# Account for Learning

## Evaluation Report & Action Plan
## 1999-2002

## Austin Independent School District

## Office of Program Evaluation

October 2002

# *Account for Learning Evaluation Report & Action Plan 1999-2002*

## *Austin Independent School District*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Account for Learning (AFL) is a locally funded initiative, begun in 1999-2000, with the goal of increasing reading and mathematics achievement at campuses with high percentages of economically disadvantaged students. During 1999-2000, 48 campuses were selected for participation in AFL. For 2000-2001, seven campuses were added, and in 2001-2002, one more campus was added for a total of 56. Over the past three years, AFL allocated resources to enhance student achievement at the selected campuses such as instructional specialists and parent/community liaisons for each campus, increased per pupil allocation, summer school and enrichment activities at elementary campuses, tutorials and extended learning opportunities at middle/junior high campuses, and paid extra-duty days for the purpose of staff development.

### MAJOR FINDINGS

The evaluation of Account for Learning was based on student reading and mathematics TAAS results, TEA accountability ratings, and surveys of principals, teachers and instructional specialists at campuses that received AFL funds.

- Among AFL-funded campuses at the elementary and middle school levels, the percentages of students who demonstrated mastery in TAAS Reading exam increased by 11 percentage points each from 1999 to 2002: For elementary students, the percentage increased from 68% to 79%. Among middle schools students, the percentage increased from 66% to 77%.
- The percentage of high school students at AFL-funded campuses who passed the TAAS Reading exam remained relatively stable, with 80% mastering TAAS reading in 1999 and 79% mastering TAAS reading in 2002. The percentage of students who mastered the TAAS Mathematics exam declined by two percentage points, from 77% in 1999 to 75% in 2002 among students in AFL-funded campuses.
- Among AFL-funded campuses at the elementary and middle school levels, the percentages of students who demonstrated mastery in TAAS Mathematics exam increased by 17 percentage points each from 1999 to 2002: For elementary students, the percentage of students increased from 67% to 84%. Among middle schools students, the percentage increased from 63% to 80%.
- The number of AFL-funded campuses that received distinguished accountability ratings from the state (i.e., "recognized" or "exemplary") increased from none in 1999 to 17 in 2002. The number of AFL-funded campuses that received a rating of "low performing" decreased from 12 in1999 to 3 in 2002.

- In 2000, 75% of a sample of principals reported that campus instructional specialists were the component of AFL that was most likely to lead to an increase in student achievement.
- On a 2001 survey question for teachers about the impact of instructional specialists' activities on their instructional techniques, elementary teachers were more likely to indicate a positive impact compared with secondary teachers.
- In 2002, 62% of instructional specialists agreed with the statement, *"I feel that the principal on my campus clearly understands my role and job responsibilities,"* while 22% did not agree, and another 16% neither agreed nor disagreed.

**RECOMMENDATIONS & ACTION STATEMENTS**

1. *Expectations regarding the roles of campus instructional specialists should be clearly and consistently communicated to principals and campus staffs.* Instructional specialists have reported that they are occasionally asked to spend their time on tasks that are not appropriate, such as substitute in classrooms.

   *Action Statement: Since this survey was administered, area superintendents have been working with principals to ensure that the services of the instructional specialists are being used as intended.*

2. *Monthly training for campus instructional specialists at the secondary level should be held separate from training for elementary instructional specialists.* Some secondary instructional specialists reported that the meetings focused too exclusively on elementary campus issues. In light of TAAS results in this report that highlight the need for improvement in student achievement at the secondary level, instructional specialists at the secondary level should be given opportunities for training and peer discussion specific to their needs. Also, because high school instruction is departmentalized, program administrators for AFL should consider departmentalizing secondary level instructional specialists.

   *Action Statement: Portions of the training seminars for instructional specialists have been and will continue to be divided according to campus level, as well as by area and/or vertical team, depending on the nature and content of the planned seminars.*

3. *AFL should be assigned a separate account number in the district's accounting system, so that the effectiveness of the various components of the initiative can be evaluated relative to their costs.* Currently, it is impossible to determine how much money campuses spent on each of the initiative's components, with the exception of salaries for instructional specialists and parent/community liaisons because AFL funds are combined with local and state compensatory education funds in the

district's accounting system. It has therefore been difficult to assess the effects of the initiative in relation to its cost.

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# ACCOUNT FOR LEARNING OVERVIEW

Account for Learning (AFL) is a locally funded initiative that began in the 1999-2000 school year after planning during 1998-1999. The primary goal of AFL is to increase reading and mathematics achievement at campuses with high percentages of economically disadvantaged students through equalization of resources in order to support high quality instruction across the district. Over the past three academic years, AFL provided the following resources to enhance student achievement at the selected campuses (See Table 1.):

- increased per pupil allocation;
- a campus instructional specialist for each campus;
- a parent/community liaison for each campus;
- summer school at elementary campuses;
- enrichment experiences at elementary campuses;
- tutorials and extended learning opportunities at middle/junior high campuses;
- three paid extra-duty days for the purpose of staff development and/or planning for teachers, counselors, librarians, high school assistant principals, and helping teachers;
- two extra-duty days for the purpose of staff development and/or planning for middle/junior high school assistant principals (for 1999-00 only).

The total AFL budget for 1999-2000 was $4.5 million, and in 2000-2001, it was $4.7 million. In 2001-2002, the AFL budget rose to $5.8 million.

This report provides information for district administrators and program staff about the effectiveness of Account for Learning. Four major topics are addressed: 1) a description of AFL-funded campuses and students, 2) student achievement at campuses that received AFL funds; 3) the role of instructional specialists, with survey results from 1999-2000, 2000-2001, and 2001-2002, and 4) the role of parent/community liaisons. Data reported here come from the district's Office of System-wide Testing and surveys of principals, teachers, and instructional specialists at campuses that received AFL funds.

## ACCOUNT FOR LEARNING CAMPUSES

During 1999-2000, 48 elementary, middle/junior high, and high school campuses were selected for participation in AFL. For 2000-2001, seven campuses were added, and in 2001-2002, one more campus was added, for a total of 56. Table 1 shows the campuses that have participated in AFL in the last three school years.

Table 1: Campuses that Received Funding through the Account for Learning Program in 1999-2000, 2000-2001, and 2001-2002

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **High Schools** | Johnston | LBJ* | Travis | |
| | Lanier | Reagan | Garza* | |
| **Middle/Junior High Schools** | Burnet* | Fulmore | Martin* | Pearce |
| | Dobie | Kealing | Mendez | Webb |
| **Elementary Schools** | Allan | Dawson | Metz | Rodriguez |
| | Allison | Galindo | Norman | Sanchez |
| | Andrews | Govalle | Oak Springs | Sims |
| | Barrington | Graham* | Ortega | St. Elmo |
| | Becker | Harris | Palm | Walnut Creek |
| | Blackshear | Hart | Pecan Springs | Widen |
| | Blanton | Houston | Pickle** | Winn |
| | Brooke | Jordan | Pleasant Hill* | Wooldridge |
| | Brown | Langford | Reilly | Wooten |
| | Campbell | Linder | Ridgetop | Zavala |
| | Cook | McBee* | | |

**Five campuses were added to the program for the 2000-01 school year*
***One campus was added to AFL for 2001-02.*

Source: AISD Office of Curriculum and School Improvement

For each year, campuses were selected based on the percentage of enrolled students who participated in the federal free or reduced-price lunch program, and therefore were identified as economically disadvantaged. Table 2 shows the percentages of students who were classified as economically disadvantaged by campus group (i.e., AFL-funded campuses and campuses not funded by AFL).

Table 2: Percentage of Economically Disadvantaged Students at Campuses that Received AFL Funds, for 1999-2000, 2000-2001, and 2001-2002

| | 1999-2000 | | 2000-2001 | | 2001-2002 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | AFL | Non-AFL | AFL | Non-AFL | AFL | Non-AFL |
| **Economically Disadvantaged** | 72% | 25% | 74% | 24% | 73% | 27% |

Source: AISD Office of Management Information Systems

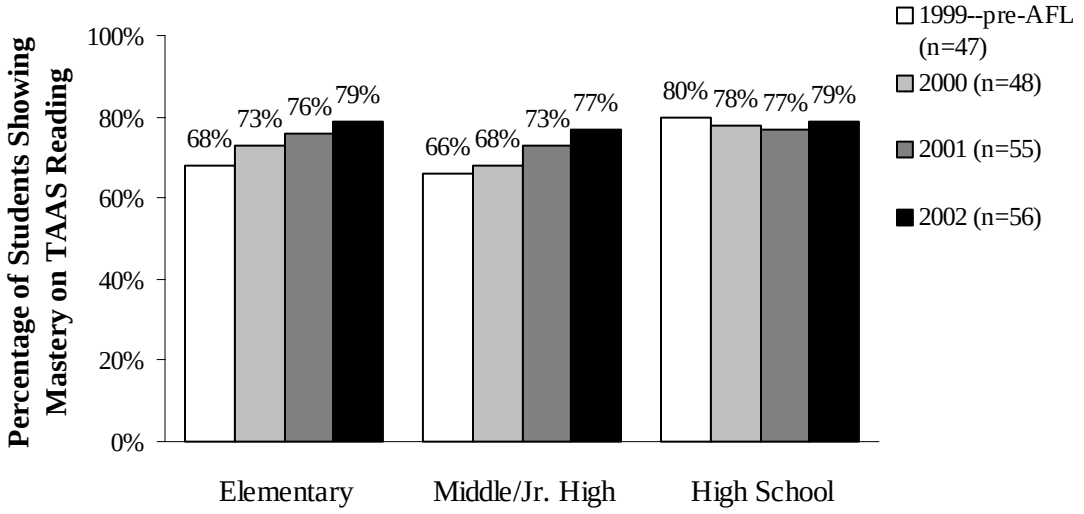
## STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AT AFL-FUNDED CAMPUSES

The Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) is a set of state-mandated tests that measure student mastery of the statewide curriculum in reading, mathematics, writing, science, and social studies at various grade levels and at exit level (i.e., Grade 10). In this report, only TAAS reading and mathematics scores are reported because a primary goal of AFL is to increase reading and mathematics achievement.

## TAAS Mastery in Reading

TAAS passing rates in reading for students at campuses that received AFL funds are presented in Figure 1 for the years 1999, 2000, 2001, and 2002. Note that AFL was not in place during 1998-99; data for 1999 are presented as a baseline for purposes of comparison.

Figure 1: Percentage of Students Passing the TAAS Reading Test at Campuses Served by AFL from 1999 to 2002*




**Data are based on the set of campuses funded by AFL during each year from 1999-2000 through 2001-2002. Because Rodriguez Elementary was not yet open in 1999, the sample size for the 1999 is based on 47 campuses, instead of 48.*

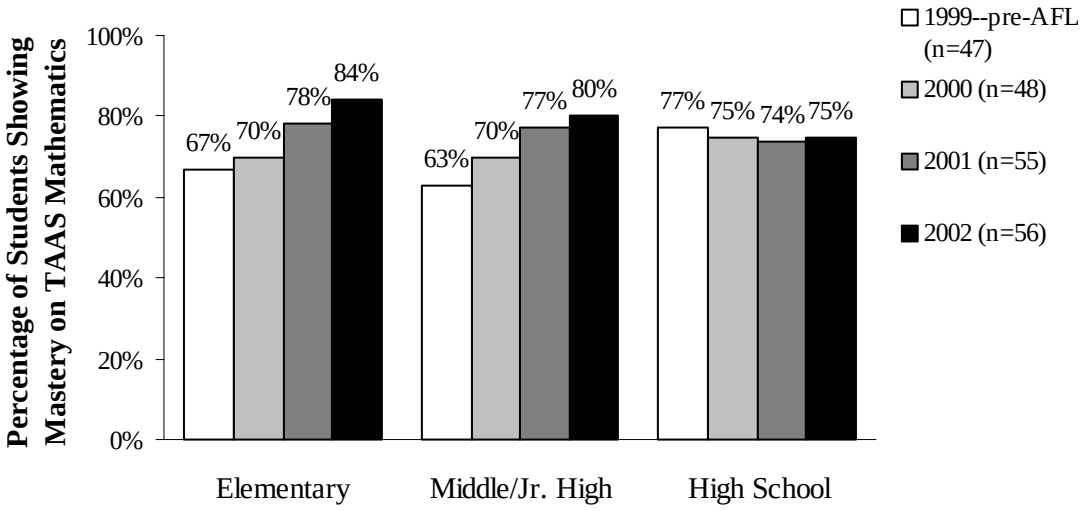
Source: Data Set of All Students Tested, AISD of Management Information Systems

Among AFL-funded campuses at the elementary and middle school levels, the percentages of students who passed the TAAS Reading exam increased by 11 percentage points each from 1999 to 2002. The percentage of high school students at AFL-funded campuses who passed the TAAS Reading exam remained relatively stable from 1999 to 2002.

## TAAS Mastery in Mathematics

Figure 2 shows that at elementary and middle school campuses that were funded by AFL, the percentage of students passing the TAAS Mathematics test increased from 1999 to 2002. The percentage of elementary and middle school students who passed increased by 17 percentage points for each school level. The gains were sharper in mathematics than in reading. At the high school level, the percentage of students who mastered the TAAS Mathematics test declined by two percentage points from 1999 to 2002 among students in AFL-funded campuses.

Figure 2: Percentage of Students Passing the TAAS Mathematics Test at Campuses Served by AFL from 1999 to 2002




**Data are based on the set of campuses funded by AFL during each year from 1999-2000 through 2001-2002. Because Rodriguez Elementary was not yet open in 1999, the sample size for the 1999 is based on 47 campuses, instead of 48.*

Source: Data Set of All Students Tested, AISD of Management Information Systems

**Accountability Ratings of AFL-Funded Campuses**

Table 3 shows that the number and percentage of AFL campuses that received distinguished accountability ratings (i.e., "recognized" or "exemplary") under the Texas accountability system increased each year from 1999, the year before AFL was implemented, through 2002, the third year that AFL was in place.

Table 3: Percentage and Number of AFL-Funded Campuses by Accountability Rating, 1999 through 2002

| | Low Performing | | Acceptable | | Recognized | | Exemplary | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | % | *n* | % | *n* | % | *n* | % | *n* |
| **1999 (pre-AFL; n=47)*** | 26% | 12 | 74% | 35 | 0% | 0 | 0% | 0 |
| **2000 (n=48)** | 15% | 7 | 81% | 39 | 4% | 2 | 0% | 0 |
| **2001 (n=55)** | 11% | 6 | 73% | 40 | 16% | 9 | 0% | 0 |
| **2002 (n=56)** | 5% | 3 | 64% | 36 | 27% | 15 | 4% | 2 |

**1999 data are based on the set of campuses that were funded by AFL during 1999-2000, the first year of the AFL initiative. Because Rodriguez Elementary was not yet open, the sample size for the 1999 is based on 47 campuses, instead of 48.*

Source: Texas Education Agency

Additionally, the number of AFL-funded campuses that received an accountability rating of "low performing" decreased each year since the implementation of AFL, from seven

campuses in the 1999-2000, to three campuses in 2001-2002. By the 2001-2002, none of the high school campuses funded by AFL were rated as "low performing."

## INSTRUCTIONAL SPECIALISTS

A significant part of the AFL program has been the Instructional Specialist component. These campus-based staff members were added to AFL-funded campuses for the purpose of improving the quality of instruction at their schools and their salaries comprise the largest part of the AFL budget. For both 2000-2001 and 2001-2002, $2.3 million of AFL funds were appropriated for salaries of AFL instructional specialists (before benefits). This amount comprises approximately 49% of the entire AFL budget for 2000-2001 and 40% in 2001-2002.

As a relatively new class of staff (some schools in the district were able to hire instructional specialists before AFL was instituted), instructional specialists have participated in training to assist them in working with teachers at their campuses, as well as on the district's instruction-related initiatives so that they may support teachers in implementing this work. In the first three years of implementation, AFL-funded instructional specialists were required to attend monthly all-day professional development sessions. Topics included cognitive coaching, data analysis of TAAS results, software use in classrooms, and more recently, curriculum alignment and the TEKS in the core content areas of mathematics, language arts, science, and social studies. Instructional specialists have also received professional development to help teachers implement the Principles of Learning, such as Clear Expectations, Accountable Talk, and Academic Rigor in the context of the district-designated curriculum in mathematics and language arts. The Principles of Learning and associated work are part of a district-wide effort to improve instruction and learning, along with instructional leadership among administrators. This initiative is part of the work being done through the district's partnership with the Institute of Learning, headed by Lauren Resnick at the University of Pittsburgh.

Campus principals have responded positively to the addition of instructional specialists to their staffs. In 1999-2000, 89% of a sample of 30 randomly selected principals at AFL-funded campuses indicated on the district's Coordinated Survey that campus instructional specialists were the most useful part of AFL. In the 2000-2001 Coordinated Survey, instructional specialists were rated *most often* as one of the three most useful features of AFL by a randomly selected sample of campus administrators. Campus instructional specialists were also cited by 75% of the sample of principals to be the component of AFL that is most likely to lead to an increase in student achievement in

1999-2000. Without AFL, 80% of these principals also noted that they would *not* have had a campus instructional specialist at their schools.

### INSTRUCTIONAL SPECIALISTS' SURVEYS

At the end of the 1999-2000, 2000-2001, and 2001-2002 school years, instructional specialists were surveyed about their experiences and other aspects of their jobs. Results from these surveys include data from instructional specialists who are not specifically funded by AFL, because at a few campuses, funding for instructional specialists was allocated from sources outside of AFL. In Spring 2000, 49 surveys were returned out of 61 distributed, for a response rate of 79%. The response rate was estimated at 41% in 2001 and 45% in 2002. In both 2001 and 2002, a complete list of instructional specialists (funded by AFL or otherwise) was not available from the Department of Curriculum and School Improvement, so a combination of attendance rosters, the district directory, and a programming request via the personnel database were used to reach as many AFL instructional specialists as possible.

Surveys of the instructional specialists—from both 1999-2000 and 2000-2001—suggest that the relative novelty of the instructional specialist position and what that position entails appears to have required time for adjustment among principals, teachers, and the instructional specialists themselves.

*Action Statement: The emerging role of the instructional specialist and training in coaching teachers has been a continuing topic of district professional development. In the second year of AFL, training for instructional specialists focused on areas in which instructional specialists requested additional help, such as data analysis, mathematics instruction, and the TEKS.*

Three themes from the survey responses of all three school years are highlighted in the following subsections of this report: the receptiveness of teachers to the instructional specialists, challenges and success experienced by instructional specialists, and finally, their suggestions regarding curriculum and instruction (from the Spring 2002 survey only). Open-ended questions on these topics were included on surveys from Spring 2000 and 2001.

### RECEPTIVENESS OF TEACHERS

A majority of instructional specialists reported being well-received by teachers, some more so in the second and third years than in the first year of AFL. In 2002, 88% of instructional specialists agreed with the statement, "*Teachers at my campus seek my*

*assistance with matters related to instructional practice."* Across all campus levels, many instructional specialists found teachers to be trusting and appreciative of the support they provided. This adjustment, however, appeared to have taken some time. For example, in Spring 2000, some instructional specialists reported feeling inadequate and under-qualified in the beginning, and some reported having trouble getting the training they felt they needed. That year, instructional specialists reported that some teachers viewed them as administrators or evaluators, which made building trust and rapport difficult.

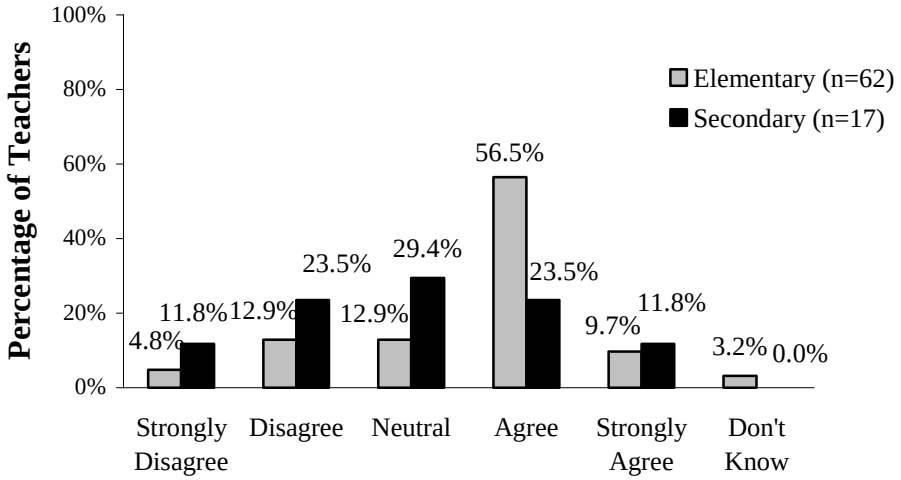
Also in the first two years of AFL, some instructional specialists reported resistance among teachers at their campuses. Although novice teachers and teachers new to campuses tended to be receptive of the instructional specialists, more experienced teachers were described as apprehensive and asked for help less often, as several instructional specialists noted. Some instructional specialists reported that several experienced teachers "questioned their authority" and ability to teach them things they did not already know.

On the district's 2001 Coordinated Survey, a randomly selected sample of 79 teachers was asked how much they agreed with a statement about the impact of the instructional specialists' activities on their instructional techniques. The results in Figure 1 show differences by campus level in teachers' perceptions of the instructional specialists' impact. Secondary teachers tended to be more neutral in their opinions of instructional specialists' impact on their practice, while more elementary teachers indicated a positive impact.

Instructional specialists cited a related theme on open-ended survey items that were part of the instructional specialists' survey in Spring 2000 and 2001. Instructional specialists reported an initial reticence on the part of the teachers that seemed to yield to acceptance with time. Responses to open-ended survey items indicate that at first, some teachers seemed threatened by the instructional specialists and doubtful of their usefulness. In Spring 2000, instructional specialists again reported that teachers at the beginning of the year seemed uncertain about the role of instructional specialists. Some reported being viewed as glorified secretaries and/or disciplinarians. Principals at some

Figure 3: Teachers' Responses to the 2001 Coordinated Survey Statement about Instructional Specialists' Activities and Workshops

*"I found the workshops and/or activities that were organized by the campus instructional specialist/coach helpful for improving my instructional techniques."*




Source: Coordinated Survey Sample of Teachers

campuses explained the role of the instructional specialist to their staff at the beginning of the year, thus preventing, or at least minimizing, some of the aforementioned problems. On other campuses, instructional specialists earned their acceptance and authority gradually by supporting a few teachers until others took notice and began asking for assistance themselves. In Spring 2002, however, 51% of 77 randomly selected teachers (at AFL-funded campuses) reported on their Coordinated Survey responses that they had contact with their instructional specialist either weekly or monthly. Another 20% of teachers (almost all at the elementary level) reported that they had *daily* contact with the instructional specialist.

A sample of 292 teachers at AFL-funded campus were also asked on the 2002 Employee Coordinated Survey to indicate which activities or avenues of support offered by the instructional specialist they had personally taken advantage of. The three most commonly cited activities, in descending order were: 1) training on the Principles of Learning, 2) training in the use of criteria charts or rubrics, and 3) training or workshops in specific content areas such as reading, math, or science. These items were also the three most frequently cited by the teachers as most effective in helping them improve their instruction.

## SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES FOR INSTRUCTIONAL SPECIALISTS

### Successes

Elementary and secondary instructional specialists listed a variety of successes in the Spring 2000 and 2001 surveys that gave way to an increased focus on instructional aspects in Spring 2002. In the first two years, instructional specialists tended to cite successes such as gaining trust from teachers, understanding their jobs, and personal growth on open-ended survey responses. Especially in Spring 2000, instructional specialists counted personal growth among their successes. Several listed "understanding my job" as a major success. By Spring 2001, 76% of respondents (n=25) indicated that they strongly agreed or agreed with a statement about understanding their job and its requirements, and just 6% disagreed.

Many successes, in Spring 2000, though, did revolve around working with teachers. In that year, several instructional specialists reported that, at least partially through their efforts, teachers on the verge of quitting were ultimately retained and that, by the spring, some of those teachers were eagerly anticipating the 2000-01 school year. Similarly, in Spring 2001, several teachers cited reduced teacher turnover as their greatest success. Instructional specialists reported further developing their knowledge and skills, including how to teach all grade levels and subjects, how TEKS and TAAS fit into "the big picture," how to implement cognitive coaching techniques, and how to analyze TAAS data. In addition, they described honing their ability to articulate this information to others, indicating a thorough understanding of the material. Most significantly, however, was that in 2002, instructional specialists reported most often that *"improved quality of instruction occurring at my campus"* was their greatest success that year. The other successes were *"learning new skills for my job"* and *"improved relationships with teachers."*

### Challenges

For all three years, the challenge most frequently cited by elementary and secondary instructional specialists was lack of time. Many reported in Spring 2000 and 2001 feeling "pulled in different directions" and having difficulty declining the myriad requests (some appropriate and some inappropriate) they received. In Spring 2002, a mixed pattern of results emerged from instructional specialists' responses to the question, *"I have time during the school week to work with campus staff on how to implement the Principles of Learning."* Fifty-one percent of instructional specialists reported that they agreed with the statement, but 44% disagreed with it. However, when asked specifically

about challenges in Spring 2002, instructional specialists selected "having adequate time to work with teachers" *most* frequently from a list of nine options.

On the open-ended survey item about instructional specialists' challenges in Spring 2000 and 2001, the second most frequently cited challenge was being asked to perform tasks that were beyond the scope of their position and that detracted from the work they were hired to do. For example, instructional specialists reported being asked to substitute teach and to act as test and textbook coordinators. This finding suggests that principals need to be informed about the appropriate and less appropriate tasks instructional specialists may be asked to do. In Spring 2002, instructional specialists were asked to rate their agreement with the statement, *"I feel that the principal on my campus clearly understands my role and job responsibilities."* Sixty-two percent of instructional specialists (n=23) agreed with the statement, while 22% (n=8) did not, and another 16% (n=6) neither agreed nor disagreed. On an open-ended survey question in 2002, however, a few instructional specialists still reported being asked to do tasks outside scope of their jobs, for example, one reported that "too many days have been spent doing classroom teaching as a sub," and added, "not much time for curriculum development."

Another challenge for instructional specialists pertained to working with what they cited were the large numbers of inexperienced teachers at their campuses. Although this was the second most frequently cited challenge on the Spring 2002 survey, many instructional specialists had written in the previous surveys about the difficulties of working with teachers who had no teaching experience, including those who were working toward their certification in teaching. For several instructional specialists, the lack of teaching experience among faculty at their campuses was related to their perceptions regarding the lack of time to work with all the teachers who needed help.

### INSTRUCTIONAL SPECIALISTS' RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENTS IN CURRICULUM & INSTRUCTION

In Spring 2002, a curriculum director was hired, and the district began to focus on aligning the K-12 curriculum in preparation for the new state assessment, the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). Training for instructional specialists focused more on the alignment between the TEKS and the curriculum so that they would be better prepared to assist teachers at their campuses. The curriculum director requested that instructional specialists be queried with the following open-ended survey item: *"In your opinion, what improvements are most needed in the area of curriculum and*

*instruction in order to best prepare teachers and students for TAKS success?"* Three primary themes emerged from the data:

- The need for curriculum alignment, both vertically and horizontally. A majority of instructional specialists cited district-wide alignment as important, given the district's high student mobility rates.
- The need for better quality professional development, especially regarding the TEKS and the TAKS, along with more *time* for professional development. Instructional specialists cited the need for professional development that is not optional, and that involves time for reflection and dialogue among teachers. Many also emphasized the need for instruction in reading, writing, and mathematics.
- The need to reduce "optionality" of professional development and instructional approaches, with the latter as important for fostering better consistency throughout the district.

*Action Statement: Summer 2002, instructional specialists attended a mandatory two-week training institute that would enable them to support the delivery of the district's curriculum. Instructional specialists also participate in focused seminars each week.*

## PARENT/COMMUNITY LIAISONS

Campuses that participated in AFL also received funding for a parent/ community liaison to increase parent and community involvement on their campuses. In 2000-2001, approximately $890,000 was allocated for parent/community liaison salaries; in 2001-2002, this amount increased to approximately $1.4 million. Because parent/community liaisons are supported through other sources as well (most notably, Title I), evaluation results related to parent/community liaisons for 2000-2001 are summarized in a separate report entitled "Parent and Community Involvement Evaluation" (Washington, 2001). A similar report containing data from 2001-2002 on parent and community involvement will be issued in Fall 2002. During 1999-2000, however, a survey was conducted with parent/community liaisons at AFL-funded campuses. The results are briefly summarized below.

In 1999-2000, 32 out of 48 parent/community liaisons (67%) at AFL-funded campus responded to a survey about their work. In their responses to a question about how they spent a majority of their time as parent/community liaisons, the three most frequent responses were: 1) providing information to parents, including sending mail-outs, flyers, newsletters, and making phone calls; 2) preparing for, conducting, and

notifying parents about house meetings and home visits; and 3) recruiting, organizing, and training parents and community volunteers and mentors. Other frequently cited activities included attending Parent Educator and Parent Advisory Council meetings, and preparing for and conducting workshops, classes, and assemblies.

Parent/community liaisons were also asked to describe other aspects of their jobs during the first year of AFL (1999-2000), such as rewards and challenges. They described their work as important, rewarding, and challenging. Many believed that they could make important changes to their campuses through the work they did with parents, whom they described as enthusiastic, interested, and concerned. A few of the rewards cited by parent/community liaisons included watching parents develop leadership skills, and become engaged and empowered. Challenges included an enormous workload and a shortage of time. Others cited a lack resources such as funds for a lending library for parents, and training, especially for liaisons at the secondary level and for those who work with parent populations whose primary language is *not* English or Spanish.

## SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

During its first two years, the AFL initiative funded resources to enhance instruction, increase student achievement, and foster parental involvement. AFL provided funding for staff positions and activities at selected campuses with high percentages of economically disadvantaged students. In addition, campuses that were part of AFL received monies for summer reading programs, TAAS tutoring, and enrichment activities, such as study trips to museums and cultural events.

The most popular component of AFL among campus and district staffs was the campus instructional specialists, who provided ongoing education and support to teachers. As a result of the instructional specialist, summer school, and TAAS tutoring components, it is likely that AFL contributed to increases in achievement among elementary students in reading and math.

The evaluation of AFL has revealed areas in need of improvement as well. Therefore, on the basis of the results of this evaluation, the following recommendations are offered for consideration:

- *Expectations regarding the roles of campus instructional specialists should be clearly and consistently communicated to principals and campus staffs.* Instructional specialists are continuing to assist with the implementation of the Principles of Learning and have been charged with assisting teachers with the curriculum plans that are aligned with the TEKS, as the district prepares for the TAKS. The goal of these efforts is to improve instructional practice and increase student achievement.

Campus instructional specialists have a significant role to play in this work: they are trained monthly in the Principles of Learning and have studied the learning standards students will need to master (i.e., the TEKS); they have also learned skills for coaching teachers. Salaries for instructional specialists account for about half of all Account for Learning expenditures, yet many have reported that they are asked to spend their time on tasks that are not appropriate for them. For campus instructional specialists to be successful in meeting the goals of AFL, they must be trained and held accountable for performing the tasks they were hired to perform. Campus administrators should also be held accountable for ensuring that instructional specialists are engaged in work as stipulated in their job descriptions.

*Action Statement: Since this survey was administered, area superintendents have been working with principals to ensure that the services of the instructional specialists are being used as intended.*

- *Monthly training for campus instructional specialists at the secondary level should be held separate from training for elementary instructional specialists*. During 1999-2000 a majority of instructional specialists reported that their monthly meetings were very productive. However, some secondary instructional specialists reported that the meetings focused too exclusively on elementary campus issues. TAAS results in this report highlight the need for improvement in student achievement at the secondary level, especially among students at campuses served by AFL, and teachers at secondary campuses were less positive about work done on their campuses by instructional specialists than were elementary teachers. In light of these findings, and in light of the fact that secondary educators face issues that are unique to them, instructional specialists at the secondary level should be given opportunities for training and peer discussion regarding strategies specific to their needs. Also, because high school instruction is departmentalized, program administrators for AFL should consider departmentalizing secondary level instructional specialists. In doing so, instructional specialists could support teachers in specific content areas in which they were expert. One possible way to organize the instructional specialists would be to assign each to a multi-campus cluster; that is, two or three campuses could share a secondary level mathematics specialist, or language arts specialist. Secondary teachers would then have access to support from an instructional specialist with experience and knowledge in their particular content area.

*Action Statement: Portions of the training seminars for instructional specialists have been and will continue to be divided according to campus level, as well as by area and/or vertical team, depending on the nature and content of the planned seminars.*

- *AFL should be assigned a separate account number in the district's accounting system, so that the effectiveness of the various components of the initiative can be evaluated relative to their costs.* Currently, it is impossible to determine how much money campuses spent on each of the initiative's components, with the exception of salaries for instructional specialists and parent/community liaisons, because AFL funds are combined with local and state compensatory education funds in the district's accounting system. Therefore, it is difficult to assess the effects of the initiative in relation to its cost. Another recommendation related to this one is that the district's standardized planning process be monitored with regard to AFL. Campus staffs should be made responsible for documenting the following: 1) plans for their AFL resources, 2) observable outcomes expected, and 3) the relationship between AFL and other campus initiatives. Doing so would help ensure that thoughtful planning would precede campuses' use of AFL funds and would provide means of assessing which activities are particularly effective in increasing student achievement and which should be changed or discontinued.

## REFERENCE

Washington, W. (2002). *Parent and Community Involvement Evaluation Report, 2000-2001* (Publication No. 00.04). Austin TX: Austin Independent School District.

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