

**The Optional Extended-year Program:
Evaluation of Activities, FY 2004**

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Executive Summary

The Optional Extended-Year Program (OEYP) provides additional support and instruction for students in Kindergarten through Grade 11 at-risk of not being promoted to the next grade level, and for students in Grade 12 who have been identified as unlikely to graduate before the next school year. This report examines OEYP projects for the 2003-04 school year, and presents information on student demographics, participation, and retention. It also describes problems that school districts and charter schools reported they encountered when implementing their programs and the solutions they found to address those problems.

Data provided by the school districts and charter schools indicate that the typical OEYP student in 2003-04 was enrolled in a public elementary school, Hispanic, and economically disadvantaged, suggesting that the school districts and charter schools were successful in reaching students most at-risk for not being promoted: The percentage of economically disadvantaged and ESL students in OEYP programs has increased over time, with the largest increases occurring between 2003 and 2004. The percentage of economically disadvantaged and ESL students increased by five percentage points and sixteen percentage points during this period, respectively.

In 2003, the Texas Legislature reduced funding for the OEYP program from an average of \$92 million appropriated in previous bienniums to approximately \$33 million for 2003-2004. Since then, there has been a shift in the types of OEYP programs implemented by grantees:

- Over two-thirds (69%) of 2003-04 OEYP programs were extended-year or intercession only programs, an increase of 11 percentage points since the previous school year.
- By contrast, in 2003-04 approximately 22% of OEYP programs were in an extended-day format, a decrease of seven percentage points since the previous school year.

- The most common program focuses were reading/language arts programs (99%), mathematics and/or science programs (98%), problem solving (92%), integration of technology (88%), and readiness for next grade (86%).
- The most common professional development opportunities were teaching strategies in content areas (88%), research-based practices (86%), and assessment strategies (85%).
- The most common parental/family awareness activities were conferences with parents (97%) and providing materials and meetings in the home language of parents (81%)

On average, 92% of students selected for participation in OEYP programs during the 2003-04 school year actually did so. The highest participation rates (93%) were in extended-year or intercession only programs, while the lowest participation rates were in extended-week programs (70%).

The purpose of the OEYP program is to help students most at-risk of not being promoted to the next grade level, or at-risk of not graduating on time. On average, 2003-04 OEYP student grade retention rates were higher than statewide averages by grade, and higher than grade retention rates in earlier years of the OEYP program, particularly for earlier grades.

- OEYP retention rates in Grade 1 (24%), Grade 2 (16%), and Grade 3 (11%) were each higher than statewide averages for the same grade, a difference of 18 percentage points, 12 percentage points, and 8 percentage points, respectively.
- Grade retention rates for students in Grade 1 through Grade 3 in 2003-04 were higher on average than retention rates for students participating in earlier years of the program. For example, in 2003-04, retention rates for these grade levels were 24%, 16%, and 11%, respectively. In 1999-00, retention rates for these grade levels were 18%, 12%, and 7%, respectively.

Unlike previous years of the OEYP program, which were funded at higher levels, no apparent statistical association was found between the number of instructional days attended and decreased grade retention rates. When considered alongside the substantially higher percentage of Grade 1-3 students retained in grade, this suggests that compared to earlier years, the 2003-04 OEYP program was less successful in achieving its primary goal— reducing student grade retention rates.

Similar to earlier years of the OEYP program, no statistical association was found between the number of instructional days attended and the percentage of students meeting Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) passing standards. This is consistent with expectations, indicating that 2003-04 grantees were successful in encouraging students with the most academic need to attend the greatest number of instructional days.

The school districts and charter schools reported that they encountered a number of problems and issues when implementing their grant programs, and reported a variety of solutions they found to address those problems:

- Not surprisingly, the most common problem – cited by 20% of the school districts and charter schools - was a lack of sufficient funds to support OEYP activities.
- Other common problems included: limited student attendance, lack of parent interest and involvement, student transportation issues, staff shortages, data quality and/or coding problems, and scheduling conflicts.
- To address funding shortages, the most common solution – cited by 13% of the school districts and charter schools - was to use funds from other sources.
- The most common alternate sources of funds were federal Title 1 funds, state compensatory education funds, local funds, and Accelerated Reading Initiative (ARI)/Accelerated Mathematics Initiative (AMI) funds.
- Federal Title 1 funds accounted for more than one-third (35%) of all 2003-04 program costs among all grantees. OEYP funds (23%) accounted for the second

highest percentage of program costs, followed by local funds (17%), state compensatory education funds (16%), and ARI/AMI funds (9%).

- Other common solutions to problems encountered by the school districts and charter schools included: varying instructional strategies/environments, increasing contact with parents, arranging transportation for students, changing program focuses and curricula, and revising scheduling.

School districts and charter schools reported frustration with the lack of funding and the lack of a concomitant reduction in the expected number of students served, as specified in program guidelines. School districts and charter schools that were unable to secure alternate sources of funding reported that they had to make significant changes to their OEYP programs, including eliminating some staff, reducing the grade levels served, eliminating professional development and student enrichment opportunities, reducing the number of days OEYP programs were in operation, and combining different grade levels into the same instructional groups. The various solutions that school districts and charter schools found to address the problems they encountered is important information to help future grantees, who will likely operate with similar funding constraints, achieve the important goal of providing instruction to students at-risk of not being promoted.