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Arp ISD Summative Evaluation Report

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Arp Independent School District has recently completed implementation of a Texas Reading Academy Project, the Academy for Reading Progress (ARP). This rural East Texas school district received funding to improve reading through providing improved materials for students, providing staff development designed to improve reading, and forming a strong alliance with parents for the purpose of providing adequate student support and extended reading and learning time at home. The program was initially funded for the 1998-1999 school year, it was extended by the Texas Education Agency to the 1999-2000 academic year.

Data presented in this evaluation report indicates that the strategies and activities conducted through this project were successful in their desired goal of improving student progress in the district. Test scores are better; cooperation with the home is improved; use of technology has flourished. The elementary school library has undergone dramatic improvements. Materials are available to students at all reading levels.

Teachers and administrators have received extensive training through this project. The focus has been on the identification of specific needs in reading and on identifying strategies to address these needs. Available data reflects student progress in this area.

It is the recommendation of this evaluation that the program begun here be continued and expanded as possible. There is a need for assistance for the project director who performs many other tasks in addition to managing this project.

INTRODUCTION

Partnering with parents and the community for the benefit of students is the overriding philosophy of the Academy for Reading Progress (ARP), a Texas Reading Academy Project operating within the Arp Independent School District. This district, a rural school district located in East Texas, received funding for one year for a program to improve reading through providing improved



materials for students, providing staff development designed to improve reading and forming a strong alliance with parents for the purpose of providing adequate student support and extended reading and learning time at home. The program was funded by the Texas Education Agency as a part of the Texas Reading Academies. Initial funding was for the 1998-1999 school year. The project period was extended by the Texas Education Agency, and project activities continued into the 1999-2000 school year.

Data was gathered for this evaluation report during an on-site visit to Arp on October 18, 1999. This was the second visit of the evaluator to the school district and the third meeting with district personnel.

EVALUATION QUESTIONS TO BE ADDRESSED

Results of this evaluation address three major questions to be answered in regard to the project:

1. To what extent were the strategies and activities of the grant implemented as planned?
2. How effective were the strategies in achieving the desired results of the project?
3. What is the impact of the project on participants?

These questions are best addressed by focusing on the expected results expressed in the initial application for funding.

EXPECTED RESULTS

Results anticipated from the implementation of this project were projected on three levels as follows: teacher development, parental participation and student progress. A summary of the results at each of these levels will form the bulk of this evaluation report. A review of these results will indicate the degree to which the project was successful.



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TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

The total impact of any project is directly related to the effect which it has on teachers, including the impact on the way in which teachers teach, the amount and types of information available to teachers, the ability of the teachers to utilize available research, the teachers' perception of personal development during this project and the progress in reading which the students made during the project period.

Expectations for results of teacher development in the ARP project are as follows:

- better diagnostic information available to the teacher
- more appropriate and better prepared lesson cycle and instructional activities
- reaching more types of learners with multi-sensory instruction
- better application of research-based instructional design
- student progress

The 17 project teachers and the school librarian received extensive training in multi-sensory strategies to promote textual fluency, increased vocabulary, phonemic awareness, decoding, segmenting, and blending through an integrated curriculum framework. Four staff development days, September 24, 1998; October 19-20, 1998; and November 4, 1998, stressed development in these skill areas. Agendas, registration lists, and evaluations for each of these sessions are on file in the office of the project director. On September 25, 1998, project teachers, the principal and the librarian participated in a staff development day instructing them in the proper administration and analysis of the Texas Primary Reading Inventory, the Informal Reading Inventory, Engaged Learner and STAR electronic assessment.

Instructing teachers in designing ARP Project Modules was the focus of training on early release days in October 1998. The emphasis here is to learn to design student-centered curriculum modules. On April 5 and June 6, 1999, two in service days helped project teachers with curriculum framework training for TEKS and TAAS.

Summer 1999, provided teachers with a summary of curriculum writing skills and an opportunity to write curriculum modules. At this time, teachers also participated in writing the Campus Improvement Plan for 1999-2000. Improvement of reading is now included in this plan.



Training, particularly training which provides teachers with skills for diagnostic assessment of student reading skills and comprehension, was especially helpful with G/T, Title I and dyslexia students. Identification was more accurate. Enrichment and research activities were better prepared for the learning environment. Improved diagnostic assessment resulted in improved reading as indicated by the following data:

·In 1997-98, 15 of 55 first grade students achieved less than one year equivalent growth in reading skills; in 1998-99, four of 62 students in first grade achieved less than one year equivalent growth in reading skills.

·In 1997-98, 21 of 56 second grade students achieved less than one year equivalent growth in reading skills; in 1998-99, six of 53 students in the second grade achieved less than one year equivalent growth in reading skills. Also, in second grade 17 of 53 students achieved two grade levels above or more in reading for comprehension, vocabulary and word recognition.

·In 1997-98, 24 of 55 students in third grade achieved less than one year equivalent growth. This same year, 82% of the students passed on TAAS reading objectives. In 1998-99, eight of 51 students achieved less than one-year growth and 22 of 51 students in grade three achieved two grade levels above or more in reading skills. In 1998-99, 92% passed the TAAS reading objectives.

Interviews with project teachers indicate a positive attitude toward the training received. There is little or no turnover. Teachers like being a part of the project. They appear to come to Arp and stay. They feel a special pride in the library, especially in the fact that so many additions have been made to it and it is now more usable and more useful to students. New reading materials have allowed students to expand their vocabulary, reading comprehension, and contextual reading experience beyond any other time in the history of the school. The teachers in this project present an impressive body of professional educators committed to maintaining high standards for students and to improving student achievement by themselves receiving continuous training to help them to do this.

Students have been impacted by the program also. STAR assessment was used in grades two and three as a pre-assessment. Students in the third grade were TAAS tested with an improvement from 82% to 92% in reading and an increase in math from 76% to 81%.



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PARENTAL PARTICIPATION

A second area of impact of this project is on parents of students in the project and other interested parents and non-parents in the district. Five distinct results were identified as desired results of implementation of this project. These results are as follows:

- extended support for reading initiatives, learning and reading time at home
- closer working relationship with school
- a clearer picture of educational priorities for students
- a better understanding of beginning readers' needs including siblings and extended family
- student progress

Involvement of parents was obtained in a number of ways. One method was Family Reading Nights held on Tuesdays and Thursdays from September to May. These were well attended by more than 100 parents.

Saturday Story Time was another activity completed through this project. National Honor Society Students and parents read at these sessions. Four reading clinics and other training sessions were scheduled for parents. Parents were trained in Internet access. This training encouraged parents to read with their children and provided them with techniques to improve the reading of children. Also, the training helped parents to become familiar with terms used in reading.

Parent volunteers in classroom reading circles further engaged parents in the reading programs of their children. Teachers created a syllabus for parents, putting it both on the web and hard copy, to encourage parent involvement. The geographic area included in the Arp Independent School District includes an upscale residential area near Lake Tyler. At one time students from these families attended private school in nearby Tyler. This is no longer true. Students attend school in Arp, and parents are heavily involved in the school program. This involvement extends into junior high and senior high.

One technique to involve parents envisioned in the project was the use of nannies and pappies to volunteer in the reading program. Although there was heavy parental involvement, this particular technique was never implemented. Use of technology to promote parental involvement is an important strategy. Forty-one computers have been placed on permanent loan with parents of students in the program. They have been given training to enable them to use e-mail and the

Internet. This has resulted in much enthusiasm, often resulting in parents upgrading their equipment. Now parents communicate directly with teachers regarding student assignments and student progress. Both teachers and the project director expressed a positive feeling about parental support for this and for other parts of the school program. Rapport between home and school is excellent and continues to improve.

STUDENT PROGRESS

The progress of individual students is the primary focus of this project. Anticipated results in student progress were as follows:

- fundamental and enhanced reading skills through a literacy-rich and balanced reading program that provides a large selection of reading, multimedia, and research materials
- broader foundation in literacy and textual fluency
- improvement in reading speeds
- improvement in word recognition and decoding skills
- vocabulary, spelling, and writing
- comprehension and effective reading level

Fundamental reading skills were enhanced through a literacy-rich and balanced reading program that provided a large selection of reading and research materials. The library has added many resources of interest to students, and many of the project activities revolve around the library. Students have shown improvement in all aspects of reading: word recognition and decoding skills, improvement in reading speeds, comprehension, vocabulary, spelling and writing.

Students in the ARP Project have had heavy involvement with technology as they took part in distance editing, writing objectives, writing storybooks, and using the Internet as a classroom resource. Each ARP classroom has three to five drops to facilitate Internet usage. Also, teachers were assisted by high school web masters and were able to place their curriculum on the Internet.

One very popular aspect of the ARP project is the DEAR program, Drop Everything and Read. DEAR time was blended with the Accelerated Reading program to encourage students to gain a profuse and broad reading foundation. This project was implemented with parents at home also.

Closely related to student progress is the upgrading of the library. More than 3,000 titles have been added to the Arp Elementary Library, upgrading it to exemplary status. The library now



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complies with the Texas Library Initiative for on line resources. Library resources are available from each classroom and by remote access. One of the objectives of this project was to upgrade the computer system so that this remote access would be available. There is no way to measure the impact of the library and the remote access feature on student progress.

Students have been impacted by the DEAR Program also. STAR assessment was used in grades two and three as a pre-assessment. Students in the third grade were TAAS tested with an improvement from 82% to 92% in reading and an increase in math from 76% to 81%.

Arp ISD has in effect a district policy to pre-test and post-test all students during the year for teacher information and district improvement committee information. Several instruments were added this year, including the TPRI, Metropolitan Achievement Test, STAR and portfolio assessments. This has assisted the classroom teacher in better serving each individual student. Analyzing test scores as a whole has helped teachers plan and pace instruction. Grade level data cited below indicates the student progress made during the implementation of this project.

Kindergarten:

- 14 out of 66 below grade level achievement for phonemic awareness, vocabulary and word recognition. This information was the first data collected for a kindergarten class and assisted teachers in developing individualized goals and classroom objectives for each student.

First Grade:

- 1997-1998 Data: 15 of 55 students achieved less than one year equivalent growth in Reading Skills
- 1998-1999 Data: four of 62 students achieved less than one year equivalent growth in Reading Skills and 34 of 62 students achieved two grade levels above or more (second grade and above) in comprehension, vocabulary and word recognition.

Second Grade:

- 1997-1998 Data: 21 of 56 students achieved less than one year equivalent growth
- 1998-1999 Data: six of 53 students achieved less than one year equivalent growth in Reading Skills and 17 of 53 achieved two grade levels above or more in reading skills for comprehension, vocabulary, and word recognition.

Third Grade:

- 1997-1998 Data: 24 of 55 students achieved less than one year equivalent growth
- 1997-1998 TAAS: 82% Passage on the Reading objectives
- 1998-1999 Data: eight of 51 students achieved less than one year equivalent growth and 22 of 51 students achieved two grade levels above or more in reading skills
- 1998-1999 TAAS: 92% Passage on Reading Objectives



RESPONSE TO EVALUATION QUESTIONS

Reviews of the results achieved through this project indicate that the project did operate in a successful and effective manner. It is appropriate to review the project in light of evaluation questions cited at the beginning of the evaluation.

Question 1: To what extent were the strategies and activities of this project implemented as planned?

Project strategies and activities were implemented as planned. In reviewing these activities, only one was not addressed. The plan to have Nannies and Pappies to encourage reading was not feasible. Having high school students perform the tasks planned for the nannies and pappies proved more feasible than using adults.

Question 2: How effective were the strategies in achieving the desired results?

This is a highly successful project with positive results in all three areas of expected improvement: teacher development, parental participation, and student progress. The project director monitored effectiveness of project strategies constantly.

Question 3: What was the impact of the project on participants?

One has only to visit this school district and observe the project in action to realize its significance. Teachers are enthusiastic, dedicated, and planning to stay in Arp. No parents were interviewed during this evaluation, but teachers and the project director are enthusiastic about parental participation and support.



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RECOMMENDATIONS

The impact of this project is significant as evidenced by:

- effective teacher development
- improved and upgraded library resources
- increased parental involvement
- improved student achievement
- improved teacher attitude

Recommendation 1:

Continue to embed philosophy of project into overall operation of Arp ISD.

Recommendation 2:

Consider assistance for project director, perhaps an assistant director or even a clerical aide.

