

# HILO™ Pre-K Spanish Enrichment Program

## An Overton Group Pilot Program at Pickle Elementary School

### What is the HILO pre-K Spanish enrichment pilot program?

The Harmonious Intervention through Language Opportunities (HILO™) pilot program was created by the Overton Group on the assumption that all kids can benefit from learning a second language. Pre-kindergarten (pre-K) students also can benefit from developmentally appropriate opportunities to build social and academic skills through stimulating activities. The HILO parent manual describes advantages (e.g., flexibility of the brain and development of higher-order thinking skills, and respect for other cultures and languages) to learning Spanish in early childhood.

The impetus for the program, according to the curriculum preface, was “to offer language enrichment to young children in the African American community who share their schools with large numbers of Spanish-speaking recent immigrants and children of immigrants.”

The program is designed to offer all pre-K students, i.e., native and nonnative speakers) enhanced, developmentally appropriate learning opportunities through songs, games, art, and other activities by which language can be developed and vocabulary practiced. These activities are implemented in large and small-group configurations balanced with individual attention and one-on-one activity.

### What do students in the HILO program learn?

The curriculum and assessments were developed with the input of multidisciplinary experts in early education and linguistic development. The curriculum was written by Nydia Cohen and Felissa Taylor, who are both bilingually certified elementary school teachers. The aim of the curriculum is to “bring Spanish language learning and culture into the lives of students from non-Spanish and Spanish-speaking families in order to strengthen harmonious ties within the various cultures, as well as provide a strong educational foundation for students to successfully enter various school system programs” (HILO, 2014, Foreword).

The curriculum addresses conversational Spanish and integrates academic learning and preparation through lessons that incorporate cultural and holiday practices originating in a variety of countries, including Latin America and the United States. The curriculum is organized in four units that incorporate developmentally appropriate pre-K learning activities. Language and vocabulary are scaffolded into increasingly more complex learning objectives across the 36 multi-lesson units. As an example of the content, unit 5, titled “¿De que’ color es?” is divided into four daily lessons. The les-

sons provide instruction on colors, shapes and numbers through art, music and stories. A companion parent manual has corresponding lesson guides to enable parents to understand and support learning connections at home.

### What does the HILO program look like in action?

The program provides packaged materials and lesson plans for teachers to implement in the classroom. Professional development opportunities (i.e., positive classroom management strategies, teacher shadowing and in vivo mentor assistance ) are provided to teachers who use the curriculum. The campus principal confers with HILO program administrators to coordinate program implementation and to provide feedback about the program’s impact and efficacy. Additionally, communication with campus pre-K teachers provides an opportunity for classroom teachers to give feedback on relevant student learning characteristics, to progress and to consider any modifications that may be necessary for a particular student to be successful in both programs.

The HILO program was implemented strategically: the pre-K program at Pickle Elementary School concludes



it’s day one hour prior to the rest of the students are released. The end of school day gap can make it challenging for parents who have students in pre-K and older grades to coordinate transportation. Many pre-K students stay at the campus in a classroom where they are supervised by campus staff until parents arrive to pick up older students. The HILO program was designed to be implemented during the 1-hour gap to provide added instructional value to

the students’ day.

### What were the metrics used to measure success in the pilot?

The HILO pilot program at Pickle Elementary was implemented with 20 students when it began on February 9, 2015. It concluded May 22, with 18 of the group remaining active participants. Attendance, parent satisfaction, curriculum review, and assessment data were used to indicate pilot program quality.

## Limitations of the Pilot

All pilot programs are intended to “test” a new program to learn if the design is effective, to gather data, to revise elements as needed. As such, there are limitations or challenges presented in any pilot program. In the case of the HILO program, the primary limitation of the pilot was the enrollment demographics at the pilot campus.

The HILO program was designed to “bring transparency of Spanish language learning and culture into the lives of students from non-Spanish and Spanish speaking families in order to strengthen harmonious ties within various cultures, as well as provide a strong educational foundation for students to successfully enter various school system programs” (HILO Curriculum, Foreword). Furthermore, the preface to the curriculum indicates the goal is “to offer language enrichment to young children in the African American community who share their schools with large numbers of Spanish-speaking recent immigrants and children of immigrants.”

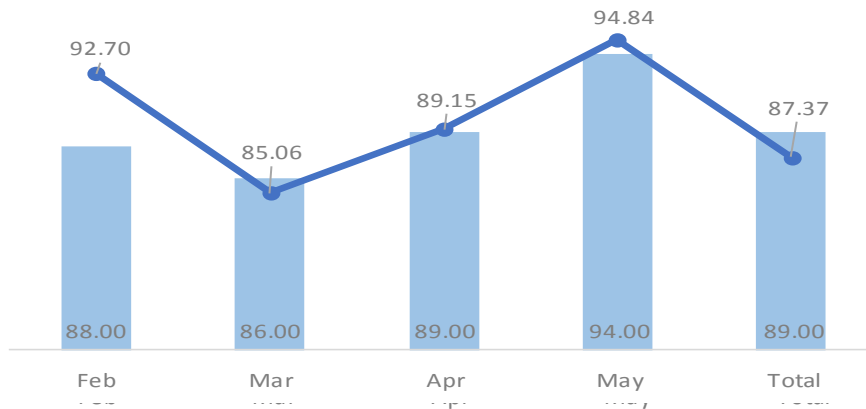
During preparation for the AISD pilot program, the Overton Group met with AISD administrators and was assigned Pickle Elementary as its initial test site. The Pickle campus community has an African American enrollment of 48 (6.3%) and Hispanic enrollment of 705 (92.3%). Given HILO’s intended purpose, a school with a higher African American student population would provide a better testing ground for the potential impact of this type of program, for example, Jordan (20.1%), Overton (26.4%), Sims (40.5%) or Norman (41.1%).

Recognizing the limitations imposed by the community demographics, the Overton Group conducted an additional pilot outside of AISD in a community with higher African American participation. The results of the external pilot can be obtained by contacting The Overton Group directly (<http://www.theovertongroup.org/>).

## Attendance

The program attendance mirrored school day attendance at Pickle. Parents were careful to ensure students participation in the voluntary program was consistent and effective. Figure 1 illustrates the average monthly attendance rate at

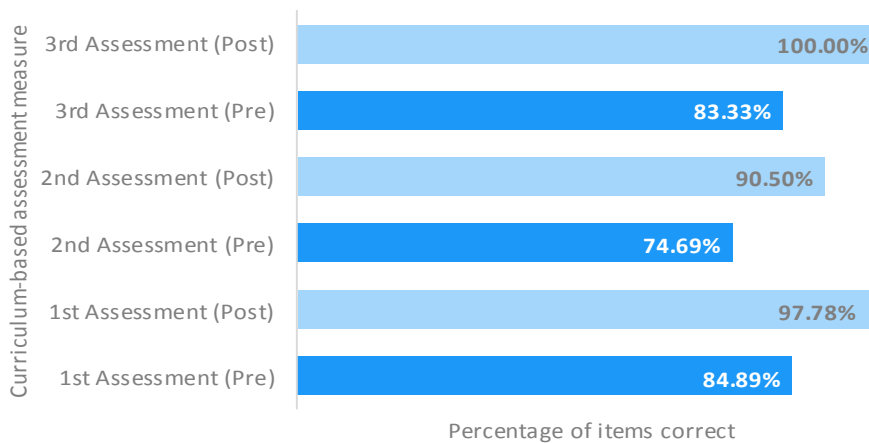
**Figure 1.**  
**Average Monthly Attendance for Pickle Pre-K and HILO Pilot Participation**



Source. AISD 2015 student enrollment data, HILO attendance records.

Students' attainment of curriculum goals was measured through pretest and posttest unit measures (Figure 2). Students demonstrated mastery of curriculum units on both pretests and posttests. The results show an average student growth from the pre- to post-test but gains were modest because many of the students were native Spanish-language speakers (e.g., 14 of 18). The growth indicates that students, who were primarily Spanish-speakers, learned additional vocabulary related to colors, days of the week, food, clothing, numbers and cultural holidays. The benefit of the program among students in the Pickle community was pre-academic preparation. It provided kindergarten preparation in much the same way that programs such as Sesame Street and Headstart can improve academic readiness through exposure to basic vocabulary, concepts and skills.

**Figure 2.**  
**Pre- and Posttest Results for 2015 AISD HILO Pilot Participants**



Source. HILO curriculum pre- and posttest data 2014-2015.

from HILO program administrators. It was available to parents in May for a 1-week period. The survey was available in Spanish and in English.

Pickle ES compared with participation in the HILO program. There were no significant differences in levels of participation. Figure 1 shows slightly higher attendance in the HILO program than in pre-k; this is likely due to late arrival at school wherein students missed Pickle attendance but were present for HILO attendance. The Pickle Elementary School attendance and the HILO program attendance are both higher than national pre-K attendance rates<sup>1</sup>

## Curriculum-Based Student Assessment

It provided kindergarten preparation in much the same way that programs such as Sesame Street and Headstart can improve academic readiness through exposure to basic vocabulary, concepts and skills.

## Parents' Perceptions

A final metric used to evaluate the HILO pilot program was parents' perceptions. A parent survey was designed by AISD's Department of Research and Evaluation with input

<sup>1</sup> See Harris, R. (2011), [Large number of K-3 students miss weeks of school](#) or Attendance Works.(2015). Mapping the early [attendance gap](#) for more information.



Fourteen of the 18 students' parents completed the survey. Among those, three completed the English version and the remainder completed the Spanish version, again reinforcing the reality that most students in the AISD pilot program were native Spanish speakers. Four out of five parents reported that the HILO teacher had communicated appropriately with them about their child's participation. Similarly, all parents reported being *very comfortable* or *comfortable* with talking to the teacher about their child's needs in the HILO program. All parents indicated they would recommend the program to others. Thirteen parents believed their child had learned about children who speak another language. Although most parents' responses were positive, two parents disagreed that their child had learned how to communicate with children who speak a different language. Parents of native Spanish-speaking children *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that their child learned additional Spanish in the HILO program, while parents of native English speakers only *agreed* that their child had learned some Spanish in the HILO program.

Parents were asked what they thought their child enjoyed about the HILO program. Responses included: "being with her friends, learning Spanish," "learned to write the alphabet and participated in what they could," "I believe he liked the entire program and enjoyed it very much," "the companionship of other kids and that they speak another language," and "drawing and playing." These parent comments seem to underscore the value of the developmentally appropriate curriculum activities for the students who participated in the program. Parents perceived that their children enjoyed the activities and the program.

## Conclusions

The HILO pilot program was developed by the Overton Group as a way to bridge cultural differences between African American pre-K students and their Spanish-speaking peers. The curriculum was designed to be developmentally appropriate and incorporate common pre-academic skills and concepts (i.e., colors, numbers, days of the week, holiday events/festivities). The program was piloted during Spring, 2015 at Pickle. DRE conducted a preliminary evaluation of the pilot to inform administrators about the progress of the pilot and any student impact outcomes that could be determined. Based on attendance, parents' perceptions, and curriculum-based assessment measures, HILO is a promising program. Students attended the program at similar rates to the AISD pre-K program from which it can be inferred that parents of program participants were invested in the program and made it as important to the child's day as attending school. Parents reported overall positive feedback about the program, including that students enjoyed it and learned a bit, and parents said they would recommend the program to others. Finally, students evidenced small gains in vocabulary and pre-academic concepts, based on pre- and posttest assessments developed and administered by HILO program staff. The most concerning limitation of the pilot program was the demographics of the campus HILO was assigned to by AISD (see sidebar, page 2). It is recommended that future implementations of the program be situated in communities that reflect a larger population of African American students because that was one of the community groups targeted by the Overton Group when designing the program.

## AUSTIN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

Laura T. Sanchez Fowler, Ph.D.

### Department of Research and Evaluation



1111 West 6th Street, Suite D-350 | Austin, TX 78703-5338  
512.414.1724 | fax: 512.414.1707  
www.austinisd.org/dre | Twitter: @AISD\_DRE

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