

**Summer Opportunity to Accelerate Reading  
(S.O.A.R.) Evaluation, 2000  
Executive Summary  
Authors: Janice Curry, Gloria Zyskowski, Ph.D.**

The Summer Opportunity to Accelerate Reading (S.O.A.R.) program is AISD's elementary summer school to improve reading and literacy. In June 2000, the 21-day program served 2,406 grade 1-3 students who were below grade level in reading and/or at risk of retention. The budget allocation of over \$2 million was funded from federal Title I, state Student Success Initiative grant, and local dropout prevention monies. Reading instruction was provided by 176 AISD teachers who attended professional development in balanced literacy as part of the S.O.A.R. summer program.

**MAJOR FINDINGS**

Program effectiveness for S.O.A.R. was based on the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA). Valid pre- and posttest scores reveal the following information for all students (n=2,118) and for students who attended at least 19 days, 90% of the 21-day program (n=1,422 ):

- The average gain for all students was 2.1 reading levels as determined by the DRA. This gain is equivalent to about one fourth to one half of an academic year progress, depending on the grade level of the student. During the four-week program, 92% of all students showed reading improvement by advancing one or more levels on the DRA.
- The average gain for students who received a complete program (at least 19 days) was 2.2 reading levels as determined by the DRA. During the 21-day program, 93% of students with a complete program showed reading improvement by advancing one or more levels on the DRA.
- Of the 129 students who pretested at Level A (the lowest level), only 20 (1%) remained at this level at the end of S.O.A.R .
- The program has shown consistent gains for students from 1998 to 2000 even as the enrollment has increased six fold. In fact, each year has seen an increase in the percent of students making gains of one or more levels.
- Thirty-six percent (604) of the students who began S.O.A.R. below grade level ended the program at or above grade level.
- A total of 450 students (21%) were at or above grade level at the pretest.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. The S.O.A.R. program has grown and evolved during its three years of existence. Although negative comments were made by teachers about some aspects of S.O.A.R. 2000, the overall program was praised for its structure and design. The following recommendations are offered for consideration:
2. Continue the S.O.A.R. program for summer 2001. The program has proven successful for approximately 4,000 students in its three summers of operation. Students have consistently shown average gains of two reading levels or more each year. An additional benefit is that S.O.A.R. teachers receive professional development and hands-on learning in balanced literacy that they can use in their classrooms throughout the year.
3. Recognize S.O.A.R. as "the" AISD program for reading intervention for grades 1-3. There are many summer programs at individual AISD schools that compete with S.O.A.R. for resources, teachers, and student attendance. This year, at least 13 Title I schools had reading and literacy summer programs that targeted some of the same students served by S.O.A.R. If campus sponsored summer reading programs continue in AISD, these programs should be evaluated for effectiveness to assure that students are receiving

effective reading intervention. Otherwise, S.O.A.R. should be the model for summer reading intervention in the early grades.

4. Increase staffing for S.O.A.R. Even though the program has grown each year, no additional staff have been added. The district should consider appointing a director for summer programs who has limited additional duties during the regular school year. Reasons for this include the need for increased and/or enhanced districtwide summer programs as the state moves toward stronger accountability for promotion. Additional support staff (clerical support and bilingual mentor teachers) are needed to continue the program at its current 2000 enrollment and beyond.
5. Maintain the current average class size of 14:1. While the average class size in 2000 was 14 students, 34% of classrooms had from 15-19 students. Sixty percent of the bilingual classes had 15 or more students. The DRA results do not indicate a difference between this year's average gain of 2.1 reading levels, when the average class size was 14:1, and previous years' gains when the class size was 9:1 in 1998 (average gain of 1.9) and 12:1 in 1999 (average gain of 2.0). However, teachers are very sure that one of the reasons this program works is because of a small class size. Teachers of large classes say that a class size of 17-19 students does not allow for the amount of one-on-one and small group reading instruction students need. As the number of Spanish-speaking students attending S.O.A.R. increases, it is necessary to hire more bilingual teachers to achieve an actual class size of 14:1.
6. Restructure the training to take into account the fact that many of the teachers have received the same training in previous summers or in balanced literacy classes. Teachers, mentor teachers, and principals offered many suggestions for changing the training model, but said that the training should be consistent for all grade levels. The director of S.O.A.R. 2001 and experienced teachers and mentor teachers should meet to brainstorm ideas for a new training model. Some of the ideas suggested by teachers included more hands-on training with the S.O.A.R. materials and breakout sessions to offer a more in-depth training for experienced teachers, while new teachers receive the current orientation training for balanced literacy.
7. Develop and uphold stricter eligibility requirements to include only students who are below grade level in reading at the end of the school year. Principals and teachers would need to be educated on the purpose of S.O.A.R. and how to identify these students. With the money saved by not including the 239 students who were above grade level at the beginning of S.O.A.R., the program would have \$170,407 (estimated cost of \$713 per student) to hire additional staff, purchase materials, enhance professional development, or serve additional students who are below grade level.
8. Develop a policies and procedures manual for S.O.A.R. teachers and principals available prior to the beginning of the summer program. Teachers and principals requested a manual that would include specific information about the curriculum, classroom procedure, employment issues, eligibility requirements, and attendance and behavior policies. This could lay the groundwork more clearly for teachers and principals and reduce the frustration for teachers who believed that all expectations were not made clear this year.
9. Revise the registration forms to include information about special needs and LEP status to improve staffing and grouping of children. Valuable teacher time was required this year to determine special needs and LEP status of students. Instruction will go more smoothly if teachers and principals are aware of special needs situations in advance.

The data indicate that the structure of the S.O.A.R. program can withstand change and growth and still be an effective reading intervention. The program should focus on providing reading intervention to those students who are below grade level in reading. Training, supervision, and materials need to be of utmost quality to accomplish this goal.