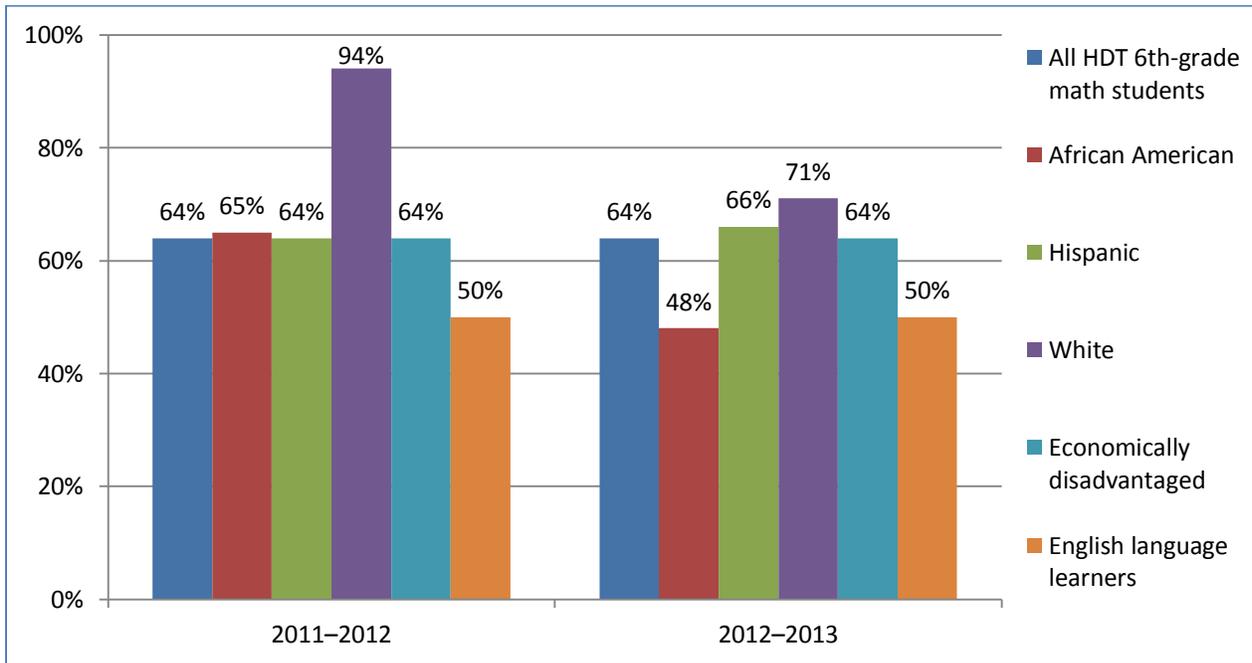
Catapult Learning managed the HDT program at Mendez, using seven district tutors and 22 Catapult tutors (29 total), supervised by an education coordinator. Tutors provided services to approximately 312 6th graders. Three teachers from Mendez participated. Tutors and students met 5 days a week for 57 minutes per session (285 minutes per week), on a total of 163 days.

Sixth-Grade STAAR Math Assessment Results

Sixth-grade students in AISD take the STAAR test in math at the end of the school year. In the spring of 2013, HDT students took the STAAR math test. Of the 839 students enrolled in 6th-grade math HDT, 64% met the STAAR math standard. African American students and English language learners passed at significantly lower rates (48% and 50%, respectively; Figure 3).

Results from the 2012 and 2013 STAAR tests summarized for each HDT school can be found in Figure 4. Students at Mendez, the only middle school that did not receive TTIPS funding, passed the 6th-grade STAAR math standard at a rate of 66%, only slightly higher than the average of 64%. Students from Martin met the STAAR standard at a significantly lower rate (i.e., 9 percentage points lower) than did all HDT students (53% and 64%, respectively).

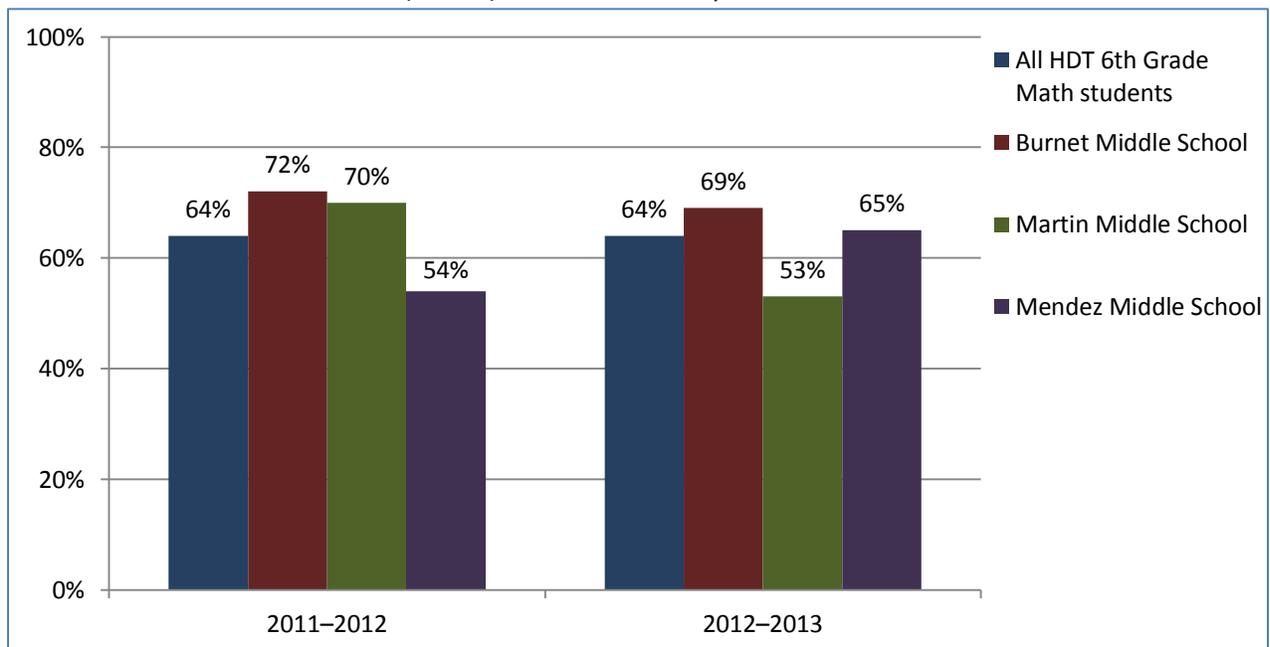
Figure 3. High-Dosage Tutoring (HDT) Students Who Met Sixth-Grade State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) Math Standard, 2011–2012, 2012–2013



Source. District STAAR Results, 2012, 2013

Note. Not all students in each HDT program were tested, so percentages may not align with the total number of students.

Figure 4. High-Dosage Tutoring (HDT) Students Who Met Sixth-Grade State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) Math Standard, by School, 2011–2012, 2012–2013



Source. District STAAR Results, 2012, 2013

Note. Not all students in each HDT program were tested, so percentages may not align with the total number of students.

THIRD-GRADE READING PROGRAM SUMMARY

Third-Grade Reading Tutoring Overview

Sylvan Learning tutors implemented the 3rd-grade HDT program at Govalle and Ortega. Eleven Sylvan tutors shared their time between Govalle and Ortega, supervised by a Sylvan program coordinator. Five teachers at Govalle and three teachers at Ortega participated. Tutors served approximately 91 students at Govalle and 53 at Ortega. Sylvan tutors met with pairs of students for 45 minutes a day. They worked at Ortega from 7:45 am to 10 am and at Govalle from 10:30 am to 2:15 pm. Tutors had planning time before or after their meetings with students and conducted afterschool tutoring at both schools from 2:45 pm to 4:00 pm twice a week.

Ten in-house AISD district tutors met with students at Langford, and 11 AISD tutors worked with students at Widen. A district reading specialist managed and oversaw these 21 tutors. Six teachers’ classes at Langford and five teachers’ classes at Widen took part in the HDT program. AISD tutors worked with approximately 127 students at Langford and 100 at Widen.

Third-Grade Reading Assessment Results

Ortega Elementary

Ortega provides a unique opportunity to evaluate the effect of HDT on students’ performance on the STAAR exam. Ortega joined the HDT program at the beginning of the 2012–2013 school year. All other HDT schools in the district joined during the 2011–2012 school year, the year the STAAR exam was first administered. Because STAAR data were not available prior to 2011–2012, STAAR results prior to HDT implementation could not be compared with results using HDT, except in the case of Ortega. Comparing

Ortega’s 3rd-grade STAAR reading test results from 2011–2012 (before implementing HDT) with results from 2012–2013 (after implementing HDT), students increased their passing rate by five percentage points. However, this difference was not statistically significant and cannot be used to indicate progress after implementing the HDT program.

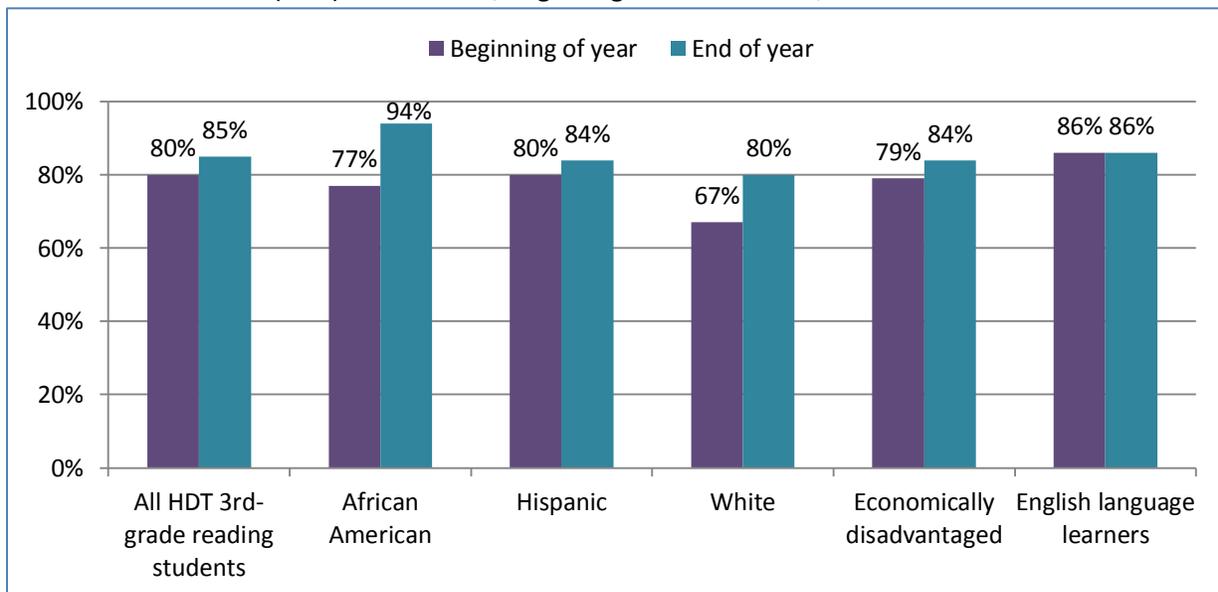
Diagnostic Reading Assessment

Staff in the 3rd-grade reading HDT program tested students with the DRA at the beginning of the year and end of the year to evaluate whether students met grade-level expectations. The DRA assesses a student’s reading capabilities and is used to identify a child’s reading level, accuracy, fluency, and comprehension. This information can be used to help plan instruction.

Eighty percent of all HDT 3rd graders met the DRA benchmark in the beginning of the year. Student outcomes varied slightly when ethnicity and other demographic features were factored in, but no significant differences were found between the DRA passing rates of the subgroups analyzed (Figure 5). Also, no significant changes were found from the beginning-of-year to end-of-year passing rates in these groups.

Students’ DRA results varied more between schools than between other subgroups (Figure 6). Ortega students passed at a significantly higher rate than did all HDT students (98% and 80%, respectively). Ortega students also passed at a significantly higher rate at the end of the year than did all HDT students (96% and 85%, respectively). At the beginning of the year, Widen students met the DRA benchmark at a significantly lower rate than did all HDT students (66% and 80%, respectively). By the end of the year, Widen students’ passing rate was not significantly different from the average rate of all HDT students. From the beginning of the year to the end of the year, Widen students significantly improved their DRA passing rate, from 66% passing to 83% passing.

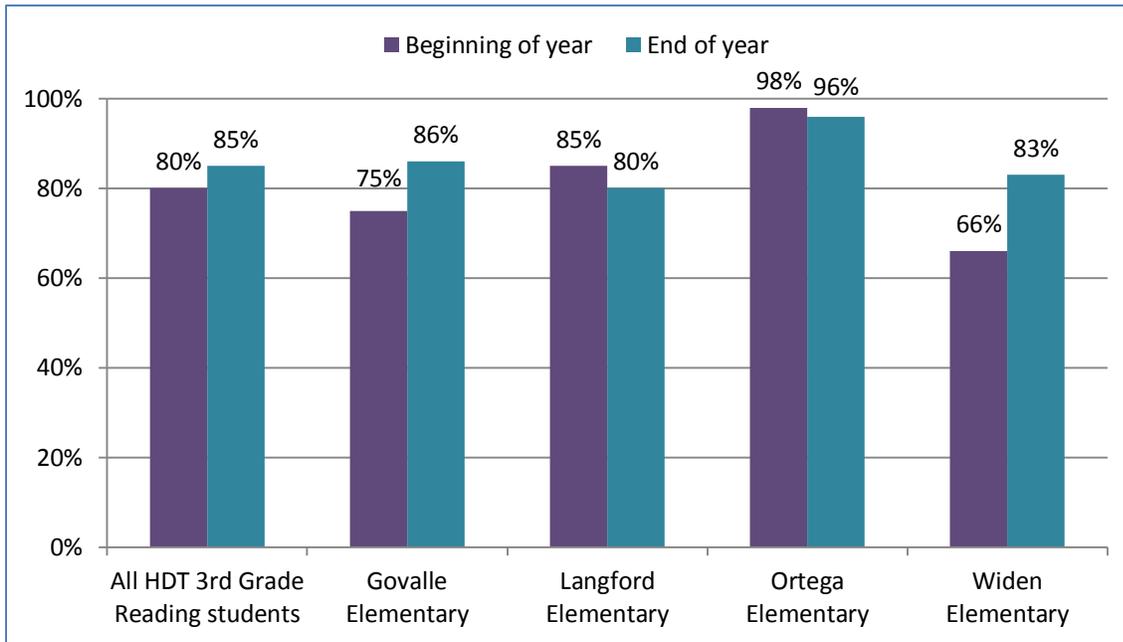
Figure 5. High-Dosage Tutoring (HDT) Students Who Met Third-Grade Diagnostic Reading Assessment (DRA) Benchmarks, Beginning and End of Year, 2012–2013



Source. District DRA Results, 2012–2013

Note. Not all students in each HDT program were tested, so percentages may not align with the total number of students.

Figure 6. HDT Students Who Met 3rd DRA Benchmarks, Beginning and End of Year, by School, 2012–2013



Source. District DRA Results, 2012–2013

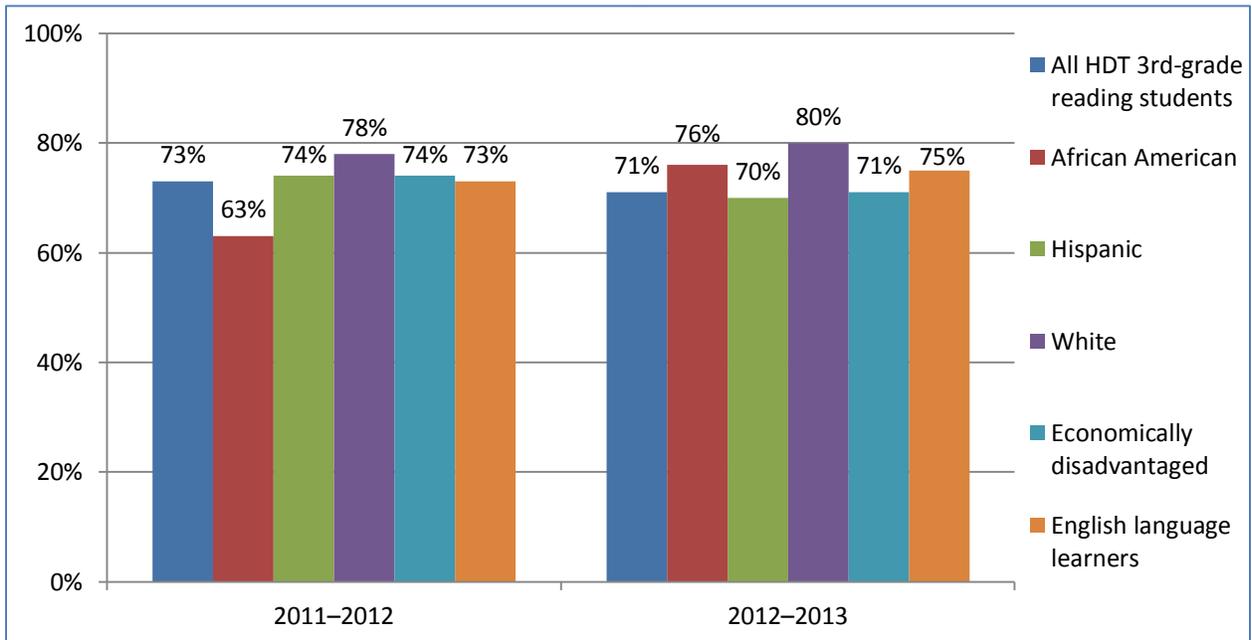
Note. Not all students in each HDT program were tested, so percentages may not align with the total number of students.

Third-Grade STAAR Reading Assessment

Third graders in AISD take the STAAR exam at the end of the school year, which includes a reading section. Results of the 3rd-grade STAAR reading test (Figure 7) were mostly consistent across ethnicity groups, economically disadvantaged students, and English language learners in 2012–2013. No significant differences were found in passing rates.

Similar to DRA results, student outcomes on the STAAR test varied more by school than by other subgroups (Figure 8). Seventy-one percent of all HDT students passed the 3rd-grade STAAR reading test. Ninety-two percent of students at Ortega passed, which was significantly higher than the average of 71%.

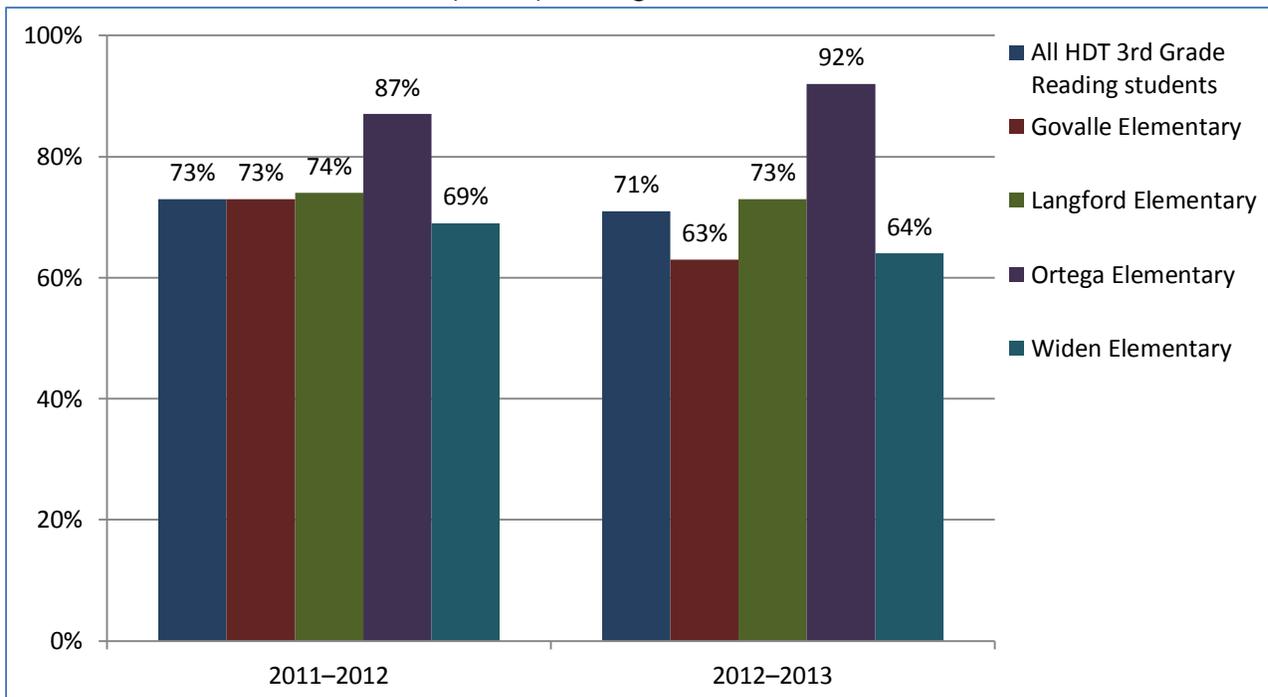
Figure 7. High-Dosage Tutoring (HDT) Students Who Met Third-Grade State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) Reading Standard, 2011–2012, 2012–2013



Source. District STAAR Results, 2012, 2013

Note. Not all students in each HDT program were tested, so percentages may not align with the total number of students.

Figure 8. High-Dosage Tutoring (HDT) Students Who Met Third-Grade State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) Reading Standard, 2011–2012, 2012–2013



Source. District STAAR Results, 2012, 2013

Note. Not all students in each HDT program were tested, so percentages may not align with the total number of students.

TUTOR , TEACHER, AND STUDENT SURVEYS

At the end of the 2012–2013 school year, teachers, students, and tutors at the HDT campuses were invited to complete surveys about their experiences with and perceptions of their HDT program. Surveys were administered electronically. Thirty-five teachers, 142 tutors, and 1,607 students completed surveys. Results from student and teacher surveys are organized by program, following the tutor survey results.

Tutor Survey Results

Of the 196 tutors, 142 took the HDT survey (a response rate of 72%), and responses were very positive. Tutors gave the most positive feedback when asked about working with their students and the effects of their HDT program. Almost all tutors agreed that they “enjoyed working with my students” and 96% agreed that HDT helped students develop confidence and make academic progress. Tutors were less positive when asked about their training: only 65% agreed they were trained effectively to manage student behavior and 72% indicated they were included in relevant training throughout the school year. Responses to statements about support were mixed: 85% felt well supported in their tutoring and 80% received helpful feedback from their supervisor, but only 52% reported they communicated regularly with teachers.

In open-ended comments, tutors indicated they appreciated the small group settings. One tutor said, “The one-on-one tutoring allowed me to zero in on the students deficiencies.” Tutors liked forming bonds with students and felt that HDT was a successful intervention that improved student confidence. One tutor said, “I love building relationships with my students and being apart *sic* of their academic success.” Another said, “This program has the potential to help students build strong foundation for the given subject and enhances their confidence.”

This program has the potential to help students build strong foundation for the given subject and enhances their confidence.

— HDT tutor

Many tutors cited problems with managing students’ behavior or receiving support on disciplinary issues. Tutors also indicated they felt disconnected from the rest of the school employees and had issues with the curriculum (e.g., lack of coherency, fun, and flexibility following it). One tutor said, “There was little to no interaction with the rest of the school for most of the year.” Another said, “Because we decided to track the teachers’ lessons, the curriculum we used was cobbled together, and not very coherent.”

Behavioral issues were a problem since there was not a strong disciplinary program in place. As tutors we really didn't have much authority to give students any consequences for poor behavior.

— HDT tutor

Algebra I Survey Results

Teachers

Fourteen 9th-grade teachers (100%) responded to the survey about their experiences with the Algebra I HDT program and gave almost exclusively positive feedback. The majority of teachers responded positively to every question about training, except for a question about including tutors in school training. Teachers also agreed with every statement about program implementation and HDT results.

I loved how I got individual time with my students.

— Algebra I teacher

One hundred percent agreed that “The tutoring curriculum effectively supported and reinforced my instruction” and almost all teachers agreed that “my students seemed to better understand Algebra I.”

When asked for additional comments about what they liked most about the program, 9th-grade teachers were enthusiastic about the small groups and their ability to have individual time with their students. Teachers also thought, in the words of one teacher, the “lessons paralleled the curriculum in the classroom well.”

Asked about their least favorite feature, teachers indicated they were concerned about some tutors’ teaching styles; that is, specifically, that they taught material before it was covered in class or moved too quickly through the material.

At times, tutors taught different methods of solving problems than I did in class, which sometimes caused confusion.

— Algebra I teacher

Students

In the Algebra I program, 646 students responded to the survey, a response rate of 87%. Responses were very positive, especially to statements about their tutors (e.g., “My tutor encourages me...” “My tutor helped me become better at Algebra I,” and “My tutor cares about how I do...”) Only 73% of students agreed with the statement “I like Algebra I better because of my tutor,” but 91% agreed that HDT helped them get better grades. Answering the question “How many tutors have you worked with this year during your algebra tutoring time?” 35% of students indicated they had worked with four or more. This may indicate high tutor turnover rates or student transfers between tutors.

In open-ended comments, 9th graders noted that the tutoring helped them improve in algebra. Some students complained that the program was boring or that they did not like their tutor, but many more said they had fun and liked their tutor. The biggest critique was that students wanted more tutoring—either more time with their tutor or to continue the program next year.

My tutor really helped me get better at algebra, i wouldnt sic mind having another tutor next year.

— Algebra I student

Sixth-Grade Math Survey Results

Teachers

Seven out of 10 teachers (70%) responded to the 6th-grade Math survey. Overall, teachers had positive feedback about the HDT implementation, but did not believe that students improved their outcomes because of the program. Most teachers agreed that the curriculum supported their instruction and that HDT was an effective instructional strategy. One hundred percent responded that the student-to-tutor ratio was “just right.” However, less than half of teachers agreed that HDT improved their students’ enjoyment, understanding, or grades in math. Teachers responded positively to statements about

My tutors were very skilled at following my lead and...When we did our work time, the tutors were great in helping the students develop the skills to work independently.

— 6th-grade teacher

tutors, except when asked about interacting with them. Most teachers agreed that “The tutors used effective instructional strategies,” and 100% agreed with “My students had positive experiences with their tutors.” Less than half agreed with “We included the HDT tutors in training and professional development,” and very few agreed with “I received communication from the tutors...on a regular basis.”

Sixth-grade teachers who answered the open-ended questions in the survey tended to be impressed with the tutors’ abilities and liked the small group structure. One teacher said, “We had a great group of tutors for the most part. The ones that wanted to be here...were REALLY dedicated and went above and beyond.” Some teachers were concerned with tutors’ inability to assign consequences, reflecting many tutors’ issues with behavior management; in the words of one teacher, “(Tutors) should be able to do something for discipline.”

...the tutors did a great job of rewarding the students. But they did not have the ability to give consequences. I feel that they should be able to do something for discipline.

— 6th-grade teacher

Students

Seven-hundred sixty students answered the HDT survey for 6th-grade math, a response rate of 78%. Responses were very positive, especially when students were asked about their tutors. Ninety-five percent of respondents agreed with the statements “My tutor helped me become better at math” and “My tutor cares about how I do math.” Only 72% of students agreed that they “like math better because of my tutor,” but 92% felt that working with their tutor helped them get better grades. Similar to other programs, 41% of students worked with four or more HDT tutors throughout the year.

Students provided additional comments about HDT that were mainly positive. A handful of 6th graders commented that the program was boring or tutors were mean, but the large majority of students who took the survey gave very positive feedback. Students indicated they learned a lot about math, thought the program was fun, and appreciated their tutors. Comments by students included the following: “(My

(My tutor) helped a lot and she had faith in me and all of her other students. I have so many things to thank her for.

— 6th-grade student

tutor) helped a lot and she had faith in me and all of her other students. I have so many things to thank her for.” “Math tutoring is bringing my grade up from a C- to...B to an A.” “They helped me pass the (STAAR) and I (appreciate) it.”

Third-Grade Reading Survey Results

Teachers

Teachers' responses to the 3rd-grade reading survey were mixed. Fourteen out of 17 teachers participated in the survey (a rate of 82%) and almost all agreed with the statement "My students had positive experiences with their tutors." However, teachers were far less positive when answering more specific questions. Almost no teachers felt their students had better reading grades because of HDT, and only 43% responded that their students seemed to enjoy reading more because of the program. Fifty percent of teachers thought the time tutors spent with their students was "too much," and many teachers indicated that they had problems with specific aspects of the program implementation, such as communication with tutors and the link between HDT curriculum and their instruction.

I enjoyed the opportunity to work in a small group with my two lowest readers.

— 3rd-grade teacher

In open-ended comments, third grade teachers expressed their appreciation for the low tutor-to-student ratio and their ability to "work in a small group" with their students. Several teachers remarked on the "strong relationships" students formed with their tutors, and some teachers saw students improve and enjoy the material more because of HDT. One teacher stated, "They enjoy reading because they are able to make personal connections with their tutors." Other teachers did not see positive effects of the program one said, "Teachers could do a better job keeping the students with them in the classroom." Some teachers voiced concern about the qualifications and preparation of some tutors. Several 3rd-grade teachers commented on the lack of communication between tutors and teachers, paralleling many tutors' responses. One teacher said, "There is not a lot of communication between tutors and teachers. The availability of the tutors does not coincide with our conference time, because they are tutoring at another school. We do not get to communicate and discuss the HDT Program."

There is not a lot of communication between tutors and teachers... We do not get to...discuss the HDT Program.

— 3rd-grade teacher

Students

Two hundred one 3rd graders responded to the HDT survey, a response rate of 54%. Students' feedback was very positive, especially to statements about working with their tutors. Ninety-five percent of respondents agreed that their tutor cared about how they did, that they worked well with their tutor, and that they tried their hardest when working with their tutor. Responses to the question "How many reading tutors did you have...?" were almost evenly distributed between 1, 2, 3, and 4 or more.

The 3rd graders had very positive comments about the program and their tutors and had minimal critiques. They thought the material was fun and the program improved their reading, understanding, and grades. Many students commented about how much they liked their tutors. One student said, "They were all very kind and helped me become a better reader."

My tutor has helped me achieve many reading goals.

— 3rd-grade student

CONCLUSIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS

Based on student, tutor, and teacher survey results, the HDT Program appeared popular overall, with some exceptions (as discussed in detail in the Tutor, Teacher, and Student Surveys section). Students' responses, in particular, highlight the perceived positive impact of personalized tutoring. Although the response rates for the HDT surveys were high, caution must be used when interpreting results from small sample groups.

The effects of HDT on academic improvement and achievement are less clear, due to the scope of this evaluation. Pre- and posttest data were unavailable for most HDT programs. The DRA results offer some insight into students' progress throughout the HDT process. STAAR results cannot show growth, they can only show achievement reaching a set standard.

Survey respondents identified several main areas for program improvement, including:

- **Student behavior management:** Tutors and teachers commented on tutors' struggles or inability to manage students' behavior. Tutors requested training about how to manage behavior, and teachers recommended a better system that would allow tutors to assign consequences or that would provide support for tutors responding to students' disciplinary issues.
- **Collaboration:** Tutors and teachers felt disconnected with respect to collaborating with each other. Only a small number of tutors were included in campus professional development activities or training throughout the school year. Tutors also rarely communicated with teachers and felt disconnected from other school employees. Teachers agreed that tutors were not included in training and that communication was low. One teacher stated that the tutors' availability did not coincide with campus training times.
- **Curriculum:** Some tutors found the curriculum confusing at times and thought it could be more fun for students. Tutors also requested more flexibility in following the curriculum. Some teachers expressed concern that tutors' instructions failed to connect with the curriculum or that tutors taught material before it was covered in class.
- **Student-to-Tutor Ratio:** A high number of students indicated they had four or more tutors throughout the school year, which has implications for student-tutor bonding and consistency in learning through HDT.
- **Perceptions of Student Outcomes:** The large majority of tutors believed that HDT helped students' learning, but teachers' perceptions were not as positive. In some programs (as discussed in Tutor, Teacher, and Student Surveys), less than half of teachers agreed that HDT was an effective program.