African American Success Initiative: 2011-2012

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At-a-Glance

In line with Dallas Independent School District's (Dallas ISD) vision to educate all students for success, the African American Success Initiative (AASI) was created to address poor academic performance and achievement among African American students. While AASI's mission acknowledged Dallas ISD's commitment to the achievement of all students, it clarified the program's specific purpose which was to “eradicate the achievement gap and increase access to opportunities for its African American students.” The goal of the AASI program was to close the achievement gap by ensuring that African American students' academic, social, and cultural needs were being met as they engaged in rigorous and relevant instruction, while striving to become college and workforce ready.

African American Success Initiative (AASI) program activities were coordinated, overseen and implemented, to varying degrees, by Dallas ISD Professional Development, Special Education, Early Childhood Education, and Social Studies departments, Dallas ISD African American Male Taskforce, Dallas ISD African American Female Taskforce, and a curriculum advisory committee. During the 2011-12 school year, AASI funding was utilized to support several student and staff activities (seminars, conferences, professional development, college fairs, and field trips) that focused on the academic and cultural needs of students of color. African American Success Initiative programs and services were available to teachers and students (regardless of their identified race or ethnicity) at schools across all Dallas ISD learning communities. The Title I 2011-12 program workscope allocation for this component was $1,000,000.

The focus of the 2011-12 AASI evaluation was to 1) describe the characteristics of AASI participants and program activities and 2) examine the results of the AASI Leadership Conference Survey.

Program Activities

In October of 2011, about 1,400 Dallas ISD female students (in grades four through twelve) attended the “21st Century Girls with Purpose” seminar. The question-answer workshop allowed students to “voice” their opinions and experiences related to school and community climate, social and academic stressors, and areas in need of additional support and intervention. Seminar activities also included keynote speakers, music/dance performances, door prizes, and awards. The reigning Miss Black USA served as a motivational speaker for this event.

The Dallas African American Female Taskforce, through the utilization of AASI funding, provided Dallas ISD female students with additional opportunities to participate in leadership and college-related activities in the community. Students attended the Dallas ISD College Fair, Earth Day Dallas 2012 at Fair Park, 3rd Annual Dallas Youth Council “Leaders on the Move” event at Mountain View College, and leadership conferences at Irma Rangel Young Women’s Leadership School and Cedar Valley College.

African American Success Initiative leadership partnered with the Dallas ISD Reading Language Arts department to implement the Comprehensive Literacy Academy for Secondary Schools (CLASS). The academy was comprised of 11 sessions that were held at various district school sites from 4pm to 6pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays throughout the 2011-12 school year. The goal of CLASS was to increase instructional quality by empowering middle school reading teachers to:

- use culturally relevant methods for engaging adolescent readers (especially for African American students),
- learn research-based practices to develop fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension skills, and
- establish routines and use resources to diagnose reading difficulties and deliver targeted interventions.

Program staff reported that 162 secondary reading teachers participated in CLASS professional development activities. However evaluation staff could only match 156 participants with the district’s personnel database. Of those 156 identified participants, 89 percent were female and 11 percent were male. The majority (62%) of CLASS
participants were African American, while 26 percent were white, 10 percent were Hispanic, and 2 percent were Asian or American Indian. Sixty-six percent (103 out of 156) of participants had 10 or more years of teaching experience, 30 percent had six to nine (15%) or two to five (15%) years of experience. Only five CLASS participants were first year teachers. Teacher participation in CLASS was voluntary and AASI funding was utilized to provide additional pay (30 hours of supplemental pay at a rate of 20 dollars per hour up to 600 dollars) to teachers who participated in CLASS.

In June of 2012, AASI and Dallas ISD Early Childhood Education hosted a two-day summer academy for prekindergarten through second grade teachers at Bryan Adams High School. The focus of the Early Childhood Symposium was to provide teachers with an opportunity to have access to speakers and activities that would promote the use of classroom instructional best practices in a multiplicity of curricular areas: literature, mathematics, science, writing, technology, vocabulary, health, and others. Participation was voluntary and eligible attendees (the first 500 teachers that registered for the symposium) received supplemental pay (about 20 dollars per hour). Over 500 district teachers, instructional coaches, and staff attended the summer academy.

Through the AASI, Dallas ISD schools were given the opportunity to secure additional funding “mini-grants” (up to 1,000 dollars) to implement programs or interventions to address specific academic, social, or cultural needs of students on their campuses. The program reported that 35 schools received mini-grant funding; additional data (regarding activities or outcomes of the mini-grant program) was not available for evaluation staff review.

**Student Advocate Program**

The African American Success Initiative (AASI) student advocate program placed at-risk elementary, middle and high school students (3rd-12th grade) with student advocates (district teachers or staff). The AASI student advocate program was two-pronged: the AASI Female Student Advocate Program served Dallas ISD female students and the AASI Male Student Advocate Program served Dallas ISD male students. Student advocates served as mentors for program students and were responsible for connecting students to resources, assuring their attendance at district and community events related to their achievement, empowering them with information that would assist them in choosing and completing academically rigorous coursework and programs, and assisting with college and financial aid applications. African American Success Initiative advocates were required to meet with their mentees weekly and received a stipend ($500.00) for participating in the AASI student advocate program. Comprehensive data outlining campus-specific mentor-mentee activities was not available for evaluation staff review.

Eighty district employees served as AASI student advocates in 2011-12. The majority (86%) of advocates were African American, 11 percent were Hispanic, and 3 percent white. Advocates were more likely to be female (79%) and a teacher (85%). Ninety-five percent (76 out of 80) of advocates had obtained, at a minimum, an undergraduate degree from a college or university (37 bachelor, 38 master, and 1 PhD); four advocates had not obtained a degree from a college or university.

During the 2011-12 school year, 1,527 district students participated in the AASI student advocate program. The AASI Female Student Advocate program served 1,275 students (83% of program participants) and the AASI Male Student Advocate Program served 252 students (17% of program participants). Over 97 percent of students served in the AASI student advocate program were either African American (77%) or Hispanic (20%). The remaining 3 percent of program participants were white, two or more races, or Asian. Figure 1 displays the percentage of student participants in the AASI student advocate program by ethnicity.

![Percentage of 2011-12 Student Participants in the AASI Student Advocate Program by Ethnicity.](image)

The largest percentage (51%) of students were served at the elementary level, followed by middle school (29%) and high school (20%). More specifically, fifth grade had the largest percentage (25%) of students to be served by the AASI student advocate program. The largest percentage (85%) of
AASI student participants were identified as disadvantaged (Low SES), followed by at-risk (56%) and TAG (14%). Figure 2 displays the percentage of AASI student participants by special characteristic category.

![Figure 2. Percentage of AASI student participants by special characteristic category.](image)

**Note.** Students could be in more than one category.

**Dallas ISD Youth Leadership Conference**

The Dallas ISD Youth Leadership Conference “Preparing the Talented Tenth” was held in May of 2012. The leadership conference for elementary students (4th-6th grade) was held at North Dallas High School and the secondary conference (7th-12th grade) was held at Skyline High School. The objective of the Dallas ISD Youth Leadership Conference was to “build upon the leadership skills that are innate in the students we serve, both male and female, from all ethnic backgrounds”. Conference activities included but were not limited to: keynote speakers, music and dance performances, and break-out sessions discussing topics such as personality and learning styles, leadership, personal goal setting, community service, self-esteem, time management, careers in math and science, social and professional etiquette.

Principals at Dallas ISD campuses were directed to identify 15 students at each campus to attend the conference. Ten of the fifteen identified students had to be current (2011-12) AASI student advocate program participants and the five remaining students had to be in current leadership positions on their campus (student council, clubs, enrichment programs, or student athletes). Transportation was provided for identified students to attend the conference. The AASI program reported that about 1,100 students attended an elementary or secondary Dallas ISD Youth Leadership Conference.

**AASI Leadership Conference Survey**

The AASI Leadership Conference Survey, developed through collaboration between staff from AASI and Dallas ISD Evaluation and Accountability, collected self-reported data from students who attended an elementary or secondary Dallas ISD Youth Leadership Conference in May of 2012. The focus of the survey was to examine student perceptions regarding 1) relevance of leadership conference topics and activities and 2) suggestions for improvement.

Eight hundred and seventy (479 elementary and 391 secondary) students completed the AASI Leadership Conference Survey yielding a 79 percent response rate. Forty-five percent of survey respondents reported that they currently (2011-12) participate in the AASI student advocate program. Respondents were more likely to be female (61%) than male (39%). About 91 percent of respondents were identified as either African American (52%) or Hispanic (39%) with the remaining 9 percent being white, Asian, American Indian, or other. Figure 3 displays the percentage of survey respondents by ethnicity.

![Figure 3. Percentage of AASI Leadership Conference Survey Respondents by Ethnicity.](image)

**Relevance of Leadership Conference Activities.** Over 90 percent of survey respondents reported that they enjoyed attending the conference (96%) and actively participated in conference activities and sessions (94%). Ninety-one percent of elementary students and 86 percent of secondary students reported that leadership sessions or activities helped them to understand how to better prepare for college. About 96 percent of respondents reported that conference activities helped them understand how to become a better leader, person, or student. Respondents agreed that they had learned something useful about the importance of being a leader (95%) and 94 percent learned something new
in regards to leadership/character development at the conference. Ninety-five percent of elementary respondents answered “Yes” when asked whether the information they learned at the leadership conference was important to them. Findings also revealed that 88 percent of survey participants would like to attend another conference like this one in the future and that they would recommend this event to their friends, classmates, or siblings. Additionally, respondents’ understanding of the purpose of the leadership conference, topics, or activities seemed to increase after their attendance at the Dallas ISD Youth Leadership Conference. Figure 4 presents participant responses related to participant understanding of leadership conference, topics, or activities.

![Figure 4. Responses to Survey Question "I understood/understand the purpose of leadership/character development conferences, topics, or activities."](image)

Suggestions for Conference Improvement. The “Dress for Success” workshop was elementary respondents’ favorite conference activity while middle school respondents enjoyed attending the “Attitude is Everything” session. High school students reported that the “Leadership and Personality Styles” workshop was the most useful conference activity.

The majority of respondents seemed to believe that the skills or information that they learned at the conference could be utilized in the future. They reported that the information or skills they learned would be used to: “be a better student council member next year,” “teach others to be leaders,” “learn to better interact with others,” use “my leadership style as a positive,” “use my strengths as an advantage,” “learn to make new friends,” “be a more effective leader,” “network,” “become a better student,” “further my success in education,” “plan ahead,” “better myself and my community,” “lead my brothers in the right direction,” “set realistic goals,” and “get really nice job and more organized.”

Suggestions for program improvement revolved around the need to expand the time in which the conference and its activities were conducted. Each leadership conference was a one-day event lasting between four and six hours. Respondents reported that the time allotted for the conference did not allow participants to be fully engaged in its activities, projects, and discussions. Responses included, but were not limited to: “needed more time for communication,” “more time for hands-on activities,” “time to do more activities,” “more opportunities to work together,” “need more active sessions,” “be more organized...so we aren’t rushing in the end,” “have more sessions,” “do more games,” “more music and interaction.”

Summary and Recommendations

During the 2011-12 school year, AASI funding was utilized to support several student and staff activities focused on the academic, social, and cultural needs of students of color such as CLASS professional development activities, student advocate program, Early Childhood Education Symposium, and the Dallas ISD Youth Leadership Conference.

African American Success Initiative Leadership Conference Survey results revealed that the Dallas ISD Youth Leadership Conference was a positive and beneficial experience for the district’s youth. Conference activities and topics seemed to be relevant and useful to conference attendees. Students voiced that the information and skills learned while participating in the conference would be utilized in the future to better themselves, the community, or others. Respondents noted that expanding the time allotted to participate in the conference and its activities would strengthen the leadership conference experience.

Due to Texas’ current transition from the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) to the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR), participant test result data will be reviewed at a later date to determine program impact on student academic achievement as applicable.

Recommendations for African American Success Initiative program improvement include (1) improving the quality and availability of data and (2) determining additional services and strategies that would be most beneficial in increasing positive outcomes for African American youth.

For more information, please contact Program Evaluation at 972-925-6457.