At-a-Glance

African American Student Success Initiative (AASI) provides support to feeder patterns with a high concentration of African American students and those with the widest achievement gaps. The initiative focuses on academic support, student advocacy, and other support services designed to improve student academic success and prepare students for college, career, and the workforce.

Program Background and Goals
Beginning late in SY 2012-13, the program employed a more decentralized approach to implementation, in which campuses were given the discretion to design and implement activities most appropriate for their individual needs.

The first phase of the redesign at the end of SY 2012-13 included the Lincoln, Madison, Pinkston, and South Oak Cliff feeder patterns (Cohort 1). In 2013-14, the Carter, Samuell, North Dallas, and Wilmer Hutchins feeder patterns (Cohort 2) were added. The AASI had a budget of $503,946 Title I, Part A funding for SY 2013-14. All schools (N = 70) in the eight feeder patterns, with the exception of magnet schools, were eligible to receive AASI funds.

The AASI has four performance goals:

1) Decrease the achievement gaps on State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) between African American students in targeted feeder patterns and statewide white students by 25 percent in reading and mathematics.
2) Increase graduation rate by three percentage points.
3) Increase ACT scores by 1.5 points
4) Increase SAT scores by 120 points.

Baseline data for the four performance goals were established using data from SY 2011-12 (cohort 1) and SY 2012-13 (cohort 2). Cohort 1 feeder patterns are expected to achieve the goals by the end of SY 2014-15, whereas cohort 2 feeder patterns are expected to reach the same goals a year later, end of SY 2015-16.

The AASI proposed the following main components for SY 2013-14: focused action planning, professional development, student advocacy and case management, parent academies, and academic enrichment camps.

Purpose and Methods of the Evaluation
The focus of 2013-14 AASI evaluation was to 1) describe the characteristics of AASI participants and program activities; 2) examine the degree to which the various components of the initiative were implemented; 3) explore stakeholders’ perception of the professional development they received on Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning Strategies (CLRT); and 4) provide a status update on current achievement gaps.

This evaluation was primarily based on review of available documents submitted by participating campuses and personal communication with AASI staff. Post-training survey data from educators who participated in one or more of the professional development sessions on CLRT were also used to supplement data from document reviews. Post-training surveys solicited training participants’ feedback on: 1) the quality, relevance, and usefulness of the trainings; 2) their level of understanding of the basic framework of CLRT; 3) the degree to which they applied the knowledge and skill-set they gained from the trainings; 4) any obstacles or barriers they encountered during implementation; and 5) additional resources needed.

Implementation
Since the redesign of the initiative a total of seven professional development sessions on Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching and Learning (CLRT) were conducted by Dr. Sharroky Hollie, executive director of the Center for Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning. Overall, 428 individuals participated in at least one of the seven training sessions. The initiative employed a train-the-trainer model in SY 2013-2014, and campus-level training data submitted to the evaluator indicated that a total of 872 school staff were introduced to the CLRT framework at the school level by Campus Instructional Coaches and Academic Facilitators.

District- and campus- level training sessions received very positive feedback from participants.
The majority of respondents believed changes to current approaches to teaching African-American students are necessary and indicated that, training sessions were timely, specific and content-focused, with clearly stated objectives, and relevant to their work. Generally, responses indicated while the majority of participants have the general understanding of CLRT, they nevertheless lacked the depth of knowledge required for everyday application of the framework. Campus-level training participants particularly requested additional training sessions and materials. Overall, respondents suggested they may benefit from ‘refresher’ training, but more importantly, they indicated that a more in-depth and ‘practical’ training on how to apply the CLRT concepts in a classroom setting is essential.

Review of available campus action plans indicated that key actions related to improving the achievement of African-American students (particularly literacy) and providing support to the implementation of professional development on CLRT and student advocacy and case management. Indicators of success associated with the key actions were appropriate, specific, and measurable.

According to available documents on the student advocacy and case management component of AASI, at least 850 students were identified for the mentorship component. On average, mentors scheduled seven meetings to discuss various topics or issues including academic or STAAR prep/tutoring, college/career prep, leadership, problem solving/critical thinking, etiquette/social skills/character building, positive self-image, and communication. Activities or field experiences included trips to local, museums, libraries, or the arboretum. Types of service projects were mostly comprised of the following: volunteer work at homeless shelters, nursing homes, and church; campus beautification projects; food drives and fundraisers; and community clean-up activities.

Available documents revealed that only two AASI sponsored parent academy workshops were conducted by AASI personnel and Principal Fellows in two feeder patterns during SY 2013-2014. Forty-nine parents completed post-workshop questionnaires and their responses were generally very positive. Responses from the 25 principals who completed the survey indicated that more than half did not provide any AASI parent workshops during the 2013-2014 school year, suggesting this component of the initiative was not implemented as planned.

Academic Enrichment Camps were implemented in four of the eight feeder patterns in June 2014. These eight-day Enrichment Camps targeted at-risk students at the elementary and high school levels. Participating elementary teachers received a two-day pre-camp training as well as half day training and planning sessions during the eight-day enrichment camps. A total of 369 elementary and 28 high school students were invited to camp from various campuses but close to a third (30.6%, N = 113) of invited elementary school students did not attend camp. Overall, attendance for summer camps was better in the two high schools compared to the six elementary schools.

**Summary**

While implementation of AASI during SY 2013-2014 appeared to be significantly better compared to the previous year, the AASI can benefit from improved levels of implementation, monitoring, and proper and timely documentation. Due to the late start to implementation of AASI during SY 2013-2014, fidelity of implementation of nearly all components of the initiative were significantly and negatively affected. This is in part reflected by the proportion of the available federal funding that was spent during the school year (24.9% or $125,435.77). Feedback from relevant stakeholders also indicated that the late notice and start of the initiative greatly hampered their ability to plan ahead, allocate resources, and implement various components of the initiative.

Furthermore, fragmentation of responsibility for the implementation, monitoring, and documentation of AASI activities for the majority of the school year hampered the evaluator’s ability to document and assess implementation fidelity. Relevant implementation documents were not available for all participating campuses. Moreover, some available documentation for various components of the initiative were incomplete or otherwise unusable for evaluation purposes. As a result, the evaluator cannot, with any degree of confidence, speak to the fidelity of implementation of many of the components of AASI. Readers are cautioned to reserve judgment on the potential impact of the AASI program until the program has been fully implemented for at least two consecutive academic years and rigorous analysis of implementation and achievement data conducted.

**Recommendations**

The 2014-2015 workscope indicates that the AASI plans to continue with only two of the main components from SY 2013-2014, professional development and student advocacy. A District symposium on “closing the Achievement Gap” is additionally proposed. In light of this information, the following relevant recommendations are offered for
ongoing implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the AASI.

- Clearly and effectively communicate the goals, objectives, and expectations of the AASI to all relevant stakeholders.

- Be sure administrators are notified early to allow participating campuses enough time to plan an implementation strategy.

- Be sure administrators are strong advocates of the initiative so they can set expectations prior to the school year.

- Begin implementing all components of AASI at the start of the school year. Student advocates, for example, should be identified early so they can begin working with students at-risk of dropping out earlier during the school year.

- Ensure student advocates have adequate training to provide support to at-risk students.

- Design differentiated training sessions for CICs and AFs new to CLRT training and others who already have attended one or more sessions prior to the upcoming school year. Future training sessions on CLRT for those with previous exposure to the framework need to focus primarily on deeper understanding and the ‘application’ of the framework.

- Make sure campus-level trainers have resources necessary to provide adequate training to teachers. It may be prudent to conduct one or two focus groups with CICs and AFs to gather a more nuanced feedback on the type of support they require.

- Ensure implementation of all components of the initiative are electronically documented.

- Ensure the program evaluator has timely and on-going access to implementation documents. Without full and timely access to relevant documents a meaningful evaluation cannot be conducted.

For more information, please refer to the full report EA14-148-2 found at www.dallasisd.org/Page/888.