

Diversified Education Through Leadership, Technology, and Academics (DELTA) Credit Recovery Program Annual Report, 2019–2020

DELTA is a dropout prevention and course credit recovery program that has been implemented in Austin Independent School District (AISD) high schools since 1995. It is an open-entry, open-exit program that provides an individualized, self-paced instruction through a computer-based platform to deliver curricula aligned with Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). The program targets students who have already dropped out or are at risk of dropping out of high school. Through computer-based coursework, supplemented by a variety of assignments and projects, and under the guidance of a DELTA teacher, students can complete high school courses and earn credits, thereby allowing a route to graduation that fits the scheduling requirements of those who might otherwise drop out of school. The program also provides students with the option of accelerating course completion and earning multiple credits in a short amount of time.

This report includes findings regarding demographic characteristics and academic outcomes of students served; highlights emerging topics from the student, teacher, and program staff surveys; and provides general recommendations for future program implementation.

It is important to note that AISD campus closures due to COVID-19 affected implementation of educational programs across the district. Among other changes, the return to classes after spring break was delayed. This compressed the remaining time students had to complete their coursework in the spring semester. After schools returned to session, instruction was implemented exclusively online. Consequently, it is possible that these changes affected students' outcomes and general perceptions of the program.

DELTA Participants

A total of 2,165 students from 16 high school campuses, corresponding to 11% of AISD's high school body ($N=20,616$), participated in DELTA in 2019–2020. High schools included were Austin Learning Center (ALC), Akins, Anderson, Ann Richards, Austin, Bowie, Crockett, Eastside, Garza, Leadership Academy, Lyndon B. Johnson, McCallum, Navarro, Northeast, Phoenix Academy, and Travis. The majority of these students were Hispanic (68%), economically disadvantaged (75%), and/or categorized as being at risk of dropping out of school (78%) (Table 1). In addition, 25% of the participating students were English learners, and 10% received special education services. AISD as a whole had lower percentages of students who were economically disadvantaged (52%) and who were at risk (47%) in 2019–2020 than did the group of students who enrolled in DELTA, indicating the program targeted the students most in need of support.

Table 1.

A total of 2,165 high school students participated in the DELTA credit recovery program.

	Count of students	% of total
Grade 9	155	7%
Grade 10	391	18%
Grade 11	640	30%
Grade 12	979	45%
Total	2,165	
Hispanic	1,476	68%
African American/Black	263	12%
Asian	30	1%
White	341	16%
Two or more races/other	55	3%
At risk	1,697	78%
Economically disadvantaged	1,626	75%
English learners	551	25%
Special education	226	10%

Source. 2019–2020 DELTA program database and AISD student enrollment records

STUDENT OUTCOMES

Credits Earned

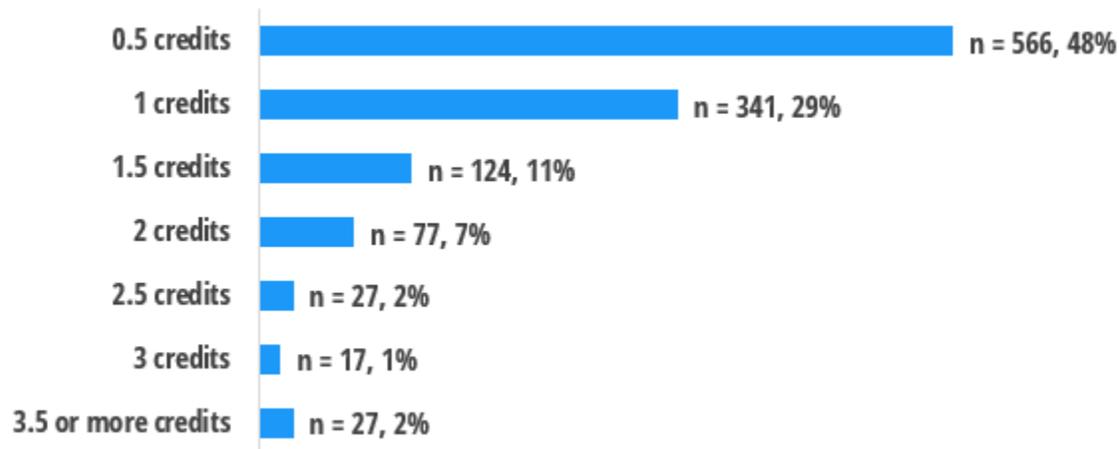
Students can start a DELTA course any time during the school year. Depending on the time of program enrollment, students may or may not complete the course before the end of the semester. In 2019–2020, 2,165 students enrolled in DELTA courses to attempt to recover credits or earn accelerated credits.

Students could enroll in more than one DELTA course during a school year. In 2019–2020, DELTA students enrolled in 3,455 DELTA courses, each corresponding to 0.5 or 1.0 credits. Overall, students attempted a total of 1,728 credits and earned 63% of those credits (Table 2). The majority of DELTA students (77%) who completed their courses earned 0.5 or 1.0 credit, and 23% of the students earned from 1.5 to 7.5 credits (Figure 1).

Courses taken and credits earned varied across subject areas. The majority of DELTA courses attempted were in the core subject areas of English language arts (ELA, 28%), math (26%), and social studies (25%). Courses in science and Spanish had the best outcomes, with 75% and 72%, respectively, of credits being completed. Courses in math and music had the lowest outcomes, with 54% and 48% of students, respectively, completing their courses (Table 2). However, students took longer to complete math courses than courses in other subjects (Table 3), which may have contributed to the lower completion rate of math courses. Lastly, on average, students took between 10.7 and 14.3 weeks to complete their courses. Courses in math and ELA took longer to complete than courses in other subject areas (Table 3).

Figure 1.

The majority of DELTA students (77%) completed 0.5 or 1.0 credit.



Source. 2019–2020 DELTA program database

Table 2.

During 2019–2020, DELTA students earned 63% of the credits attempted.

Subject areas	Number of courses started	Number of credits started	Number of credits earned	Percentage of credits earned
ELA	956	478	264.5	55%
Math	892	446	240	54%
Music	25	12.5	6	48%
Science	598	299	223	75%
Social studies	866	433	313.5	72%
Spanish	118	59	42.5	72%
TOTAL	3,455	1,728	1,089.5	63%

Source. 2019–2020 DELTA program database

Note. Some courses may have been registered in the database with start dates without the corresponding students ever starting the courses. Consequently, the number of credits attempted may be lower and the percentage of credits earned may be higher than indicated here.

Table 3.

Students took longer to complete courses in math than in other subject areas.

Subject area	Average number of weeks to earn credit	Percentage of DELTA students taking courses in each core area
ELA	13.5	28%
Math	14.3	26%
Science	11.5	17%
Social studies	10.7	25%
Foreign language	12.1	3%
Total DELTA students: 2,165	Average time: 12.4 weeks	

Source. 2019–2020 DELTA program database

Did Campus Closures Affect DELTA Students' Outcomes?

To assess whether campus closures due to COVID-19 might have affected DELTA students' outcomes, the overall number of credits earned in 2018–2019 and in 2019–2020 were compared. Overall, students enrolled in a larger number of DELTA courses in 2018–2019 than in 2019–2020. Comparing credits earned per semester in each year, students earned more credits in the fall of 2018 than in the fall of 2019 and also more in the spring of 2019 than in the spring of 2020 (Table 4). However, the difference was larger when comparing spring semesters than when comparing fall semesters, suggesting that campus closures may have affected DELTA student outcomes.

Table 4.

DELTA students earned more credits in the **spring of 2019 than in the **spring of 2020**, which may be related to school and instructional changes due to the COVID-19 pandemic.**

School year	Credits earned		
	Fall	Spring	Total
2018–2019	2,561	2,116	4,677
2019–2020	2,043	1,387	3,430

Source. 2018–2019 and 2019–2020 DELTA program database

Graduation Outcomes

Preliminary AISD graduation data for 2019–2020 indicated positive outcomes for DELTA participants. Of the 979 12th-grade students enrolled in DELTA courses, 81% ($n = 796$) graduated. Of the remaining students, 6% enrolled in other schools or were home schooled, returned to their home country, or left with a general education diploma (GED); the others had missing or unreportable records. In addition, three of the students who graduated were originally in the 2019 graduating cohort, further evidence that DELTA helped at-risk students to graduate from high school.

Students' Opinions About the Program

Students completing their credit recovery program courses anytime in 2019–2020 were asked to provide feedback about the program as they exited their course. A total of 2,165 DELTA students received an electronic link to the survey, and 4% ($n = 95$) filled out the survey.

Overall, DELTA students had positive perceptions of the program. The majority of students (87%) indicated the program helped them stay on track to graduate, and 95% said they would tell their friends and classmates to enroll in a credit recovery program if they needed a credit. When DELTA students were asked what the best thing about DELTA was, the opportunity to make up credits, the assistance they received from teachers, and the freedom to work at their own pace emerged as common topics.

Lastly, few DELTA students indicated they encountered challenges in their DELTA courses. When these students listed those challenges, personal difficulties in staying motivated, difficulties with the subject matter, and issues navigating the Odysseyware platform emerged as their main concerns.

"The speed that you can get your credits. By the time this year is over, I will have passed 4 semesters worth of classes by working in one class. I wouldn't have graduated without this class."

DELTA student

"The best thing about delta is the teachers. They make you feel like you can do it no matter how many credits you have to make up. They constantly push you to get it done because they want to see us all graduate and that goes for every student."

DELTA student

Teacher and Campus Staff's Opinions

In Spring 2020, 184 administrative staff (e.g., counselors, principals, and assistant principals who were in charge of referring and enrolling students in the program) and 20 teachers were asked to provide feedback about DELTA. Thirty-eight percent (n = 69) of the administrators and 85% (n = 17) of the DELTA teachers answered the survey.

Overall, teachers and administrators reported positive perceptions of the program. When asked about their preparation, 88% of the teachers indicated they felt well prepared or trained to teach online courses. In addition, all of the teachers who answered the survey felt the program helped students stay on track to graduate. When asked what they believed the benefits of DELTA were, course individualization, the ability to work at their own pace, and the ability to recover credits and graduate on time emerged as common topics.

Administrative staff expressed similarly positive thoughts about the DELTA program. Ninety-five percent of the administrators thought DELTA helped students stay on track to graduate. In addition, when administrators were asked about the benefits to students participating in DELTA, the following main themes emerged: the opportunity to recover credits and stay on track to graduate, the support and monitoring from teachers, and the self-paced and individualized format of DELTA classes.

“Some students need the individual attention to learn the curriculum. This kind of individual attention is not available in the traditional classroom, and results in student failure.”

DELTA teacher

“Delta is key to helping our students recover. What we find is that our 9th graders do not all enter high school at a high level of maturity... it doesn't 'click' right away. As they mature and understand that they have to get it together Delta helps them. Our students would not graduate without Delta.”

School administrator

Conclusion

Regardless of the possible influence of campus closures on credit earning, DELTA student outcomes were positive. During 2019–2020, 11% of AISD's high school students enrolled in DELTA courses, and 45% of these students were in 12th grade. Of the 1,728 credits attempted, 63% were earned. However, students were allowed to continue and complete their DELTA coursework in the summer (for summer outcomes report, see https://www.austinisd.org/sites/default/files/dre-surveys/19.44_AISD_Virtual_Learning_Summer_Programs_2020_0.pdf). Consequently, the overall percentage of courses successfully completed was higher than the percentage reported here.

In addition, 85% of the 12th graders in DELTA graduated from high school. In addition, a few of the graduating students were part of prior cohorts, indicating that DELTA helped students stay on track as well as recover credits to graduate. Lastly, students, teachers, and campus administrators had very positive thoughts about DELTA and how this program helped students earn credits and stay on track to graduate.

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