OPTIONAL EXTENDED YEAR
SUMMER 1999

Program Description

The Optional Extended Year (OEY) program is authorized in Texas Education Code Section 29.082 to assist students who are at-risk of being retained in their current grade at the end of the school year. The purpose of the program is to reduce and ultimately eliminate student retention. The program was established to provide funding to school districts for an extended year program for a period not to exceed 30 instructional days for students in kindergarten through eighth grade who are identified as at risk of being retained. A school district may not enroll more than 16 students in a class and each class shall be taught by a teacher who has successfully completed a program that provides training to teach a class offered through this program.

The HISD OEY program included the following components: 1) a system of student assessment, data collection, and evaluation, designed to identify students prior to retention for positive interventions; 2) an ongoing systematic review and evaluation of all state and local policies, procedures, and actual practices related to promotion and retention and effective instructional alternatives; 3) a comprehensive staff development program designed to inform and sensitize professional staff members to the nature of the issues involved in retention and its elimination; to train teachers to use a variety of assessments to identify students for an extended time accelerated instructional program; and to train teachers in alternative instruction/assessment approaches; 4) an intervention program for potential retainees, including an extended time program and a follow-up program, designed to improve the achievement of students and facilitate their success in future grades; and 5) a parent involvement and education program designed to secure the support and assistance of the home in supporting academic achievement and character development. Additional emphasis was directed at grades one through three where students were attending the summer school session because they did not meet promotion standards.

The 1999 OEY summer program promoted accelerated instruction by adding 22 days of instruction to the regular school year. Each day consisted of 5.5 hours of instruction in reading, writing, and mathematics. Teachers were required to report to their two days earlier. The last day of school included a half day of instruction for students in the morning, with teachers completing their reports and attending meetings in the afternoon.

Successful completion of the OEY program was based on a combination of attendance and performance. To be promoted, students in first through third grades were required to attend at least 90% of the program days. In addition, if OEY participation was due to failing the HFWE or TAAS reading test, the student was required to take a “release” version of the same test at the end of the session and pass it. If retention was due to grades, an improved grade average was needed at the end of the program. Students who were retained as a result of failing the Stanford or Aprenda were obligated to meet the 90% attendance requirement.

Evaluation of the 1999 OEY summer program was designed to ascertain the extent that retained students from the 1998-99 school year qualified for promotion to their next grade prior to the 1999-2000 school year, after participating in the program. Enrollment, attendance, and student performance data and feedback from teacher training sessions were used to answer questions posed in the 1998-99 OEY program grant. The following research questions, based on the set of evaluation questions in the grant, were addressed in this report:

1. How were students selected to participate in the Optional Extended Year program?

2. How many students were identified to participate in Optional Extended Year activities?

3. How many students participated in the Optional Extended Year program?

4. What were the attendance rates of Optional Extended Year students?

5. What was the number of school teachers working in the Optional Extended Year program?

6. What were the promotion and retention rates of students enrolled in the Optional Extended Year program?

7. How did teachers rate the curriculum materials and training provided for the Optional Extended Year program?

Findings

- Overall, 8,278 students in first through eighth were identified as eligible to attend the 1999 OEY program, based on HISD promotion standards.

- There were 10,790 students attending the 1999 OEY program and most students were in first through third grades during the 1998–99 school year.

- Nearly three-fourths of the students, 74.4%, completed the program and rates were over 70% in all grades except kindergarten.

- Average class sizes in all grades were less than 16 students per teacher, ranging from 12.0 to 15.7.

- Overall, 5,862 of the 10,790 students, 54.3%, attending the OEY program were promoted at the end of the program.

- Over three-fourths of the teachers, 76.1%, received the materials they needed, 81.5% used them to teach their classes, and 61.5% said that the materials were sufficient to carry out the program.

- Teachers believed that the training sessions were successful in preparing them for summer school. Over 80% agreed or strongly agreed that they were prepared, understood the needs of their students, and were sufficiently trained in the use of summer school curriculum materials.

Recommendations

1. Begin recruitment of teachers for the 2000 OEY program as early as possible. During the 1900–2000 school year, promotion standards will be applied to students in first through eighth grades resulting in a substantially larger number of students attending the 2000 OEY program.

2. Due to the anticipated need for more teachers, more resources will be required to deliver summer school instructional materials on a timely basis.

3. Develop instructional materials with activities and strategies appropriate for students in fourth through eighth grades. These materials will be necessary to meet the needs of students identified by the expanded grade levels addressed by promotion standards for the 1999–2000 school year.

4. Identify additional strategies and approaches to use in a summer school setting to improve the promotion rates of students in first through third grades.