Grades PK-12 BE/ESL Program: 2003-04

At a Glance

The DISD Grades PK-12 BE/ESL Program is a comprehensive effort to meet the affective, linguistic and academic needs of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students. The goal is to help LEP students acquire English proficiency and facilitate their timely integration into the mainstream curriculum to ensure equal educational opportunity.

Enrollment of LEP Students

Two different LEP enrollment patterns emerged over the last nine years. The first period (1995 to 2000) was characterized by a continuing growth of LEP students. Starting in 2001, the steady increase was replaced by negative or no growth (Figure 1). Changes in LEP enrollment were directly linked to an increased number of LEP students who met exit criteria and were reclassified as English proficient.

Most (95%) identified LEP students were served and 5% were not served. In the elementary, 14,897 (38%) LEP students were served by the BE program and 22,119 (57%) by the ESL program. 95% of the BE students were in Grades PK-2. The number of ESL students escalated from 22% at Grade PK to 90% at Grades 5-6. 253 (1%) elementary LEP students enrolled in the Newcomer program. At the secondary level, 54% of LEP students enrolled in ESL and 45% in sheltered English courses.

The district had 9,632 first-year LEP students, 19% of PK-12 LEP enrollment. In 2003-04, 53% (N=83,357) of Grades PK-12 students had a parent/home language other than English. Among them, 49,725 (31%) were identified LEP and 26,765 (17%) were exited LEP students. Identified LEP students decreased nearly 2,000 compared to last year, while exited students increased by 2,241.

Grades K, 1, and 2 had more identified LEP students than other grades (Figure 2). Starting at Grade 3, the number of LEP students decreased by grade, except Grade 9. The number of exited LEP students rose steadily from 1,037 in Grade 3 and peaked at Grade 6 (3,347).

Figure 1. Number of identified LEP students by grade, 1994-95 to 2003-04.

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The district had 9,632 first-year LEP students, 19% of PK-12 LEP enrollment. First-year LEP students in elementary and secondary schools had more differences than similarities. Only 33% of elementary first-year LEP students were foreign-born as compared to 93% of their secondary counterparts. More than half of elementary first-year students tested at WMLS 3 or above in comparison to 6% of secondary first-year students.

Fifteen percent (N=7,562) of the PK-12 LEP population retained the “LEP” status for seven years or longer. The majority of these long-term LEP students (65%) were enrolled in secondary schools. At the secondary level, 47% and 44% of middle and high school LEP students, respectively, fell into this category.
Student Demographics
Compared to non-LEP students, LEP students were more likely to be Hispanic and in the free/reduced lunch programs (Figure 3). Other differences (particularly in the secondary) included a high foreign-born rate, a high retention rate, and a high over-age rate. One-third (38%) of identified LEP students were foreign-born and 62% were US-born. Secondary schools had higher percentages of foreign-born LEP students (61%-70%) than elementary level. Sixty home languages other than English were reported by LEP students. Spanish was predominant (88%).

Program Personnel
In 2003-04, 2,686 teachers worked directly with LEP students, 27% of the DISD teaching force, including 933 BE teachers, 90 Newcomer program or English Language Institute (ELI) teachers, and 1,301 ESL teachers.

Elementary BE teachers differed from ESL teachers in ethnic make-up (84% Hispanic vs. 6%) and experience. Nearly half was either newly hired or in the district for 1-2 years; 15% graduated from a foreign university. Elementary ESL teachers (N=1,227) were relatively more experienced. Most (73%) of BE teachers were certified. Most (95%) of the uncertified teachers were AC interns with probationary certificates, either new to the district (63%) or in their second year (32%).

Secondary ESL teachers were more likely to be female (71%-80%). White (50%-54%), having a beyond a bachelor degree (38%-47%). Hispanic teachers accounted for a larger percent (32%, compared to last year’s 21%) of the middle school ELI group, despite that White was still the predominate ethnicity.

Program Implementation
New measures taken in 2003-04 by the M-LEP included the Student Intake Center, a centralized registration and assessment office serving new immigrant students, Campus Staffing Plan, the ELLA program for new immigrant students in Grade 3, and a new TEA assessment tool. A mandated four-year training on sheltered instruction for non-ESL teachers and support staff started in 2003-04 focusing on Grades 7-12 staff.

Principal and Teacher Reaction to Program Improvement
District-wide principal and BE/ESL teacher surveys showed that principals and more than half of secondary ESL teachers approved of the BE/ESL program improvement. Less than 30% of elementary teachers felt so.

Most principals and more than half of secondary teachers felt the BE/ESL program design was coherent, while only 26% of elementary teachers agreed. They were concerned with frequent changes in program design and hoped for stability and consistency. Both teachers and principals endorsed the Newcomer and ELI programs.

Instructional Guidelines and Teaching Materials
Most BE/ESL teachers received the M-LEP instructional guidelines, but a smaller portion considered the guidelines helpful or useful. In the spring 2004 teacher survey, 80% of the secondary teachers confirmed that they received the mandated textbooks and the M-LEP materials, which were widely used by teachers. Nevertheless, teachers continued to feel they had insufficient materials.

Staffing
More than half of the principals felt that they had sufficient teachers to implement BE/ESL programs. Satisfaction with staffing was higher among secondary principals (64%) than elementary principals (53%). Satisfaction with the number of BE/ESL teaching assistants was consistently low across school levels.

Only 31%-40% of the elementary and secondary teachers were satisfied with the availability of teaching assistants when needed. Even though TA positions were filled, they were often pulled out to be substitute teachers or attendance clerks rather than working in assigned classes.

Professional Development
The majority of elementary (62%) and secondary (69%) teachers said they have received sufficient training in the last two years. Most felt that half or more of the training was relevant and useful.
Improvement Priorities

The improvement priority for the PK-12 BE/ESL program most identified by both teachers and principals was still the supply of BE/ESL textbooks and teaching materials, followed by involvement of LEP parents, M-LEP instructional guides, quality of BE/ESL teacher training, sheltered instruction training for non-BE/ESL staff, and LEP placement. Another critical improvement priority was the availability of BE/ESL teaching assistants.

Academic Performance in 2003-04

English Acquisition (WMLS and RPTE)

Elementary LEP outscored secondary LEP students on WMLS. For Grades PK-2 students, 20%-30% reached WMLS 4-5 and an additional 35-53% scored at WMLS 3. From Grade 3, the percent reaching WMLS 3, 4, and 5 declined rapidly (Figure 4). 60+ % of secondary LEP students scored at WMLS 1 or 2. The decline of WMLS proficiency along grade could be due to: 1) reclassifying high performing LEP students into the mainstream program, or 2) lacking annual progress greater than one grade level in the academic-cognitive skills.

Figure 4. Percent of PK-12 LEP students reaching WMLS 3 or above by grade, spring 2004.

Grades PK-2 ESL students outscored BE students on WMLS. The gap remained in Grade 3, but was largely narrowed.

Two-thirds (65%) of Grades K-2 students scored at WMLS 3 or above in their first year as LEP and continued to make progress in the next 3-4 years. The proficiency level declined for the “years 5-6” group and continued declining in the years following. Similar patterns were found in Grade 3 and Grades 4-6 despite a much lower starting point.

A converse pattern was shown at the secondary level—a steady growth of LEP students’ WMLS level along with the years served. Yet few students (5%) were able to reach WMLS level 4 or 5 after being served for 7+ years.

In cumulative counts, 61% of Grades 3-12 served LEP students achieved Advanced on RPTE as of spring 2004. Grades 3-6 ESL students showed a small margin of edge than BE students (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Cumulative percent of LEP students reaching RPTE Advanced level by grade group and program, as of spring 2004.

Two-thirds of LEP students in Grades 4-12 made progress in RPTE proficiency. Served LEP students consistently made greater annual progress than not-served students. The growth was primarily made during the first four years served. At the elementary level, the steady growth stopped for the “years 5-6” group and the decline continued in the “year 7 or more” group.

Cohort data since spring 2000 showed that by the end of the fifth year (spring 2004), 79%, 85% and 82% of students in the original Grades 3, 5, and 7 cohorts, respectively, reached RPTE proficiency level—Advanced. Of the original groups, 6%-9% of students scored at the Beginning level after four years.

Cohort comparisons of 2001-02 new immigrant students showed favorable results for served students at the elementary and middle schools. Similar results were obtained from another study—served students consistently outscored not-served students in three-school levels

ITBS/ITED

Grades 3-8 exited LEP students consistently outperformed non-LEP and LEP students in spring 2004 mean raw NCE ITBS reading and math scores. Mixed results were found in served and not-served LEP comparisons. The comparisons of mean adjusted NCE scores repeated similar patterns but difference was reduced or minimal.

BE and ESL comparisons on ITBS in Grades K-4 showed ESL students’ stronger performance. Comparisons between ESL and sheltered course students in Grades 7-8 yielded little difference.

TAKS
Similar to previous years, exited LEP students achieved highest passing rates on all TAKS subjects across all grades. LEP students had lower TAKS passing rates than exited LEP and non-LEP students (Figure 6).

Grade 3 students, regardless of LEP status, had the highest passing rate. As students continued in school, the percent passing decreased for all students in all subjects. Grades 3-6 LEP students passed TAKS Reading, Writing, and Math by 63%, 72%, and 66%, respectively. Passing rates of Grades 7-10 LEP students were 39%, 53%, and 28%, for Reading, Writing, and Math, respectively. TAKS data in both elementary and secondary grades continually showed a positive relationship between LEP students’ performance and RPTE proficiency. No positive relationship was found between students’ years LEP and their TAKS performance. LEP students’ passing percentages appeared to peak at 3-4 years in the program and suffered a reduction after the 5th and 6th years.

Unlike last year, secondary students performed better in Writing and had lowest passing rates in Math. Only 28% of LEP students passed Math compared to 66% of exited LEP and 56% of non-LEP students.

Cross-sectional AYP analyses on TAKS Reading showed, when including exited LEP students over the last two years in the group, LEP students in all grades met the required passing standard (47% passing) except Grade 10 (40%). All grades showed positive gains, ranging from 5 (Grade 7) to 23 percent points (Grade 6).

ACP

With a few exceptions, middle school students did better on the ACP of ELI courses than high school in both fall and spring semesters. For ESL courses, the pattern was reverse—middle school students achieved higher passing rates than high school students.

Exited LEP outperformed non-LEP students on 15 of 17 middle school core subject ACPs. Lower passing rates were seen among current LEP students compared to exited LEP and non-LEP students on all subjects tested. In high school, exited LEP students outperformed non-LEP on 26 of 41 core subject ACPs. Exited LEP students had lower passing rates on 9 Pre-AP ACP tests. This pattern was consistent with 2003 data.

Meeting Exit Criteria

Under the 2004 exit policy, 31% of LEP students in Grades 2-12 met the exit criteria (Figure 7). Elementary students met the standard at a much higher rate (35%) than secondary students (17%). Grade 3 students achieved the highest percent (64%) meeting criteria.

Students were more likely to meet the criteria by passing the TAKS than reaching the 40th percentile on the ITBS. The number of students who met the TAKS criterion (7,366) was twice as high as the number meeting the ITBS criterion (3,420). This was particularly true for secondary students.

Consistent with previous years, exit rates were highly correlated to students’ RPTE levels. Very few students scoring at the RPTE Beginning and Intermediate levels met the exit criteria; even fewer met the 40th percentile criterion on the ITBS. Meeting exit standards was also positively correlated with the length of time students were in the program.
the program, except the "7+ years" group. Across grades, the year 4 and year 5 groups had the highest rate of students meeting criteria, followed by the "year 6" group (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Percent of LEP students meeting exit criteria by years served, spring 2004.

A total of 5,098 long-term LEP students, those staying in the BE/ESL program for 7 or more years, failed to meet exit criteria. This accounted for 16% of Grades 2-12 LEP population and 22% of those who failed to meet exit criteria. In contrast, only 1,519 in the "7 or more years" group met exit criteria.

The majority of long-term LEP students failing to meet the exit criteria were in secondary schools (68%, N=3,445), accounting for 32% of the total secondary LEP population.

This apparent secondary problem is rooted at the elementary level. Currently, 35% of the elementary LEP students meet the exit criteria in one year. The number of long-term LEP students would be greatly reduced if more elementary LEP students met exit criteria at their elementary grades.