

HAS ALP HELPED LOW-ACHIEVING STUDENTS?

For many years, the Wake County Public School System (WCPSS) has provided instructional support to students with special needs through a variety of grant-funded programs. However, student needs could not be fully met through these resources alone. To help accomplish Goal 2003, WCPSS allocated money in 1999 for supplemental instructional support through the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP). This summary provides information on how the allocation process changed in 2002-03 and school and system achievement results for 2001-02.

ALP BUDGET 2002-03

ALP is funded with state and local funds. ALP funds are allotted according to the number of Level I and II (below grade level) students at each school. Significant changes were made in the way ALP resources were allotted to schools during the 2002-03 school year. ALP funds were allotted to schools in teacher months of employment. This benefited schools in a number of ways:

- Months were allotted in May, giving principals lead-time to plan programs and hire qualified staff for their positions.
- Payroll procedures were simplified. This resulted in a significant decrease in missed payrolls and other problems related to processing miscellaneous payrolls.
- Principals were given more flexibility with the use of funds through the authority to convert teacher employment months to other purposes, such as paying hourly tutors, stipends, supplies, and materials for ALP.
- Funds converted to non-salary categories became school-based. This gave principals direct control over those budgets.

During the 2002-03 school year, ALP funds paid for 920.5 months of employment for teachers in elementary and middle schools. Schools used ALP months of employment for ALP teachers (daytime, after school, and Saturday), as well as for supplies, stipends, and clerical help. Transportation for ALP programs was paid for through state and local funds.

HOW ALP HELPED IN 2001-02

The program supported 7,285 students in 2001-02 in reading, mathematics, and/or writing. Participation in ALP of students scoring below grade level varied considerably, ranging from 22.2% at one school to 99.5% at another.

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Analyses of the program's 2001-02 results suggest that ALP was effective in promoting both achievement growth and performance at grades 3-8. ALP students showed high growth based on ABCs standards, and more than half were able to move from below to above grade level between spring 2001 and spring 2002 (compared to 38% in reading and 41% in math before ALP began).

Cohorts of 1998-99 3rd and 6th graders, followed over two years, revealed increasing percentages of students able to reach grade-level performance.

- In reading, the percentage of 3rd graders in ALP who reached grade level rose steadily by grade 4 (32%) and grade 5 (59%). There was a similar increase in middle school, where 40% of ALP students reached grade level (Level III or IV) by grade 7 and 57% by grade 8.
- In math, the percentage of students in ALP who reached grade level also increased. The percentage of 3rd graders in ALP who reached grade level rose to 59% by grade 4 and 69% by grade 5. The percentage of 6th graders in ALP who reached grade level rose to 40% by grade 7 and remained at 40% by grade 8.

SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL PRACTICES

The elementary and middle schools with the highest growth for Level I and II students exhibited many effective school characteristics, including collaborative leadership; high expectations, support, and frequent assessment of students; committed staff; and a climate focused strongly on achievement (and Goal 2003). Compared to schools with the lowest growth, these schools were more likely to:

- offer ALP sessions outside of the school day,
- assist some low Level III students,
- have more teaching staff involved in their ALP programs, and
- use specific materials for ALP.

Some successful strategies varied by level. At the elementary level, the most successful schools were more likely to:

- use fewer instructional strategies overall to support low achievers, and reserve some strategies (e.g., learning games) for ALP time only,
- have strong parent communications, with specific ways for parents to help,
- use fewer volunteers, and
- start their ALP programs by October.

At the middle school level, successful schools were more likely to

- have higher ALP participation rates,
- use fewer instructional strategies during the day,
- have special electives plus a period during the day for remediation/enrichment at least part of the year (extended advisory or team times), and
- assign mentors to students.

The full report on ALP for 2001-02 is available at wcpss.net/evaluation-research. It includes descriptions of practices for Level I and II students in each of the most successful schools.