



AFTERSCHOOL CENTERS ON EDUCATION / COMMUNITIES IN SCHOOLS OF BRAZORIA COUNTY

CYCLE 8, YEAR 5 GRANTEE EVALUATION REPORT
2017-2018

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I. Executive Summary

In late August 2017, Hurricane Harvey made landfall in Texas, dumping 51 inches of rain on coastal cities and in parts of Brazoria and Southeast Harris counties, including much of the area where the ten CIS-ACE Cycle 8 campuses are located. The Category 4 storm caused massive and widespread flooding and untold damage to homes and businesses; according to CNN, estimates put total losses from the storm at as much as \$75 billion. An estimated 30,000 people needed temporary shelter; many are still suffering adverse effects from the disaster. As of December 5, 2017, 632,388 individuals or households in metro Houston had submitted valid registrations for FEMA's Individual and Households Program (IHP) and 249,259 registrations were approved for \$1.0 billion in assistance (Houston.org, June 27, 2018).

Despite the challenges the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey brought to the region and communities surrounding the Cycle 8 campuses, in its fifth and final year, the Cycle 8 Communities in Schools–ACE program continued to build and improve upon its effective model for innovative, structured and high-quality, after-school activities for at-risk students in grades two through eight at ten schools in the La Porte, Galena Park, Pasadena, Alvin and Columbia-Brazoria Independent School Districts. Specifically, CIS–ACE provided: academic assistance, enrichment, family and parental support services, and college and workforce readiness. Each program day included at least two and a half hours after and/or before school at each campus; one hour was dedicated to homework and academic achievement; one hour comprised small group instruction and tutoring; and, one hour per day was devoted to enrichment activities.

The program was comprised of large, small, urban and rural campuses with large economically disadvantaged populations and includes the following schools: Purple Sage Elementary, Bayshore Elementary, Woodland Acres Elementary (including Woodland Acres MS), La Porte Elementary, De Zavala Middle School, Rick Schneider Middle School, Alvin Junior High, Mark Twain Elementary, Melba Passmore Elementary, and West Brazos Junior High.

The Cycle 8 CIS-ACE year 5 program enrolled 1159 regular students and 290¹ non-regular students in 2017-18. The 1159 students' ethnic makeup included: 769 Hispanic (66%); 246 white (21%); 129 African American (11%); 9 "Two or More Races" (0%); 3 American Indian/Alaskan Native (0%); and, 2 Asian (0%) individuals. Fifty-one percent (596) of the students were male and 49% (563) were female. Eleven percent (129) were 2nd graders; 17% (193) were 3rd graders; 19% (219) were in 4th grade; 27% (316) were in 5th grade; 11% (127) were in 6th grade; 9% (101) were in 7th grade; and, 6% (74) were 8th graders. One thousand three-hundred and forty parents attended the program in 2017-18.

In summary, the Cycle 8 CIS-ACE program has generally met or exceeded the goals of the fifth year of the grant in 2017-18 and appears to have impacted large numbers of students and families positively on all fronts. Improvements in academic performance, behavior, school day attendance and promotion rates occurred at all ten ACE centers following CIS–ACE program implementation (planning and scheduling, activity development, recruitment, resourcing and professional development, and data collection and reporting). Some challenges, particularly in terms of resource allocation and implementation at the campus level, occurred at some sites. However, in general, evidence in the fifth year of the grant suggested continued overall improvement in comparison to previous years in all areas. The Year Five, Cycle 8 2017-18 CIS-ACE program evaluation findings include the following:

¹ Total regular and non-regular student counts vary depending on which report is accessed from the TX21st report system.

Evaluator Findings and Conclusions:

1. **Resources Allocation:** Excellent staff leadership, organizational and management skills at the agency level (CIS) contributed to smooth allocation of resources regarding budgeting, facility use, staffing, data use, and activity development at all sites, with few exceptions. However, evidence points to some difficulties regarding resource allocation at the school level at half the Cycle 8 campuses, as described below.
 - a. **Five CIS–ACE sites encountered school administrations reluctant or unable to provide sufficient resources for the program at the campus level, especially including space, supplies such as homework keys, strategies, etc., and communication/guidance on students’ academic progress.** These included Mark Twain, Melba Passmore, Rick Schneider, Purple Sage and LaPorte. West Brazos managed to improve upon their resource issues considerably in comparison to last year.
 - b. **Program staffing and more specifically, consistent staffing due to absences, resignations, etc., was a much less of a problem this year than in past years.** The program director worked overtime to ensure fewer staff turnover issues this year, a tall order, given the inherent challenges of staff recruitment in Southeast Harris and Brazoria Counties. Fourteen new staff members were hired over the course of the year to replace those who were terminated or resigned (17). Nine of ten site coordinators will be returning to work with CIS in other grant cycles, resulting in a 90% return rate for next year, and 46 of 49 part time staff will return next year, a 94% return rate. Still, consistent staffing remained a challenge for several schools for a variety of reasons, including all campuses except Melba Passmore and Rick Schneider. LaPorte and West Brazos were the biggest challenges.
2. **Implementation Practices:** The program was implemented successfully with convincing evidence of most project plan elements being attended to throughout the school year in support of centers, including School Program Alignment, Recruiting and Retaining Participants, Integrating Student and Family Voice, Ongoing Monitoring (data use and observation) and Professional Development. CIS made every effort to implement the program with fidelity through extensive oversight, intervention, staff training and information gathering with some challenges. Specifically:
 - a. **All campuses met or exceeded the minimum required number of weeks of service in the fall and spring.**
 - b. **This year, as in past years, student recruitment and enrollment by need for academic support was relatively inconsistent across all ten sites.** Although CIS worked with school administrators to select students most in need of ACE services and to recruit and employ tutors and community members to assist ACE coordinators with vital program elements, not all campuses enrolled mostly the neediest students. Particularly at LaPorte and Purple Sage, teachers reported this fall that fewer than half of their students needed improvement. However, there was evidence at most sites to suggest a concerted effort to employ mechanisms to learn about and address parent/student voices regarding their needs and preferences. In addition, across all

centers, the number of tutored students dropped in math, science and reading which may have contributed to fewer positive academic outcomes.

- c. **The Program Director made a point of regularly using and sharing data (including observations, evaluation reporting, survey data, etc.) to help Site Coordinators and school staff make decisions about activity development and needed program adjustments. Only two campuses did not adequately survey all their stakeholders this year (Rick Schneider and West Brazos), a significant improvement over past years.** The resulting high percentages of returned surveys allowed for better accuracy of campus-level matched survey results for eight schools and high quality overall cycle matched results that far surpassed last year. More matched surveys, and therefore a greater percentage of the total fall and spring regular students were collected this year (54% matched student and 68% matched teacher surveys) than last (41.4% matched student and 42.4% matched teacher surveys), resulting in more reliable data. It should also be noted that although in years two and three² of the program comparable total numbers of surveys were collected, the matched teacher and student survey data collected in the last two years of the program yielded more accurate and useful stakeholder feedback.
 - d. Following up on the evaluation recommendations from year one, **the project director and CIS–ACE staff provided consistent and supplemental professional development and staff training in curriculum development, lesson delivery and classroom management, especially at campuses most in need.** However, this year, three campuses, **De Zavala, Purple Sage and LaPorte needed significantly more staff training, particularly to better manage student behavior issues.**
3. **Outputs–Activities: Observations, survey data and evidence of planning and oversight point to activities (intentional) being appropriate and implemented with fidelity at the majority of sites most of the time.** The Project Plan included specific tasks with accompanying strategies for activity development, resourcing and professional development and the Project Director carried out these tasks as described. Several issues pointed to a need to improve activity implementation in the future:
- a. **At Purple Sage and LaPorte, behavior issues were cited as interfering with the program’s ability to be delivered with complete fidelity.** Inadequate staff training, and insufficient availability of dedicated program space compounded the problem.
 - b. **Mark Twain, Melba Passmore and Schneider also suffered from inconsistent allocation of program space that sometimes interfered with the delivery of quality programming.**
 - c. **Evidence suggests that it was challenging to meet the training needs of new staff at De Zavala.**
 - d. **For the six sites that encountered minor staffing issues, the delivery of program elements with fidelity did not appear to be a factor. However, DeZavala and West Brazos suffered from more serious staffing challenges throughout the year, which appears to have affected the successful and consistent delivery of ACE activities.**

² The total number of collected surveys in year one is unavailable.

- e. It should be noted that the total number of students being tutored (and who take the Benchmark tests) in the Cycle 8 CIS-ACE program has declined over the past several years: from a total of 285 in 2014-15 in math to 162 this year; from a total of 219 in 2014-15 in science to 26 this year; and, from a total of 273 in 2014-15 in reading to 105 this year. **Lower enrollment likely negatively affected student outcomes.**
4. **Outputs–Participation: As in every other year of the cycle, CIS–ACE far exceeded its required participation levels at every school in 2016-17.** A total of 1030 regular students were required, and 1159³ regular students in total attended Cycle 8 ACE programming in 2016-17. A total of 620 parents were required, and 1340 adults were recorded as having attended the program. In addition:
- a. **Although they declined somewhat in the spring, overall, attendance percentages were relatively strong across centers and were slightly better overall in comparison to last year.** In the fall, 763 students (66%) attended programs more than 60% of the time; in the spring 719 (60%) did so.
 - b. **All ten schools should be commended for reaching their set attendance goals in a timely fashion, especially given the adverse effects of Hurricane Harvey.**
 - c. **Seven of ten schools improved their >60% attendance percentage averages and three campuses' >60% percentage averages declined in comparison to last year.**
 - d. **Average total percentages of students attending program more than 60% of the time rose steadily from year one of the program (2013-14) to year five (2017-18).** An average of 53% of all students attended more than 60% of the time in 2014-15, and this year, an average of 63% did so.
 - e. **When >60% attendance percentages were averaged across all five years, Purple Sage had the highest (78%) and West Brazos had the lowest (36%).**
 - f. **Three campuses, Alvin Junior High, Mark Twain and West Brazos, accounted for much of the low average daily attendance across the ten schools in the cycle this year as well as in past years.** At these schools, while the total enrollment figures met target levels, average daily attendance (ADA) was lower than ideal, rendering those sites less able to achieve more robust student outcomes because the program “dosage” was too low to affect change in more of their students.
5. **Stakeholder Surveys: Student, teacher and parent survey results were very positive.**
- a. **Matched Student Survey Results⁴: Student satisfaction was high overall, although it declined some in the spring.**
 - More than 90% of all students surveyed in the fall and again in the spring agreed that they enjoy coming to the ACE program, they want to return to the program, and ACE helped them complete homework assignments (n = 573).

³ Total regular student counts vary depending on which report is accessed from the 21stTex report system.

⁴ Student and teacher “matched” survey responses of students attending program in both fall and spring were exported from Survey Monkey, matched using student identifiers in Excel and entered into STATA. The resulting data sets were analyzed using statistical comparison methods, and the total reported frequencies suggest consistent, positive student and teacher attitudes about the program and about student academic progress from fall to spring.

b. **Matched Teacher Survey Results: Teachers reported that ACE positively affected student performance and that students in need of academic improvement in the fall, improved by the spring:**

- **ACE Effect:** When asked about the same 722 students in the fall and the spring: **“How much do you think this student’s attendance in ACE has positively affected his/her school performance this semester?”** in the fall, 95% (95% CI, 93-96) of teachers said “significantly,” “moderately,” or “very little,” and in the spring, 92% (95% CI, 90-94) said so.
 - ✓ Rick Schneider (2.4), Mark Twain (2.3) Woodland Acres (2.2) and Bayshore (2) had the highest Mean ACE Effect scores.⁵ The mean ACE Effect score for all sites was 2.1.
- **For students needing improvement academically in the fall, teachers reported that by the spring more than 90% of students displayed “slight,” “moderate” or “significant” academic improvement or no longer needed to improve in getting along with other students, coming to school motivated to learn, class participation, class attendance and overall academic improvement (n=447).** This year’s results represent an overall improvement and improvement in every category in comparison to last year.
 - ✓ Bayshore, Mark Twain and LaPorte had the highest mean spring academic summary scores (25.5, 22.3 and 22.1 respectively).⁶ The mean of all sites’ improvement scores was 21.3. It should also be noted that the elementary schools tended to do much better on this metric than middle schools (two of the four middle schools received the lowest scores, and the other two did not have enough data for analysis).

c. **Parent Survey Results: Parents expressed great satisfaction in favor of the program and felt that their children benefit from attending ACE.**

- More than 95% of all parents surveyed in the fall and in the spring reported that their children like coming to ACE, they want their children to return to the program next year, they believe ACE benefits their children, their children’s grades have improved as a result of ACE and ACE has helped their children to complete homework assignments (n = 546 and 700).

6. **Intermediate Student Outcomes: There was evidence of tangible improvement in intermediate student outcomes at all ten centers, including academic performance (grades, benchmark subject scores and promotion rates), positive behavior, and school-day attendance. In general, the average percentage of students showing improvement in attendance, behavior and grades was higher if participants had been enrolled in the program for two, three or four years as opposed to one year.**

Highlights of Cycle 8, academic improvement include:

⁵ The mean of the fall and spring teacher-assigned ACE Effect (range: 0=no effect to 3=significant effect) scores were plotted to show the ACE Effect for all ten campuses. The mean of the Mean ACE Effect score was 1.9.

⁶ A mean “summary score” (0 through 36 possible points) was produced of the four variables (“slight,” “moderate,” “significant” and “no longer needed improvement”) for each of the nine teacher survey questions using the spring teacher survey results. The teacher-assigned spring summary academic scores (mean) for students judged to need academic improvement in the fall were then plotted to show the difference between campuses. The mean of improvement scores was 22.4.

- a. One-Year Cohort: For students attending the program for the entire year in 2017-18 (n=1066), across all centers:
 - An average of **23% improved in their subject grades in math, 20% in science, 21% in reading, and 18% in social studies.**
 - An average of **22% of students improved or maintained attendance rates by the end of the school year.**
 - An average of **86% improved or maintained their discipline referral records by the end of the school year.**
 - **97% were promoted** to the next grade.

- b. Two-Year Cohort: For students attending the program for 2016-17 and 2017-18 (n=461), across all centers, this year:
 - An average of **32% improved in their subject grades in math, 30% in science, 37% in reading, and 26% in social studies.**
 - An average of **29% of students improved or maintained attendance rates.**
 - An average of **90% improved or maintained their discipline referral records** from last year to this year.
 - 98% were promoted to the next grade.

- c. Three-Year Cohort: For students attending the program for 2015-16, 2016-17 and 2017-18 (n=165), across all centers, this year:
 - An average of **41% improved in their subject grades in math, 22% in science, 50% in reading, and 28% in social studies.**
 - An average of **33% of students improved or maintained attendance rates.**
 - An average of **93% improved or maintained their discipline referral records from 2015 to this year.**
 - **99% were promoted to the next grade.**

- d. Four-Year Cohort: For students attending the program for 2014-15, 2015-16, 2016-17 and 2017-18 (n=54), across all centers, this year:
 - An average of **31% improved in their subject grades in math, 15% in science, 46% in reading, and 11% in social studies.**
 - An average of **33% of students improved or maintained attendance rates.**
 - An average of **93% improved or maintained their discipline referral records from 2014 to this year.**
 - **98% were promoted to the next grade.**

- e. Benchmark Test Scores:
 - Woodland Acres and La Porte were most successful at increasing average Benchmark scores in tutored students over two, three or four years.

7. Overall Assessment: **An analysis of whether sites met specific benchmarks allowed a clear comparison of the level of success and fidelity of implementation across all ten campuses. Woodland Acres, Bayshore, Alvin Junior High, and Mark Twain were found to be the highest performing sites in 2017-18; Purple Sage and La Porte were found to be the lowest performing sites.**

The following benchmarks were considered: Satisfactory Parent Engagement; At Least Some Improvement of Academic Benchmarks; Average Matched Student Survey Response of Grade Improvement Equal to or Greater than the Mean (85.5%); Average

Parent Survey Response of ACE Being Beneficial Equal to or Greater than the Mean (99.5%); Summary Academic Score Equal to or Greater than the Mean (22.4); ACE Effect Equal to or Greater than the Mean (1.9); No Reported Space/Resource Challenges; No Reported Staffing Challenges; Operating Hours/Week Met; Tutoring Evident; Survey #s Satisfactory; No Reported Additional Training Needed; No Reported Behavior Challenges; and, Average Daily Attendance Satisfactory.

Recommendations/Next Steps

Given that this year is the fifth and last year of the grant, the following next steps are recommended for implementation in future grant cycles in the five areas analyzed in this evaluation:

1. Resources Recommendations/Next Steps:

- a. **Devote Additional Time to Educate School Administrators** about ACE and the fundamental need for resources *from the school* to ensure program success. Evidence often pointed to lack of administrative support, especially regarding the allocation of dedicated space and requiring teacher support and involvement in the program. Impressing upon administrators as early as possible in the recruitment process as possible, that these two fundamental resources (dedicated space and teacher support) are required for ACE to be successful at a school, will provide an early foundation for the program achieving positive results.
- b. **Continue to work at solving the staff quality and staff turnover problem. Acquiring qualified staff and keeping them, and thus avoiding frequent staff turnover at campuses, is another key to implementing successful programs.** A 2017 meta-analytic review of the existing evaluation research found that programs such as ACE “that employed certified teachers had a small positive effect on literacy and math achievement.” However, “programs that employed instructors who were not certified (such as graduate students and volunteers) had no impact on students’ academic achievement” (Kidron and Lindsay 17).

Unfortunately, the reality in southeast Harris and Brazoria Counties is that there is a shortage of qualified candidates, especially to fill Activity Coordinator positions. Additionally, qualified, experienced staff, frequently, and logically, leave the program to pursue more lucrative jobs or to enroll in college, etc. The statistics describing the limited education and low experience levels of this year’s staff provides a snapshot of the challenge. CIS administration did an excellent job, particularly this year, of reallocating funds to support additional staff where needed and incorporating solid training for newly hired CIS campus staff as soon as possible. These strategies in addition to other creative solutions should be implemented in the next ACE cycle.

2. Implementation Recommendations/Next Steps:

- a. **Continue to build upon and refine the thematic curriculum and provide ongoing staff training.** There is no question that the development of the thematic curriculum has resulted in positive student outcomes. The key now, is to build on this resource and provide additional staff training to be sure it is being delivered with fidelity.

- b. **Consider carefully whether to continue selecting middle schools to participate in future programs.** Kidron, et al. found that out-of-school-time programs such as ACE had a “small positive effect on elementary school students’ literacy and math achievement.” However, at the middle school level, there was “a small negative effect on students’ literacy achievement and no discernible effect on students’ math achievement” (4)⁷. For years, CIS has struggled with the delivery of the ACE program in middle schools due to challenges with competing after-school activities and with behavior issues. For future grant cycles, CIS would be wise to consider selecting only elementary schools.
- c. **Be cognizant of student recruitment strategies and work with school administrators to get this right.** There is evidence this year that not all Cycle 8 schools were recruiting students with the highest levels of need. Review student recruitment strategies and guidelines to be sure that the students with the highest levels of need are being recruited at every campus. Just because a student has been in the program the year before should not mean he/she is automatically re-enrolled, especially if a given school has an influx of more needy students.
- d. **Work with School Administrators to increase the number of qualified ACE tutors and to identify students in the most need of tutoring.** Over the life of Cycle 8, the number of tutored students declined sharply. Therefore, in future cycles, work to develop a sound strategy that can be systematically implemented at all campuses to recruit and place larger numbers of students into tutoring to further increase student outcomes.
- e. **Continue to train Site Coordinators in survey dissemination techniques to ensure high return rates at every campus.** Although the survey distribution and collection processes improved over the years and additional measures were added to ensure uncompromised results, the total survey numbers at some campuses remained very low this year. Consider partnering Site Coordinators who have trouble reaching sufficient numbers of surveys with those who attain high numbers. Further, for the student and teacher surveys, every effort should continue to be made to collect high “matched survey” numbers to attain more meaningful analysis of change in attitudes over time.

3. **Outputs – Activities Recommendations/Next Steps:**

- a. **Reallocate resources for additional training at campuses likely to experience behavior problems.** Evidence this year strongly suggested that at schools with student behavior problems, the fidelity of implementation of some activities was compromised. Provide increased oversight and extensive training in behavior management for Site Coordinators and Activity Coordinators, especially at campuses where behavior is likely to be a challenge.

⁷ Kidron, Y., and Lindsay, J. (2014). The effects of increased learning time on student academic and nonacademic outcomes: Findings from a meta-analytic review (REL 2014–015). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Appalachia. Retrieved from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs>.

- b. **Develop a strategy to help campuses recruit and retain qualified subject tutors and work with school administrators and teachers to place more students in ACE tutoring.**

4. **Outputs – Participation Recommendations/Next Steps:**

- a. **Develop a plan to improve program activity average daily attendance (ADA) at all campuses.** CIS staff rightly focused on meeting overall enrollment numbers at each campus, but the equally important ADA metric was sometimes not monitored and emphasized as such. At some campuses, **while the total enrollment figures met target levels, average daily attendance was lower than ideal, rendering those sites less able to achieve more robust student outcomes because the program “dosage” was too low to affect change in more of their students.**

For example, the fall semester required 13 weeks of program, five days per week, which is equal to 65 program days. Therefore, thirty days of program attendance equaled less than half the time. The updated ACE requirement of 45 days of attendance per term for regular students should improve upon this in the future. However, the spring semester will continue to present a challenge. This year, 18 weeks were required at most sites in the spring, rendering a maximum, total possible number of attendance days of 90. Attendance for 50% of the time would meet the 45-day threshold in this scenario. However, as McCombs, et al. found in “The Value of Out-of-School-Time Programs,” “youth need to attend regularly to measurably benefit from programming” (13) and “programs should work to maximize attendance of each individual student” (17). Further:

Quasi-experimental and exploratory analyses in randomized evaluations demonstrate that attendance in OST programs is correlated with program outcomes. In academic programs, high attenders consistently benefit from programming relative to control group students. However, in many OST programs, attendance is measured and reported by the number of students in attendance on a given day, without regard to whether the same students are attending regularly (17).⁸

The emphasis should be to encourage every student to come to the program as many days as possible, much more than just the required number of days per semester.

- c. **Continue to work with Site Coordinators to integrate more parents into program activities.**

5. **Intermediate Outcomes Recommendations/Next Steps:**

- a. CIS-ACE staff need to continue to make **aligning ACE programming with school curriculum a top priority** to help increase the program’s influence on intermediate outcomes.

⁸ McCombs, Jennifer Sloan, Anamarie Whitaker, and Paul Youngmin Yoo, The Value of Out-of-School Time Programs. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2017. <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE267.html>.

- b. Recognizing the potential value of retention to improved student outcomes, staff should plan to **increase re-enrollment in subsequent years of grant cycles for students who remain in need of the program.**