

Reconnection Center Program: 2014-15

At-a-Glance

The Reconnection Center Program (Reconnect) was designed to help students recover credits for incomplete or failed courses. The program allowed students to remain enrolled in courses in the traditional classroom setting on their campus while recovering credit in Reconnection Centers during assigned periods. Credit recovery allowed students to remain on track to be promoted or graduate with their cohort.

The Reconnect program provided students with online coursework. Three selected campuses (Lincoln, Madison, and Pinkston) piloted the Apex Learning system in the spring of 2014, and Apex was selected for use in all schools for the 2014-2015 school year. Apex provided a Texas-specific set of courses, aligned with the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) standards and, where applicable, designed to prepare students for *State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) End-of-Course (EOC)* assessments.

School counselors and Reconnect staff worked together to identify students who were good candidates for the Reconnect program. Once students were identified, they were assigned to the program for one or more class periods, including before- and after-school periods at some campuses. With successful completion of prescriptive online work and the district *Assessment of Course Performance (ACP)* test, students were awarded credit using district grading standards.

The Reconnection Centers had a school-within-a-school environment in which the staff consisted of one or two teachers, based on student need. At two-teacher Centers, one teacher served as the facilitator and team leader. At schools with low student demand, the Center was staffed part-time, and one teacher/facilitator divided his or her time between two to three centers. Each center contained 25 to 30 networked computers. At the time of this report, the district was operating Reconnection Centers at 28 high schools receiving Title I funds. The Title I 2014-15 allocation for this program was \$2,913,807. For the 2015-16 school year, Title I monies will not be used to fund the program, but will be replaced by State Compensatory Education funding.

Student Selection Criteria

New criteria and procedures for student selection into Reconnect established during the 2013-2014 school year were continued in 2014-15. A Path of Documentation was used to identify and enroll students who met program criteria.

Student selection was initiated by the counselor, who met individually with students who had failed or were failing a course. The purpose of the meeting was to determine (a) whether the failure was in a course required by the student's graduation plan, and (b) if so, whether the Reconnection Center was the most viable option for credit recovery. The student was informed about academic expectations, grading structure, and student responsibilities, and was required to agree to the expectations and responsibilities in a signed contract. In order to complete the online work required in the Reconnection Center, the student was also required to have passed either the 8th grade STAAR Reading test or the English I *End-of-Course (EOC)* test. If the student had passed neither of those, a Lexile score of 800-1050 on the *Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI)* was required.

Characteristics of Students Served in Reconnect

Across grades 9-12, 8.2% of enrolled students (3,193 of 38,735) were registered for one or more periods of Reconnect. Figure 1 shows the percent of students at each grade level who were enrolled in the program during the 2014-2015 school year. The largest percentage of students served was in Grade 12 (N=1,496). In comparison to districtwide percentages, a larger proportion of Reconnect students were male and African American, and a smaller proportion were LEP or economically disadvantaged.

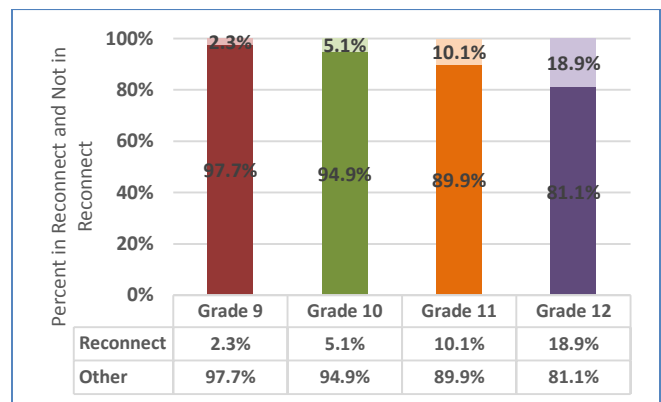


Figure 1. Percentage of students enrolled in Reconnect by grade.

Outcomes of the Reconnect Program

ACP. Reconnection Center students were required to take the district's *ACP* final examination to receive course credit for each completed semester. Figure 2 shows the percentage of tests taken in Reconnect by content area, and Table 1 shows the results of those tests.

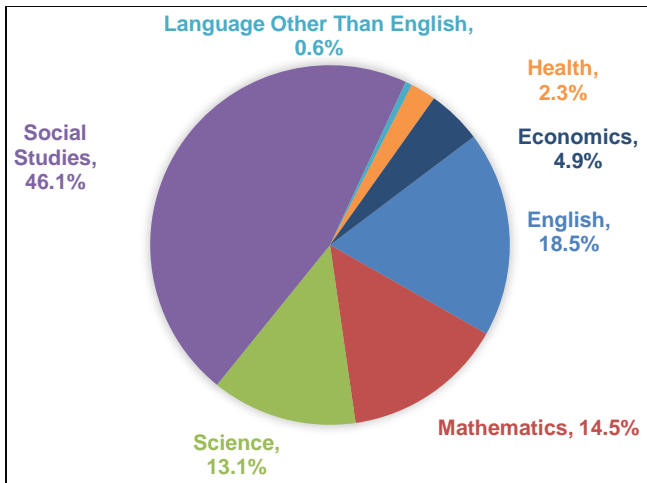


Figure 2. ACP exams taken in Reconnect by content area.

All tests taken were in subjects required for graduation under the student's graduation plan. Passing rates by content area varied from 30% to 82%, and mean scaled test scores ranged from 66 to 80. Overall, 47.4% of tested students passed semester final examinations in their Reconnect courses.

Table 1

Results of ACP Exams Administered in Reconnection Centers

Content Area	N Tested	Mean Score	Percent Passing
English/Lang. Arts	753	68	47.9
Mathematics	591	66	30.1
Science	531	68	39.9
Social Studies	727	72	59.0
Lang. Other Than English	26	80	73.1
Economics	198	71	54.0
Health	94	79	81.9

Credit Recovery in Grades 9-11. The workscope Key Result for students in grades 9-11 was stated as, "90% of the under-credited 9th, 10th, and 11th graders in the Reconnection Center will recover credits to advance to the next grade level by June 2015."

Table 2 shows credit gains of Reconnection Center students between the end of the first six weeks and the end of the second semester of the 2014-2015 school year. Grade 12 is included in this table for comparison purposes. Credit accumulation was lower at grades 9 and 10 than the credit gains expected for students enrolled in regular classes, which generally must average six credits per year to graduate in four years, but exceeded that number at grades 11 and 12.

Table 2

Credit Gains of Reconnect Students

Grade	N Students	Credits		
		BOY	EOY	Gain
9	140	2.6	7.1	4.5
10	425	8.2	13.5	5.3
11	796	15.5	21.8	6.3
12	1,381	22.1	28.5	6.4

Table 3 shows the percentages of Reconnection Center students who attained the next grade level by August, 2015. No grade reached the 90% promotion target, but grade 11 exceeded the prior-year target of 80%.

Table 3

Promotion Rates of Reconnect Students

Grade	N Students	Promoted	
		N	Percent
9	140	106	75.7
10	425	297	69.9
11	796	687	86.3
Total 9-11	1,361	1,090	80.1

A second Reconnect workscope goal was that 90 percent of grade 12 Reconnect students would recover credits sufficiently to graduate with their class by August, 2015. After excluding verified leavers, 83.6% of 12th grade Reconnect students had graduated by the specified date. In addition, one Reconnect student who began the year in grade 9, two who began the year in grade 10, and 212 who began the year in grade 11 were able to graduate by August, largely because of credit recovery, although EOC testing waivers by Individual Graduation Committees may also have played a part in a few cases.

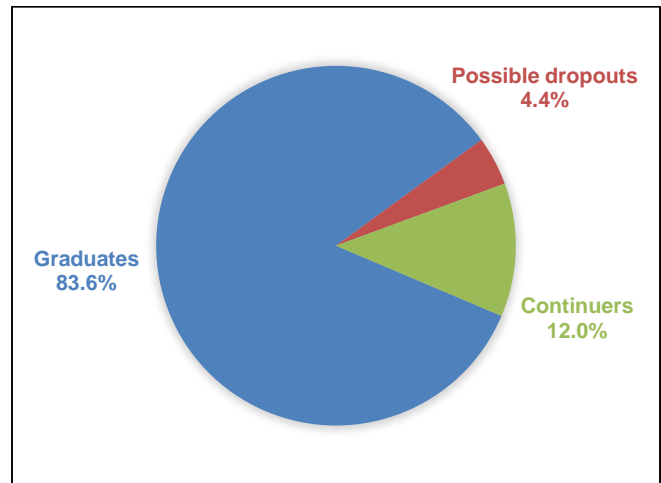


Figure 3. Graduation Status of Grade 12 Reconnect Students.

Facilitator Survey Responses

Facilitators and teachers (N=28) responses to an end-of-year survey indicated that, in general, the respondents felt that campus administrators and counselors were knowledgeable about the Reconnect program, and that counselors at their schools were correctly assigning students to the program. A majority (53.6%) did not feel that content area teachers at their campuses provided sufficient support for the program. Parent communication was viewed as frequent and effective.

At some campuses, however, assignment of unqualified students was a major concern, in addition to a lack of alternative placement options for students who

were unsuited to the program. Additional staffing support was viewed as a need by a majority of respondents (N=15), from either a matching teacher, a teacher assistant, or content area teachers assigned to the Center during specific periods. Salary issues were also a frequently expressed concern (N=13), and several facilitators requested reinstatement of the discontinued facilitator stipend.

Support desired from the Student Initiatives Department included additional campus visits and increased support as intermediaries on issues arising between facilitators and campus staff. Other needs varied by campus, including space, storage, equipment, supplies, and improved tech support and faster IT response time. More respondents cited needs for equipment and supplies than for classroom space or technology.

Reconnect facilitators described students most likely to benefit from the program as self-motivated juniors and seniors without attendance or discipline issues. Freshmen and sophomores were seen as less likely to have the necessary self-motivation, and lack of reading skills was considered a barrier regardless of incentive to succeed.

Recommendations

The primary recommendation from prior reports which was addressed in 2014-15 was to “create clear criteria for selecting students for the program,” including setting the *required* reading level score at a sixth grade equivalency. A Path of Documentation was created in 2013-14 outlining enrollment procedures and criteria, and has been updated in the current year. As well, counselors have been given a larger role in identifying and enrolling students in the program. Although specific counselors were to have been identified to work with Reconnection Center facilitators, counselor turnover at some schools and lack of training at others appear to have contributed to difficulties in appropriate student assignment. Counselors should be identified as originally planned, and made familiar with requirements and procedures.

Documentation of coursework has improved considerably with the Apex Learning online gradebook, but improvements are still needed. Apex continues to work with the district to improve the recordkeeping system, and provided regular reports throughout the year on student enrollment, course progress, and completion. As in 2013-14, it is recommended that the existing student data system be used in addition to the Apex system to record attendance and grades. As well, before- and after-school enrollment should be recorded in GradeSpeed at every campus.

To address a major concern expressed by facilitators on the end-of-year survey, staffing should be reviewed to determine whether additional support is needed in some locations, whether from an additional teacher or aide, or from content area teachers assigned to assist

in Reconnect during certain class periods. Another widely expressed concern, salaries of facilitators, will be affected by the new teacher evaluation system, so any adjustments to facilitator pay would need to be aligned to current district policy regarding compensation.

Further analysis is needed to determine which students benefit most from the Reconnect program. Facilitators contend that students in grades 11 and 12 with motivation to graduate and adequate reading skills are most likely to benefit from the self-paced online coursework offered, and outcome data on credit gains, grade-level promotion, and graduation gives support to their claims. Past achievement results, current and previous course grades, attendance data, and course completion records of current Reconnect students should be analyzed in greater depth to help refine identification criteria, in order to assist schools in assigning students to Reconnect who are most likely to be successful in the program.

For more information, see EA15-132-2, which can be found at <http://www.dallasisd.org/Page/888>.