Helen Poulsen, Ph.D

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The Impact of Virtual Bilingual Summer School on English Learners' Beginning-of-Year (BOY) Performance in 2020–2021

Department of Research and Evaluation
Austin Independent School District

Introduction

Emergent bilingual students (formerly known as English learners) in Austin Independent School District (AISD) are eligible to enroll in a month-long summer school program offered before entering kindergarten and 1st grade. The bilingual summer school program is designed to prepare students for future success. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) provided guidance to school districts on offering the summer program in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and indicated that districts could have flexibility in fulfilling the requirements of this program. AISD offered virtual only, synchronous and asynchronous, instruction for the bilingual summer school program in June of 2020.

This report explores the impact of attending the virtual bilingual summer school program on kindergartners' and 1st graders' fall academic performance. Students who attended the virtual summer school program were compared with emergent bilinguals who did not attend the program in terms of their beginning-of-year (BOY) early reading performance (matched on percentage of students with economic disadvantage). Students entering kindergarten were assessed with the Texas Kindergarten Entry Assessment (TX-KEA), which is composed of several subtests as part of a literacy screener designed to gauge students' readiness for kindergarten. Students entering 1st grade were assessed with the MAP Growth assessment for reading.

Summer School Student Demographics 2020

A total of 860 students attended the 2020 virtual summer school program; this was lower than last year by 383 students. Of those, 457 students were entering kindergarten, and 403 students were entering 1st grade. 442 students subsequently enrolled in AISD kindergarten in the fall of 2020. There were 399 summer school students who enrolled in 1st grade in the fall of 2019. The remaining students included 11 who re-enrolled in prekindergarten and eight who did not enroll in AISD.

Most (72%) of the summer school program students were Hispanic. Other racial backgrounds included 19% Asian, 6% White, 2% Black or African American, 1% two or more races, and 0.6% American Indian or Alaskan Native. Additionally, most (74%) students were identified as economically disadvantaged and a small percentage (11%) were in special education.

Kindergarten BOY Performance

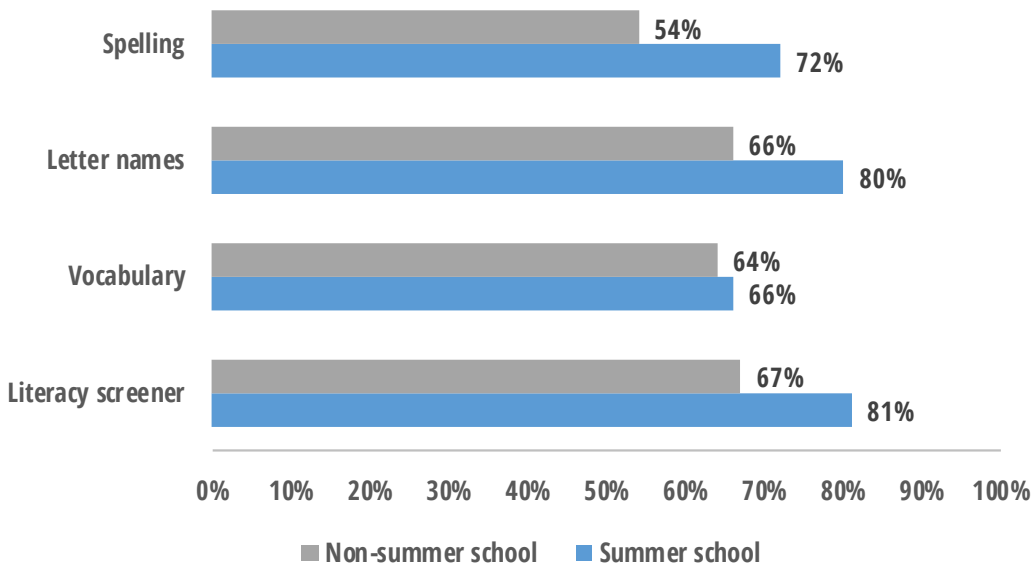
Kindergartners enrolled in AISD were administered the TX-KEA to assess their kindergarten readiness, at the beginning of the 2020–2021 school year. For more information on the

TX-KEA, please see the sidebar on page 2. Students who attended the summer school program were compared with an equivalent number of emergent bilingual kindergarten students who did not attend summer school. Students in the comparison group were randomly chosen so the proportion of economically disadvantaged students would be equal to that of the emergent bilinguals who attended summer school (78%).

Attending the virtual bilingual summer school program in June 2020 had a positive impact on kindergartners' TX-KEA performance (Figure 1). The subtests of vocabulary, letter names and spelling were required this year by the TEA. These subtests make up the literacy screener composite scale. In Figure 1, the percentages of students in each group scoring on track at BOY kindergarten for each subtest are displayed. The vast majority of kindergartners who attended the summer school program scored on track in all subtest domains and on the literacy screener. Overall, students who attended summer school had 2% to 18% more scores on track than did the comparison group. Last year, only the subtests of letter names and vocabulary were assessed for summer school students' performance, and percentages on track last year were almost equivalent to scores from this year.

Figure 1.

Emergent bilingual kindergarten students who attended the virtual bilingual summer program outperformed students who did not attend the summer program on TX-KEA subtests and the literacy screener.



Source. AISD student TX-KEA records

Note. Percentages indicate students scoring on track for grade level. Participation rates in each subtest varied: summer school spelling and literacy screener (n = 348); non-summer school spelling and literacy screener (n = 333); summer school letter names and vocabulary (n = 361); non-summer school letter names and vocabulary (n = 340). The difference in percentages between the summer school and non-summer school groups were statistically significant, except for the vocabulary subtest.

TX-KEA

The TX-KEA is administered to AISD kindergarteners in the fall and is used to screen students' school readiness upon entry to kindergarten. The University of Texas Health Science Center's Children's Learning Institute, the TEA, and the U.S. Department of Education collaborated in the development of the TX-KEA.

The TX-KEA is a criterion-referenced test designed to assist school staff with determining whether students meet specific academic standards and development levels. The test assesses kindergarten readiness across six domains: language, literacy, math and science, executive functioning, social emotional skills, and academic motor skills. Test results are used to guide instruction and help teachers identify students in need of further diagnostic assessment and intervention.

The test is available in both English and Spanish. The results presented in this report represent the best performance for a student in either language. Thus, if a student took the test in both English and Spanish, the higher performance of the two would be the data included in the analysis. For more information on the TX-KEA, see https://www.texaskea.org.

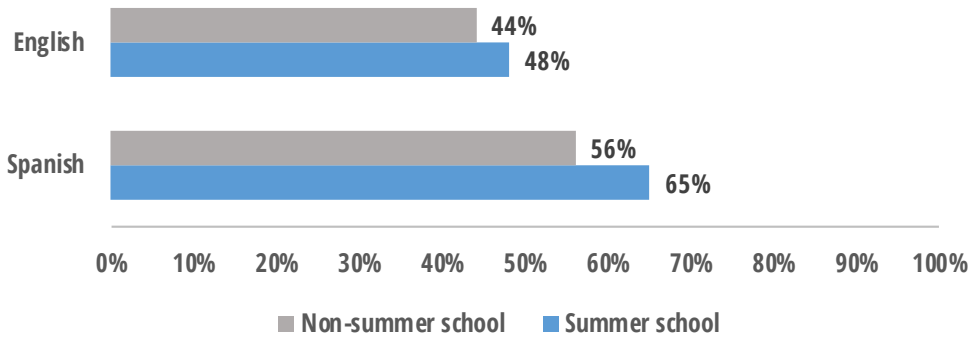
First Grade BOY Performance

First graders enrolled in AISD were administered the MAP Growth assessment to assess their reading ability in the beginning of the 2020–2021 school year. For more information on the MAP test, please see the sidebar. Emergent bilingual students who attended the summer school program were compared with an equivalent-sized group of 1st grade students who did not attend summer school. Those who did not attend summer school were chosen at random to create a subgroup whose proportion of economically disadvantaged students was equal to that of the emergent bilinguals who attended summer school (71%).

Attending the virtual bilingual summer school program in June 2020 had a positive impact on 1st graders' MAP reading performance (Figure 2). In Figure 2, the percentages of students in each group scoring high average or high at BOY 1st grade for each test language version are displayed. Students were assessed in either Spanish or English, and some students tested in both languages. Students did not score as high on the English version of the MAP reading assessment as they did on the Spanish version. Since the summer school program targeted emergent bilingual students, most with Spanish as their home language, higher scores in Spanish than in English might be expected. Last year, a different test was administered to 1st graders, so comparisons between years could not be made. As a result, it is not known whether the virtual summer school program's effectiveness was similar to the previous years' summer school program for incoming 1st grade students.

Figure 2.

Emergent bilingual 1st grade students who attended the virtual bilingual summer program outperformed students who did not attend the summer program on the MAP reading assessment for both English and Spanish test versions.



Source. AISD student MAP reading records.

Note. Percentages represent scores in the high average or high range. Some students took the test in both Spanish and English. Participation rates in each subtest varied: summer school Spanish (n = 217); non-summer school Spanish (n = 230); summer school English (n = 215); non-summer school English (n = 206). The difference in percentages between the summer school and non-summer school groups were not statistically significant for the English test, but were marginally significant for the Spanish test (p = .052).

MAP Growth

This is the first year AISD is using the Northwest Education Association's MAP Growth to assess academic performance and growth in grades 1 through 5. MAP is a nationally norm-referenced test, but it is not a state standardized test. The test is designed for continuous progress monitoring of skills identified as predictors of later academic success and to help teachers plan for differentiated instruction and develop interventions for stuggling students.

MAP assesses math, reading, language usage, and science. It is an interactive, computer-adaptive assessment and it is untimed. The first question presented to each student will start out at the norm level for that grade level. If the student gets the question right, the next question is harder; if the student ges the question wrong, the next question is easier. The tests are scored into one of five tiers: low, low average, average, high average and high. The assessment is given at the BOY, middle of year (MOY), and end of year (EOY).

The test is available in both English and Spanish. Students who took the test in both English and Spanish have both of their scores reported. This is because taking the top score for a student who has test scores for both English and Spanish is not recomended as the two test versions are not yet comparable. For more information on MAP, see https://www.nwea.org/map-growth/

Conclusion

Academic performance on BOY assessments shows that participation in the virtual bilingual summer school program was associated with better academic preparedness to start kindergarten and 1st grade. In kindergarten, those who attended summer school scored higher on the spelling and letter names subtests as well as the literacy screener, but scored similarly to non-summer school students on the vocabulary subtest. In 1st grade, summer school students scored higher on the Spanish version of the MAP reading assessment than non-summer school students. This is especially helpful to know because it adds to our understanding of the effects of virtual schooling during the COVID-19 pandemic on students' academic performance. Furthermore, Spanish-speaking emergent bilingual students in the 1st grade scored higher on the Spanish version of the MAP reading assessment than on the English version. Thus, teachers should test emergent bilingual Spanish-speaking 1st graders in their home language to receive the most accurate representation of the students' academic performance on the MAP reading assessment.

Enrollment in the kindergarten and 1st grade bilingual summer school program was down by about 30% from last year. Some drop in enrollment was expected because overall enrollment at AISD, especially in lower grades, was lower, likely related to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, another contributing factor may have been the difficulty in reaching families to inform them about the virtual bilingual summer school program, because the previous enrollment period was last spring when all school was still virtual due to the pandemic. Not all families have reliable access to technology, which can hinder their ability to receive information as well as participate in a virtual program. Kindergartners' scores on two subtests of the TX-KEA were similar to those found last year (Poulsen, 2020). In light of this, it appears that the virtual summer school program prepared incoming kindergarten students for academic success just as well as the original in-person version, which speaks to the efficacy of the virtual summer school program for kindergartners. First graders' scores were unable to be compared with scores from last year because MAP was a new assessment administered this year. Hence, conclusions cannot be made with regards to virtual versus in-person summer school program efficacy for incoming 1st grade students.

Overall, it appears that attending the virtual bilingual summer school program was beneficial for emergent bilinguals' academic success in kindergarten and 1st grade. Other educational research echoes the importance of summer interventions to prevent or reduce summer reading skill loss, particularly for low-income students (Zvoch & Stevens, 2013).

References

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AUSTIN Independent School District

Helen Poulsen, Ph.D.

Department of Research and Evaluation

4000 IH 35 Frontage Road | Austin, TX 78704
512.414.1724 | fax: 512.414.1707
www.austinisd.org/dre | Twitter: @AISD_DRE

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