Extended-Year Operations: TAKS Academy, Thriving Minds Summer Camps, and Summer School Programs, 2010-11

Nolan Rett Mickelson
Veronica Martinez-Cantu, M.S.

At-a-Glance

The Dallas Independent School District (Dallas ISD) provided extended-year educational services for eligible students in elementary, middle, and high schools. The TAKS Academy was designed to provide remedial test preparation for fifth and eighth grade students prior to the third administration of the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). Through the Dallas ISD’s partnership with Big Thought, the Thriving Minds Summer Camps for elementary and middle school students extended traditional and bilingual instruction through core curricula steeped in project-based learning (PBL). At the elementary level, students attending the summer camp received four-weeks of core instruction integrated with studies in the arts. Middle school students received the core curriculum integrated with career exploration for two weeks at Dallas ISD sites, then continued for two weeks at Fair Park. High School Summer School offered opportunities for credit recovery and fine arts enrichment. Several other enrichment programs were offered across the district, focusing on various ages and needs. These programs presented opportunities in music, dance, and science, among other subjects.

TAKS Academy

The Student Success Initiative TAKS Academy was funded by a Texas Education Agency grant to provide accelerated instruction to students who failed to meet the standards on previous administrations of the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) before the third administration of the TAKS test.

Districtwide, 2,322 fifth grade and 2,769 eighth grade students failed to meet TAKS standards on the previous two administrations of the test and were required to attend the TAKS Academy. Of those required to attend, 1,722 fifth grade students (74.2%) attended; 1,727 eighth grade students (62.4%) attended. These students received tutoring on weekday mornings from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. beginning June 13 and ending June 29. The final three days were reserved for the third administration of the TAKS exams.

Exactly 1,128 fifth grade students attended the TAKS Academy for reading and 95 percent of these students took the third administration. Only 192 students (17.0%) met the standard for TAKS Reading, while 880 (78.0%) did not. Of the students attending for reading, 923 were promoted; 737 (74.1%) of the promoted students either did not meet the reading standard or did not take the exam.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Did not Take</th>
<th>Did not Meet Standard</th>
<th>Met Standard</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>880</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>1,128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>790</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>1,069</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>544</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>757</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>1,214</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>1,470</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only 218 (20.4%) of the fifth grade students attending for mathematics met the TAKS Mathematics standard (see Table 1); 790 students (73.9%) did not meet the standard and 61 (5.7%) did not take the exam. Approximately 19 percent of those attending the TAKS Academy for mathematics were retained and 81 percent were promoted. Of those students promoted, 664 (76.7%) either did not take the TAKS Mathematics exam or did not meet the standard.

The lowest number of students, 757, attended for eighth grade reading (see Table 1). About 26 percent of these students were retained; 74 percent were promoted to the ninth grade. Only 134 students (17.7%) met the reading standard. Of the 561 students promoted to the ninth grade, 444 (79.1%) either did not meet the standard or did not take the exam.

Exactly 1,470 eighth grade students attended the academy for mathematics (see Table 1). Only 164 students (11.2%) met the standard. Most students (88.8%), either failed to meet the standard or did not take the third administration. Approximately 22 percent of students attending the TAKS Academy for mathematics were retained in the eighth grade.
and 78 percent matriculated to the ninth grade. Of the students promoted, 993 (87.0%) either did not meet the standard or did not take the exam.

**Elementary Thriving Minds Summer Camp**

Big Thought, a non-profit organization focused on enriching education through creative learning, and the Dallas ISD managed the Thriving Minds Summer Camp for elementary school students. This partnership was developed to implement a new approach to summer school with PBL. PBL incorporated “driving questions” into each academic subject to facilitate student learning by completing real world projects. Through an entry event, guiding questions, and concept support, teachers facilitated the learning process, while students collaborated, communicated, and thought critically as a peer group to create a final product. In addition to core content, the schedule included studio time which was led by Fine Arts Specialists from the district and community professionals (i.e. teaching artists). Studio time for K-2 focused on creative play activities that were reflective in nature to reinforce concepts students were learning throughout the day. For grades 3-5, studio time allowed students to have an in-depth 16-day project-based learning experience with one creative discipline – anything from art to cooking to robotics.

Students attended summer camp at one of 17 district elementary schools. Classes were held Monday through Thursday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. The elementary summer camp began July 5 and ended July 28. Students completed coursework in English/language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies with certified teachers. Teachers teamed up with certified fine arts teachers and campus integration specialists to deliver an integrated curriculum in all subject areas.

Approximately 6,707 students were recommended to attend the elementary school Thriving Minds Summer Camp; 6,240 of these students actually attended. Nearly 84 percent \((N = 5,209)\) of the assigned and attending students were promoted to the next grade and over 16 percent \((N = 1,029)\) were retained. Of the remaining 467 students who were recommended but did not attend, 85 percent \((N = 398)\) were promoted and 15 percent \((N = 68)\) were retained.

**Middle School Thriving Minds Summer Camp**

The middle school Thriving Minds Summer Camp was a product of the Dallas ISD’s partnership with Big Thought, and was driven by many of the same principles as the elementary summer camp, namely project-based learning. However, in lieu of studio time, the middle school Thriving Minds Summer Camp incorporated an exploratory class. Led by core class teachers, the exploratory period utilized community professionals from a variety of fields which were used in the exploratory classes to help students connect school to career goals.

Eligible students in grades 6-8 began summer camp at one of nine district middle school locations and were transported to Fair Park for the last two weeks. Classes were held Monday through Thursday from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. The middle school summer camp began July 5 and ended July 28. Students completed core coursework in two of the following subject areas: English/language arts, mathematics, science, or social studies. Classes met daily and were taught by certified teachers. An additional exploratory class was scheduled each day that focused on careers. All students had the opportunity to participate in several field trips to museums, spend a day at the Trinity River Audubon Center, and attend a performance at the Music Hall in Fair Park.

The overall passing rate for all courses was slightly under 85 percent. Of the 2,036 attending students, 1,815 (89.1%) were promoted and 206 (10.1%) were retained. Interviews with middle school principals revealed concerns with the academic relevance of the excursions at Fair Park, the degree to which a PBL curriculum was implemented, keeping quality teachers with classes, and the logistics of hosting a centralized summer camp at a non-school site. Despite these concerns, all principals were extraordinarily optimistic about the future of the middle school Thriving Minds Summer Camp and were particularly proud that students were provided with the opportunity to experience the museums, theatre, art, environment, and historical significance of Fair Park.

**High School Summer School**

The 2011 High School Summer School instructional program was intended to allow 9th through 12th grade students an opportunity to receive credit for courses not successfully completed during the 2010-11 academic year. The session operated from June 15 to July 21 at seven locations across the district. The last eight days of the summer session were devoted to student projects, TAKS testing, and course finals. Classes began at 8:00 a.m. and ended at 1:35 p.m. Evening school began at 4:15 and concluded at 9:45 p.m. In order to obtain credit for a course, the
student must have attended at least 90 percent of the instructional days, received a course grade of at least 70 percent, and complete a summer project.

Approximately 69 courses were offered to 2,726 high school students. The overall passing rate for the courses was 85 percent. The percentage of enrollments receiving a failing grade was just over 12 percent, and over 3 percent of the enrollments did not have a grade recorded.

**Recommendations**

The reliability of the data collected regarding the students participating in extended-year services was questioned in the 2010 Extended-Year evaluation. While many of the concerns were addressed prior to the current evaluation, schools remained inconsistent in reporting student participation in many programs. For example, no information was recorded in district databases for students in grades 6-12 who participated in enrichment programs. Going forward, accurate reporting of participating students should be a primary concern.

Students were either required to attend the *TAKS* Academy or recommended to attend a summer camp to prevent retention. Most of the *TAKS* Academy students, though they failed to meet a relevant *TAKS* standard, were promoted. Similarly, many recommended students did not actually attend the summer camp session and were promoted to the next grade level. Promotion rates for students not attending were, in fact, similar to rates for attending students. It is recommended that the administrative staff investigate the lack of consistency in applying the standards for promotion to the next grade.

Additional information may be obtained by consulting EA11-160-2, which can be found at [www.dallasisd.org/inside_disd/depts/evalacct/](http://www.dallasisd.org/inside_disd/depts/evalacct/).