

**Evaluation of the Texas Middle School Program for AP\* Spanish**  
Executive Summary

February 2007

© Texas Education Agency 2007

\*AP, Advanced Placement Program, and Pre-AP are registered trademarks of the College Board, which does not endorse nor was involved in the production of this report.

## CREDITS

### **Resources for Learning, LLC**

Resources for Learning (RFL) specializes in the development, implementation, and evaluation of standards-based reforms in education. RFL works with state and regional education agencies; universities, districts, and campuses; and other entities engaged in the education of young people.

For additional information about RFL research, please contact:

Linda Wurzbach, President  
Resources for Learning, LLC  
206 Wild Basin Road  
Building A, Suite 103  
Austin, TX 78746  
Phone: 512-327-8576  
Fax: 512-327-8577  
[www.resourcesforlearning.net](http://www.resourcesforlearning.net)

This report is available at [www.teamiddleschoolspanish.org](http://www.teamiddleschoolspanish.org)

### **Contributors**

Tracy Laughlin, MFA  
Judy Jennings, PhD  
Ali Callicoatte Picucci, MA  
Lorena Lopez-Gonzalez, PhD  
Linda Wurzbach, MEd  
Dorian Martin, BA  
Emily Sartain, BA

### **Prepared For**

Advanced Academics Unit  
Division of Curriculum  
Texas Education Agency  
1701 North Congress Avenue  
Austin, TX 78701-1494  
Phone: 512-463-9581

### **Research Funded By**

Texas Education Agency

Copyright © Notice The materials are copyrighted © and trademarked ™ as the property of the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and may not be reproduced without the express written permission of TEA, except under the following conditions:

1. Texas public school districts, charter schools, and Education Service Centers may reproduce and use copies of the Materials and Related Materials for the districts' and schools' educational use without obtaining permission from TEA.
2. Residents of the state of Texas may reproduce and use copies of the Materials and Related Materials for individual personal use only without obtaining written permission of TEA.
3. Any portion reproduced must be reproduced in its entirety and remain unedited, unaltered and unchanged in any way.
4. No monetary charge can be made for the reproduced materials or any document containing them; however, a reasonable charge to cover only the cost of reproduction and distribution may be charged.

Private entities or persons located in Texas that are not Texas public school districts, Texas Education Service Centers, or Texas charter schools or any entity, whether public or private, educational or non-educational, located outside the state of Texas MUST obtain written approval from TEA and will be required to enter into a license agreement that may involve the payment of a licensing fee or a royalty. For information contact: Office of Copyrights, Trademarks, License Agreements, and Royalties, Texas Education Agency, 1701 N. Congress Ave., Austin, TX 78701-1494; phone 512-463-9270 or 512-936-6060; email: [copyrights@tea.state.tx.us](mailto:copyrights@tea.state.tx.us).

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Introduction

The state demographer of Texas predicts that by the year 2040 approximately 66% of public elementary and secondary students in Texas will be Hispanic (Murdock, 2006). While not all of these students will speak Spanish as a first language, increases of over 180% in the demand for programs serving English language learners are projected by 2040. In addition to possible language barriers, the low-income status of many of these students will present further challenges to their potential for academic success. Driscoll (1999) found that family income is one of the key contributors to high school graduation.

A broad base of research points to structural inhibitors such as the practices of schools that limit the academic success of poor and minority students. Because many of these students are enrolled in low-resource schools and/or are trapped in remedial programs or non-college preparatory classes, they do not always have access to the “opportunity” infrastructure of schools (Conchas, 2001). Numerous studies suggest that providing higher level instruction and a rigorous curriculum enhances the performance of all students, especially those who have not previously demonstrated high academic achievement (Learning Point Associates, 2004). Expectations regarding a student’s academic potential and exposure to the skills and values associated with high achievement have also been shown to have a significant influence on student engagement and success in school (American Educational Research Association, 2004; Learning Point Associates, 2004).

This report provides information on the evaluation of a program developed and piloted by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) designed to promote the academic success of low-income, Spanish-speaking students.

### Program History

With a grant from the U.S. Department of Education’s (USDE) Advanced Placement Incentive (API) program, TEA established the Texas Middle School Program for AP\* Spanish<sup>1</sup> in 2000. The project was designed to encourage the teaching of the AP Spanish Language course at the middle school level for students whose home language was Spanish and who were identified as economically disadvantaged. The goal was to use these students’ first language as an academic asset to boost student academic success, promote self-confidence in school, and support aspirations and preparation for college.

Seven school districts broadly representing most regions of the state piloted the program in the 2000–01 school year. With another grant from API, in 2002 TEA supported the replication of the program at 13 additional scale-up sites across the state. In March 2005, TEA seeded a statewide expansion of the program with planning grants to an additional 59 sites.

### Study Overview

In 2005, the Advanced Academics Unit of the Division of Curriculum at TEA contracted with Resources for Learning, LLC (RFL), to conduct an evaluation of the longer term impacts

---

<sup>1</sup> \*AP, Advanced Placement Program, and Pre-AP are registered trademarks of the College Board, which does not endorse nor was involved in the production of this report.

associated with participation by low-income, Spanish-speaking eighth graders in the Texas Middle School Program for AP Spanish. Participating students consistently performed well on the AP Spanish Language examination, and, in addition, anecdotal reports from staff at the pilot and scale-up sites suggested that as a result of participation, student absenteeism and disciplinary infractions declined; students' overall grades improved; and upon entering high school, students enrolled in more advanced classes and performed better on state tests than students from this population typically did. This study was designed to investigate these claims. Because a primary focus of the study is the long-term outcomes of program participation, analysis focused primarily on the pilot program, which began in 2000.

The purpose of this evaluation was to

- identify relationships between program participation for students participating in the program at the pilot campuses and long-term, school-related student outcomes;<sup>2</sup>
- document student perceptions of impacts; and
- provide ongoing statewide program implementation information and statistics related to participation and performance that could inform the future of the program.

### **Evaluation Questions**

1. Did students who participated in the program have higher attendance rates in high school than their non-participant peers?
2. Did students who participated in the program perform better on state tests in high school than their non-participant peers?
3. Did students who participated in the program complete AP courses in high school in higher numbers and at a higher rate than their non-participant peers?
4. How did students who participated in the program perform on AP exams in high school?
5. Did students who participated in the program graduate early or on the Distinguished Achievement Plan at a higher rate than their non-participant peers?
6. Did students who participated in the program feel the program impacted them positively in terms of academics, future opportunities, and relationships?
7. What are some issues that are likely to impact the program in the future?

### **Participants**

The evaluation focused on data for three cohorts of students at the pilot campuses, those who participated in the program in 2000–01 (346 students), those who participated in 2001–02 (416 students), and those who participated in 2002–03 (595 students). Participating districts provided student identification information. The study also included peer groups composed of all other Hispanic, Spanish-speaking students at the same campuses in seventh grade who did not participate in the program and who had a Grade 7 score on the state assessment. This allowed evaluators to compare the outcomes for participating students to school averages for the group of students who were very similar demographically.

---

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that discipline-related outcomes were excluded from the evaluation design due to the unreliability and variability of discipline-related data primarily because of inconsistency in reporting by school districts.

## **Methods**

Data collection methods included requests for student identification and AP exam performance information from pilot districts. Data on student outcomes were collected from the appropriate divisions at TEA. Surveys were administered at pilot campuses by local coordinators, and the evaluators conducted a document review of program information. Data on student performance on the AP Spanish Language exam were collected from both the pilot districts and the scale-up districts and College Board score distribution reports provided by TEA.

### ***Student Data***

Based on the student identification information provided by districts, the evaluators requested student performance data on the student assessment required by the State of Texas during the years of the study. Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) data for the years 1999–2002 and Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) data for subsequent years were requested from the Student Assessment Division of TEA. Data on student characteristics, attendance, course taking, and graduation were requested from the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) Division of TEA.

For the analysis of participating student characteristics and long-term outcomes (attendance, TAKS performance, AP course taking, and graduation), participant group data were compared to peer group data. In those outcome areas for which a test of statistical significance was appropriate, i.e., where a prior-year value (attendance, TAKS performance) was available, additional comparisons were conducted with similarly sized subsets of the peer groups so that difference in group size did not affect the results of the statistical testing. Regression analyses adjusted for previous performance in these areas.

### ***Surveys***

Surveys were used to assess student perceptions of program impacts, including perceived changes in academic performance, relationships at school, college expectations and aspirations, and plans for the future. Through PEIMS data received from TEA, the evaluators identified students who participated in Year 2 of the program who were still enrolled in the district and attending high school. A total of 230 students were identified for participation. Surveys were sent to local program coordinators for administration in Winter/Spring 2006, and 111 surveys were returned for a response rate of 48%. Surveys included items extracted from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) and the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS).<sup>3</sup> Survey questions selected from these instruments were primarily related to academics and future plans. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze survey data.

---

<sup>3</sup> The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) is a representative study that explores the causes of health-related behaviors of adolescents in grades 7 through 12 and their outcomes in young adulthood. Add Health seeks to examine how social contexts (families, friends, peers, schools, neighborhoods, and communities) influence adolescents' health and risk behaviors. For more information, see <http://www.cpc.unc.edu/addhealth>. The National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS 88) is a major longitudinal effort by the National Center for Education Statistics designed to provide trend data about critical transitions experienced by students as they leave middle or junior high school and progress through high school and into postsecondary institutions or the work force. For more information, see <http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/nels88/>.

### ***Program Data***

This portion of the evaluation included historical, district-reported program participation and exam performance information from both the pilot and scale-up sites, College Board score distribution reports provided by TEA, and progress reports to TEA from the 59 sites receiving planning grants. Descriptive statistics were used to report information on program participation and examination performance.

### **Study Limitations**

The evaluation was dependent on district provision of student identification numbers. This data was incomplete and/or irregular in some cases, so the group identified for inclusion in the evaluation was smaller than the originally reported participant group. Also, little is known about the initial grant awards and requirements or local program development and decision-making processes. Thus, this investigation does not benefit from information about local circumstances at the time of participation that can be linked to students, including local context, selection processes for student participation, or differentiation in services provided. Because all of these factors could have influenced the long-term outcomes, it is important to recognize that the evaluation describes trends overall that are likely attributable to program participation but that are subject to considerable variation at the local level. Analysis of characteristics of participating students indicates that participating districts were more selective in identifying students for participation in the program in the first year of implementation than in Years 2 and 3, particularly in terms of Limited English Proficiency (LEP) status and prior performance on state examinations. The evaluation methodology was designed to control for prior performance issues that could have influenced long-term, school-related outcomes for participants. However, other factors could have come into play, the identification and measurement of which were beyond the scope of the evaluation. Finally, the first group of students participating in the program (Participant Group 1) was the only group for which complete data on course taking and graduation through Grade 12 were available. Most findings for Participant Group 1 were substantiated by analysis of data for students who participated in the second year of the program (Participant Group 2). While Participant Group 2 was more representative of the target group (low-income, Spanish-speaking students), data were only available through 11<sup>th</sup> grade, so findings should be read with these circumstances in mind. Survey data might also contain positive bias. Other limitations with specific data are discussed in the relevant chapters of this report.

### **Summary of Findings**

#### ***Characteristics of Participants***

- In the pilot year of the program, while the participant group reflected the economic status of its peer group, grantees appeared to be selective in identifying higher performing students (as measured by prior performance on state examinations) and fewer Limited English Proficient (LEP) students to participate.
- Overall, in the second and third years of the pilot program, eighth-grade students enrolled in the program tended to be more representative of their Hispanic, Spanish-speaking peers.
- In Years 2 and 3, in comparison with peer groups, the program served a higher percentage of “LEP exempt” students who were identified for exemption on statewide examinations.

- Schools/districts tended to select more females than males for participation in the program.

***Relationships Between Program Participation and Long-Term, School-Related Student Outcomes***

- Data do not suggest that attendance over the long term is impacted by program participation.
- It is possible that program participation positively impacts TAKS performance in reading/English language arts.
- Students who participated in the program were more likely than their peers to complete one or more AP courses in high school.
- Students who participated in the program were more likely than their peers to complete an AP course in English Language and Composition in high school.
- The most frequently taken AP examinations in high school by participating students were English Language and Composition, U.S. History, AP Spanish Literature and Composition, English Literature and Composition, and Calculus AB.
- Information on AP exam performance by participants in high school was limited, but data suggest that participating students as a group do not perform well on AP exams in high school in subject areas other than Spanish.
- Students who participated in the program were more likely than their peers to graduate early and/or graduate under the Distinguished Achievement Program.

***Student Perceptions of Program Impacts***

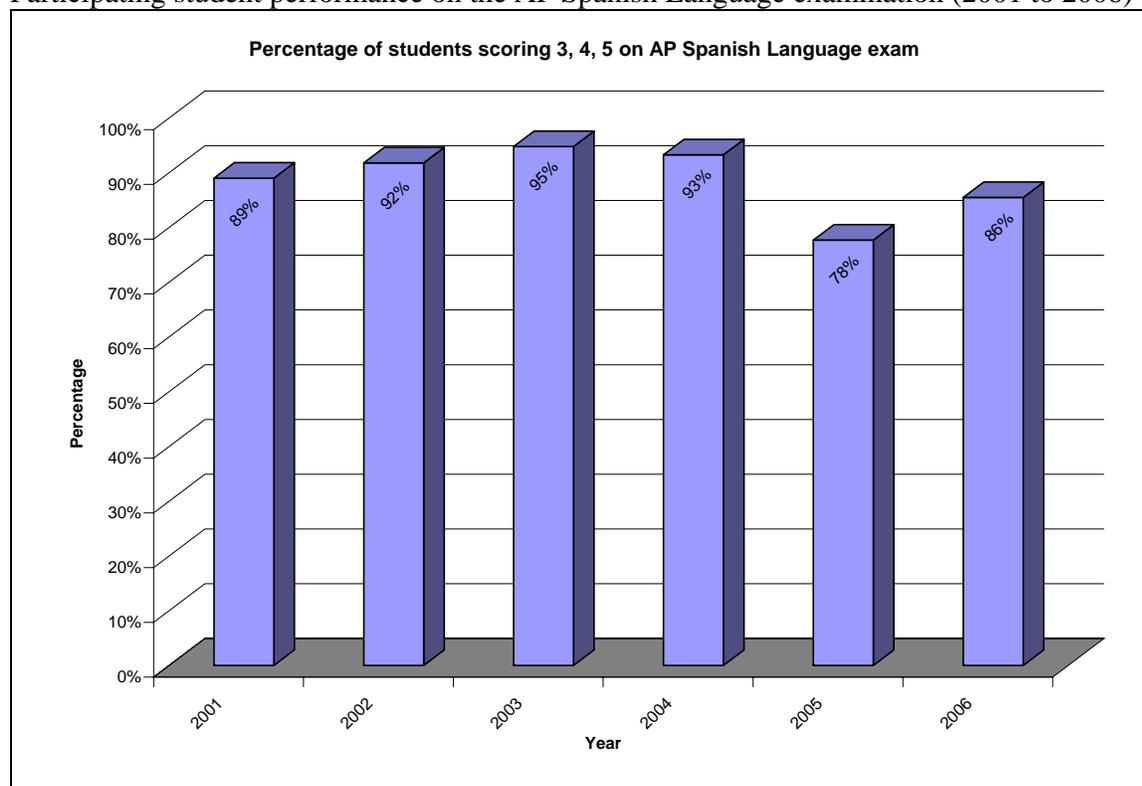
- The majority of students reported positive impacts on their academic lives.
- Relationships and career awareness represented other areas in which students were positively impacted.
- Students did not perceive English language skills or relationships with counselors to be areas of high positive impact.
- The majority of participating students aspired to advanced degrees.

***Trends and Issues With Potential Future Implications***

- Schools and districts implementing the program tended to continue and expand the program at the original campuses and at additional campuses in the district.
- Program growth was most consistent in districts serving a majority Hispanic student population.

- The majority of participating eighth graders earned a 3, 4, or 5 on the AP Spanish Language examination making them eligible for college credit.

Participating student performance on the AP Spanish Language examination (2001 to 2006)



Source. District-reported data

- Changes to the exam format could impact student performance.
- Statewide participation in the program should increase in 2006–07 to approximately 2,000 students with new program implementation at an additional 59 campuses.

### Conclusions

- Schools and/or districts tended to be more selective in program enrollment the initial program pilot year. Student participants were less representative of their Hispanic, Spanish-speaking peers and most were already higher performing students (in terms of performance on state assessments). In subsequent years, sites tended to open up enrollment to a broader group of students that was more representative of the eligible pool of Spanish-speaking students on their campuses. Findings from Year 1, when districts were more selective, were generally supported by Year 2 findings, when selection was more representative.
- Data suggest that participating students performed better in high school reading TAKS than their peers.

- Participating students took more advanced courses (specifically AP courses) in high school than their peers and graduated early and/or having met requirements for the Distinguished Achievement Program (DAP).
- Survey data indicate that student self-confidence and motivation and academic self-image were positively affected by program participation.
- Survey data indicating that participation in the program improved student-to-student and student-to-teacher relationships suggests that the program helps to build some of the social scaffolding in school that research suggests supports the academic success of low-income, language-minority students.
- Enhanced bilingual skills are of value to participating students on a variety of levels.
- Only about a third of survey respondents reported participation in college preparatory programs. Further, limited data suggesting poor performance on AP exams by participants could be indicative of underpreparedness for the rigors of college. This is important as survey data indicate many participants plan to pursue advanced degrees at four-year colleges and universities.
- Overall, data indicate that the program is sustainable once established and is replicable both within districts and across a range of types of school communities.
- Eighth-grade participants consistently scored well on the AP Spanish Language examination. The drop of 15% in exam scores of 3 or better associated with changes to the exam in 2005 has possible future implications. With changes expected to the 2007 exam, teachers at the existing program sites need to be made aware of exam changes and adjust their strategies to better prepare their students for success.
- Finally, while this study has shown some interesting preliminary findings about the possible impacts of the program on participating students broadly speaking, it also has raised some provocative questions about the context for the program at individual schools and the impacts on individual participants or types of participants.

### **Recommendations**

- The Texas Education Agency (TEA) should investigate ways to support programs that provide continued support to participating students as they move into high school including integration with established programs that promote college readiness for students underrepresented in higher education.
- TEA should investigate ways to provide ongoing or periodic supplemental training or support a network for AP teachers in existing middle school programs to keep them up-to-date with course and exam requirements.
- TEA should investigate funding sources or establish partnerships to continue the program and support for schools offering it.

- TEA should support continued research on program approaches and impacts to identify best practices in local program implementation and develop a greater understanding of the impacts on individual students and different types of student groups.

### **References**

- American Educational Research Association. (2004). Closing the gap: High achievement for students of color. *Research Points: Essential Information for Education Policy*, 2(3).
- Conchas, G. (2001). Structuring failure and success: Understanding the variability in Latino school engagement. *Harvard Educational Review*, 71(3), 475-504.
- Driscoll, A. K. (1999). Risk of high school dropout among immigrant and native Hispanic youth. *International Migration Review*, 33(4), 857-75.
- Learning Point Associates. (2004). *All students reaching the top: Strategies for closing the achievement gap*. Naperville, IL: Author.
- Murdock, S. H. (2006, July 7). *Population change in Texas: Implications for human and socioeconomic resources in the 21st century*. Presentation to the Texas State Board of Education. Retrieved February 2, 2007, from [http://txsdc.utsa.edu/download/pdf/presentations/2006\\_07\\_07\\_State\\_Board\\_of\\_Education\\_Austin.pdf](http://txsdc.utsa.edu/download/pdf/presentations/2006_07_07_State_Board_of_Education_Austin.pdf)