

2017-18 Evaluation of Accelerating Campus Excellence (ACE)

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At-a-Glance

The Accelerating Campus Excellence (ACE) initiative was formed on the principle that transforming schools requires strong leadership and effective teachers enveloped in an environment of high expectations. Starting in 2015-16, ACE offered competitive stipends to incentivize top teachers and principals to relocate to some of the district's most challenged campuses. The first group of seven campuses (ACE 1.0) continued for year three of the program in 2017-18 (Annie Web Blanton, Umphrey Lee, Roger Q. Mills, Elisha M. Pease, Billy Earl Dade, Thomas A. Edison, and Sarah Zumwalt). A new cohort of six campuses (ACE 2.0) was added in 2017-18 (C.F. Carr, J.N. Ervin, Onesimo Hernandez, L.W. Ray, Edward Titcher, Thomas J. Rusk). The 2017-18 ACE program was supported by \$9,885,862 in Dallas ISD general operating funds.

The ACE program aimed to improve student achievement by striving to accelerate growth in three general areas: people, learning, and expectations.

People. To accelerate factors related to people, ACE campuses employed strong principals and effective teachers. Staff members embraced three core values: growth mindset, high expectations, and inspiring relationships. Progress was measured by examining 1) teacher retention rates, 2) Teacher Effectiveness Initiative (TEI) effectiveness levels, 3) teacher spot observation scores, and 4) quintile scores¹ on the Culture of Feedback and Support section of the Climate Survey.

Learning. To accelerate factors related to learning, ACE staff members participated in supplemental professional development opportunities and committed to excellence in both academic and social-emotional learning. Staff members also focused on consistent use of data-driven instruction. Finally, the school day was extended one hour, and after-school opportunities were offered until 6 p.m. two to three days a week. Progress was measured by examining 1) *Istation Indicators of Progress (ISIP)* Tier 1 rates, 2) *Assessment of Course Performance (ACP)* passing rates, and 3) *State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR)* performance standard attainment rates.

Expectations. To accelerate factors related to expectations, ACE campuses emphasized relationships among campus community members. In

addition, core content was double blocked and taught in alignment with best practices. The program also provided uniforms to students, upgraded facilities, and strengthened parent and community partnerships. Progress was measured by 1) disciplinary offense rates, 2) attendance rates, 3) Student Experience Survey favorable response rates, and 4) Parent/Guardian Survey favorable response rates.

Priorities. To support acceleration in these three areas, ACE campuses prioritized balanced literacy, social and emotional development, and professional learning communities (PLCs) with strong data practices.

The purpose of this evaluation was to provide data for campus, program, and district leadership to evaluate progress toward these objectives, as well as to highlight other applicable outcomes.²

What were the characteristics of ACE students, teachers, and principals?

Over half of the 6,966 ACE students were male (51%) and/or African American (54%). Most were economically disadvantaged (86%). About a third were English language learners (ELLs; 32%), and 10 percent were enrolled in special education (SPED). The 462 ACE teachers were 76 percent female, 58 percent African American, and 23 percent Hispanic. Almost a third (29%) of teachers held at least a master's degree. ACE teachers had been employed in the Dallas ISD for 7.5 years on average; 46 percent had taught in the district for six or more years. ACE principals ($N = 13$) were about half female (54%), mostly African American (69%), and 23 percent Hispanic. ACE principals worked for the District for 11.8 years, on average, and most principals held at least a master's degree (85%).

What were teacher and campus leadership perceptions of ACE?

Principals/Assistant Principals. In responses to an online survey, campus administrators generally expressed satisfaction with respect to year three of the ACE program. Most rated support from ACE program leadership favorably (88%). Of five core ACE elements implemented on campuses, administrators most highly rated the effectiveness of data analysis and PLC (84%) and consistency of policies/systems/structures (80%), and were most likely to indicate balanced literacy efforts

¹ A quintile is any of five equal groups into which a population can be divided according to the distribution of values of a particular variable.

² See full report for methodological details for all analyses.

(47%) required further development. Administrators most frequently indicated improved behavioral management support (20%) and more parent involvement (20%) were the most important potential changes that could improve future ACE success.

Teachers. In responses to an online survey, ACE teacher perceptions were generally positive. Of five core ACE elements implemented on campuses, teachers most highly rated the effectiveness of instructional rigor (74%), data analysis and PLC (72%), and balanced literacy (71%), and were most likely to indicate that school culture (44%) required further development. Teachers most frequently indicated improved behavioral management support (32%) as the most important potential change that could improve the program. Despite general teacher agreement that campus leadership offered additional parent involvement opportunities than non-ACE campuses (67%), less than half of teachers (48%) agreed that parents were engaged in the student progress. Most teachers (67%) believed that the stipend compensated them for the extra effort required of an ACE teacher.

What were the outcomes related to the people component of ACE?

Teacher retention.³ ACE teacher retention rates (fall 2016 to fall 2017) ranged from 44 percent to 83 percent, with an overall ACE teacher retention rate of 70 percent. Three campuses met the objective of meeting or exceeding the average district retention rate (73%).

Effectiveness ratings. Four of seven ACE 1.0 campuses, five of six ACE 2.0 campuses, and ACE 1.0, ACE 2.0, and ACE overall attained the objective at least 60% of teachers at campuses with at least a Proficient I TEI effectiveness level. This objective appeared to be more difficult to attain at the middle school level.

Spot Observations. In general, ACE teachers earned higher ratings for clear instruction than for instructional rigor both in the fall and in the spring. In fall 2017, four elementary schools and one middle school campus met or exceeded the 60 percent fall objective for clear instruction, and two elementary school campuses and one middle school campus met or exceeded this objective for instructional rigor. Both ACE cohorts and ACE overall missed the fall 2017 objective for average proficient spot observations in both areas.

In spring 2018, eight elementary school campuses and three middle school campuses met or exceeded the 75 percent spring objective for clear instruction. Five elementary school campuses and two middle school

campuses met or exceeded this objective for instructional rigor. Both ACE cohorts and ACE overall met the spring 2018 objective for clear instruction, but the ACE 1.0, ACE 2.0, and ACE campuses overall missed the 75 percent objective for instructional rigor.

Climate Survey. In fall 2017, one ACE 1.0 campus and four ACE 2.0 campuses met the 2017-18 objective of attaining scores in the fourth or fifth (most positive) quintiles on the Culture of Feedback and Support section of the Climate Survey. Four campuses achieved fourth or fifth quintile scores in spring 2018.

What were the outcomes related to the learning component of ACE?

ISIP. ACE overall rates of students reading on grade level trended upward most six-week periods from the start (BOY) to the end of the year (EOY) for all grade levels. In most cases, ACE 1.0 campuses increased the extent to which rates of students reading on grade level (Tier 1) exceeded the district. ACE 2.0 rates of Tier 1 students did not consistently exceed the district, especially in English, but those that fell short of district rates clearly narrowed the gaps with district rates by the end of the year.

At the end of the year (EOY), ACE campuses overall met the objective of meeting or exceeding district rates of students reading at grade level for kindergarten to grade two in Spanish and in combined English and Spanish. For English alone, ACE campuses overall met this objective in kindergarten, but not for grade one or grade two. ACE 1.0 campuses met or exceeded the district in all versions in all grades, but ACE 2.0 campuses fell short of this goal for grade one and grade two, primarily because of performance on the English version of the assessment.

For 2017-18, one-year changes in overall ACE Tier 1 attainment rates on all versions of *ISIP* were stronger than for the district. As expected, this pattern was particularly true for ACE 2.0 campuses in their first year of ACE implementation. For the ACE 1.0 cohort, longitudinal results reflect sustained accelerated achievement in reading on grade level for kindergarten to grade two overall, despite smaller year-over-year gains in years two and three of the ACE program. ACE 1.0 growth in 2017-18 adds to the extensive growth in Tier 1 attainment over the first two years of the program. ACE 1.0 two-year trends also exceeded district growth across the board. As the strongest evidence of literacy growth for ACE students, not only did three-year growth in Tier 1 attainment for ACE 1.0 students in all grades far exceed the district in English, Spanish, and

³ Because 2017-18 was the first year after reconstitution for ACE 2.0 campuses, resulting in almost complete teacher turnover, this objective was evaluated only for ACE 1.0 campuses.

combined English and Spanish, but this three-year growth ranged from +32.0 percentage points (kindergarten Spanish) to +45.1 percentage points (grade two English).

ACP. ACP passing rates for ACE overall exceeded the previous year on 39 (80%) of the 49 exams administered on ACE campuses in the fall, and on six (75%) of the eight exams administered in the spring. As expected, these rates were particularly strong for ACE 2.0 campuses after their first year of the program. In addition, ACE students overall met the objective of ACP passing rates at least within 10 percentage points of district rates on 38 (78%) of 49 ACPs in the fall and on three (38%) of the eight spring exams. This success rate was virtually the same for ACE 1.0 and ACE 2.0 in the fall, but was particularly strong for ACE 2.0 campuses compared to ACE 1.0 campuses in the spring.

STAAR. ACE students overall met the 2017-18 ACE objective of achieving STAAR performance standard attainment rates at least within 10 percentage points of the district for all subjects at the Approaches+, Meets+, and Masters level. This finding was true for ACE 1.0 and 2.0, except for ACE 1.0 reading, which came a few points short of meeting this objective. Notably, ACE 2.0 social studies slightly exceeded district passing rates for all three performance standards.

With few exceptions, ACE STAAR passing rates increased over one year across the board in all subjects for all performance standards. Generally, this one-year growth was strongest for mathematics and social studies, especially for ACE 2.0, an expected outcome in the first year of the program. Two- and three- year changes in STAAR performance standard attainment for ACE 1.0 campuses were mostly positive. The strongest overall three-year percentage point gains for ACE 1.0 campuses emerged in mathematics (+34) and social studies (+28) at the Approaches+ level, in mathematics (+30), writing (+19), and science (+19) at the Meets+ level, and mathematics (+15) at the Masters level. These three-year results are a testament to the ongoing impact of ACE implementation on these original ACE campuses.

On the exam level, in 2017-18 STAAR passing rates exceeded 2016-17 on all STAAR exams (100%) in all subjects administered on ACE campuses at both the Approaches+ and Meets+ performance standards. Considered separately, both ACE cohorts performed exceptionally well, with ACE 1.0 campuses exceeding last year on 83 percent of exams at the Approaches+ level and 78 percent of exams at the Meets+ level, and ACE 2.0 campuses exceeding last year on 94 percent of exams at the Approaches+ level and 100 percent of exams at the Meets+ level. ACE students overall met the objective of performance standard attainment within 10 percentage points of district rates on 15 (83%) of 18

STAAR exams at the Approaches+ performance standard and on 12 (67%) of the 18 STAAR exams at the Meets+ level. This success rate was slightly higher for ACE 2.0 than for ACE 1.0, as expected, but both cohorts achieved the STAAR objective for 2017-18 on most tests administered (range: 61% to 83%).

What were the outcomes related to the expectations component of ACE?

Disciplinary offenses. Six of thirteen campuses met the ACE objective of disciplinary referrals at or below average district rates. ACE 1.0 campuses reduced disciplinary referrals by 3,391 (87%) over three years, and ACE 2.0 campuses reduced referrals by 1,218 (77%) in 2017-18.

Attendance rates. Four ACE elementary school campuses (Blanton, U. Lee, Ervin, Titche) and one middle school campus (Rusk) met the 2017-18 ACE objective of attendance rates of at least 96 percent for 2017-18. Overall, ACE attendance rates (95%) for the current year were comparable to district rates (95%). On the cohort level, although ACE 1.0 overall attendance did not meet the 2017-18 attendance objective, ACE 2.0 finished the year meeting the 96 percent attendance objective.

Student Experience Survey. ACE students generally responded favorably on the districtwide student survey. Five ACE elementary school campuses and ACE elementary schools overall (87%) met the 2017-18 objective and exceeded the district elementary school favorable rate of 84 percent. Three ACE middle school campuses and ACE middle schools overall (74%) also exceeded the favorable rate for district secondary schools (71%).

Changes in student perceptions over time also were generally positive. Overall, 2017-18 ACE elementary school and middle school campuses remained within one point of favorable response rates from the previous year. For ACE 1.0, three elementary school campuses and all middle school campuses exceeded, met, or came within one percentage point of favorable response rates from the previous year. All ACE 2.0 campuses exceeded favorable rates from the previous year (range: +3 to + 13 percentage points). Since program inception, all but one ACE 1.0 elementary school campus, all ACE 1.0 middle schools, and ACE elementary schools and middle schools overall maintained three-year improvements in overall favorable student responses, indicating continued improvement of campus culture over time on most ACE campuses.

Parent/Guardian Survey. Parent perceptions of ACE campuses were generally positive (range: 73% to 93%). Four ACE campuses met the 2017-18 ACE objective by

exceeding the district positive response rate of 90 percent.

What were 2018 ACE state accountability ratings?

All but one ACE campus (Pease) earned a Met Standard rating in 2017-18, providing clear evidence of positive program outcomes.

Recommendations

In 2018-19, six of seven ACE 1.0 campuses will transition from the program with some campus support, the remaining ACE 2.0 campuses will continue in the second year of the program, and one ACE 1.0 campus will join a third cohort (ACE 3.0) participating in a modified program that will focus more heavily on development of campus leadership and teacher development. The following recommendations are offered in the context of these program changes.

- **Carefully monitor transitioning campuses.** As most ACE 1.0 campuses transition out of the ACE program and campuses join the new ACE 3.0 hybrid program, monitoring ongoing progress on these campuses will be important for evaluating maintenance of gains on former campuses and ensuring success of new campuses in the first year of the revised hybrid program. Information collected from such monitoring will be invaluable for shaping future elements of programs that target school improvement.
- **Continue professional development to support campus leaders and teachers.** Effective administrators and teachers were the cornerstone of ACE successes. Therefore, they should continue to have the resources and professional development opportunities they need to lead and teach effectively. The one ACE campus that missed earning a Met Standard accountability rating this year (Pease) did not have an official principal for much of the year and was the elementary school campus with the lowest rate of proficient teachers, as measured by TEI effectiveness levels. Expanding the pool of available effective campus leaders and teachers and retaining those who are already highly effective will be critical as the program transitions to the next phase.
- **Heighten focus on literacy.** Although not unique to ACE students, achievement and growth in reading and writing were generally weaker than for other subjects, especially mathematics. ACE campuses should continue to focus on improving literacy at all grade levels to reduce this discrepancy.
- **Continue to maintain and expand training and support for behavioral management in the classroom.** Although there was both quantitative

(decreased discipline referrals) and anecdotal (stakeholder perceptions) evidence that behavioral management improved on ACE campuses since program inception, teachers indicated that some improvement remained necessary. In addition, favorable response rates on the Student Experience Survey improved and were stronger than the district for most ACE campuses, indicating improved student perceptions of the academic environment. The extent to which positive improvements in behavioral management translated to academic achievement should be considered in future program decisions regarding campus systems and structures.

- **Continue efforts to strengthen parent involvement.** Despite extensive evidence of expanded encouragement of parent involvement, barely half of teachers and sixty percent of campus leaders agreed that ACE parents were engaged with student progress in 2017-18. Attendance rate challenges on some campuses also support the notion that engaging parents may remain a challenge at ACE campuses. Stronger partnership with parents of ACE students will assist with improving and maintaining gains in important outcomes, such as discipline enforcement, attendance rates, and dedication to learning. Leadership should continue its strong efforts to increase interest, pride, and involvement from parents of ACE campuses.
- **Prepare to evaluate long-term outcomes.** It will be important to evaluate long-term success as students move from ACE elementary school and middle school campuses into higher grades at other campuses. Dosage of years enrolled on ACE campuses and comparisons to similar students who were not enrolled on ACE campuses should be examined for long-term achievement outcomes like assessments, graduation rates, college and career readiness, college enrollment, and other factors to determine the lasting benefit of ACE participation. Planning how long-term outcomes will be studied early in the program will increase the likelihood that the appropriate data and circumstances are in place for future evaluation.

An electronic version of this report (as well as the full 2017-18 report) can be found at www.dallasisd.org/Page/888. For more information, please contact Program Evaluation at evaluation@dallasisd.org.

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