

Diversified Education Through Leadership, Technology, and Academics (DELTA) Credit Recovery Program Annual Report, 2018–2019

DELTA is a dropout prevention and course credit recovery program that has been implemented in Austin Independent School District (AISD) high schools since 1995. It is an open-entry, open-exit program that provides an individualized, self-paced instructional program through a computer-based platform to deliver curriculum aligned with Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). The program targets students who have already dropped out or are at risk of dropping out of high school. Through computer-based coursework, supplemented by a variety of assignments and projects, and under the guidance of a DELTA teacher, students can complete high school courses and earn credits, thereby allowing a route to graduation that fits the scheduling requirements of those who might otherwise drop out of school. The program also provides students with the option of accelerating course completion and earning multiple credits in a short amount of time.

This report includes findings regarding demographic characteristics and academic outcomes of students served; highlights emerging topics from the student, teacher, and program staff surveys; and provides general recommendations for future program implementation.

DELTA Participants

A total of 2,646 high school students from 16 high school campuses, corresponding to 13% of AISD's high school student body ($N = 20,820$), participated in DELTA in 2018–2019. High schools included were Austin Learning Center, Akins, Anderson, Austin, Austin State Hospital, Bowie, Crockett, Eastside, Garza, Lyndon B. Johnson, Lanier, McCallum, Phoenix Academy, Reagan, Ann Richards, and Travis. The majority of these students were Hispanic (68%), economically disadvantaged (65%), and/or categorized as being at risk of dropping out of school (75%) (Table 1). In addition, 20% of the participating students were English learners and 49% were in 12th grade. AISD as a whole had lower percentages of students who were economically disadvantaged (53%) and who were at risk (49%) in 2018–2019 than did the group of students who enrolled in DELTA, indicating the program targeted the students in most need of support.

Table 1.

A total of 2,646 high school students participated in the DELTA credit recovery program.

	Count of students	% of total
Grade 9	215	8%
Grade 10	428	16%
Grade 11	717	27%
Grade 12	1286	49%
Total	2,646	
Hispanic	1,800	68%
African American/Black	303	11%
Asian	42	2%
White	428	16%
Two or more races/other	73	3%
At risk	1,994	75%
Economically disadvantaged	1,722	65%
English learners	518	20%
Special education	245	9%

Source. 2018–2019 DELTA program database and AISD student enrollment records

STUDENT OUTCOMES

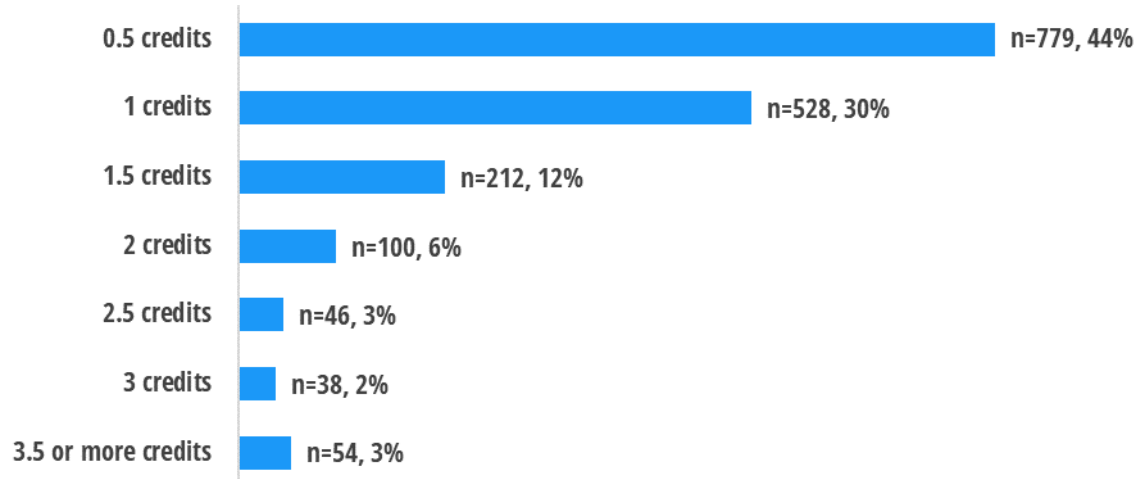
Credits Earned

Students can start a DELTA course any time during the school year. Depending on the time of program enrollment, students may or may not complete the course before the end of the semester. In 2018–2019, 2,646 students enrolled in DELTA courses to attempt to recover credits or earn accelerated credits.

Students could enroll in more than one DELTA course during a school year. In 2018–2019, DELTA students enrolled in 4,745 DELTA courses, each corresponding to 0.5 or 1.0 credits. Overall, students attempted a total of 2,372.5 credits and earned 73% of those credits (Table 2). The majority of DELTA students (74%) who completed their courses earned 0.5 or 1.0 credit, and 26% of the students earned from 1.5 to 7.5 credits (Figure 1).

Courses taken and credits earned varied across subject areas. The majority of DELTA courses attempted were core subject areas of English language arts (ELA, 34%) and math (24%). Courses in Spanish and science had the best outcomes, with 90% and 79%, respectively, of credits being completed. Courses in math had the lowest outcomes, with 66% of students completing their courses (Table 2). However, as indicated in Table 3, students took longer to complete math courses than courses in other subjects, which may have contributed to the lower completion rate of math courses. Lastly, students took between 4 and 13 weeks to complete their courses. Courses in math, science, and social studies took longer to complete than courses in other subject areas (Table 3).

Figure 1.
The majority of DELTA students (74%) completed 0.5 or 1.0 credit.



Source. 2018–2019 DELTA program database

Table 2.
During 2018–2019, DELTA students earned 73% of the credits attempted.

Subject areas	Number of courses started	Number of credits started	Number of credits earned	Percentage of credits earned
ELA	1,637	818.5	600.5	73%
Math	1,133	566.5	376	66%
Science	633	316.5	249	79%
Social studies	1,169	584.5	434	74%
Spanish	173	86.5	77.5	90%
TOTAL	4,745	2,372.5	1,737	73%

Source. 2018–2019 DELTA program database

Table 3.
Students took longer to complete courses in math than in other subject areas.

Subject area	Average number of weeks to earn credit	Percentage of DELTA students taking courses in each core area
ELA	9.4	62%
Math	13.1	43%
Science	10.2	24%
Social studies	10.6	44%
Foreign language	5	7%
Total DELTA students: 2,646	Average time: 7.9 weeks	

Source. 2018–2019 DELTA program database

STAAR/EOC Performance of DELTA Students

DELTA students were compared with non-program high school students who took the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) end-of-course (EOC) exams in the 2018–2019 school year. Students in the comparison group attended the same campuses as did program students and were matched based on socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and English language learner status.

Not all DELTA students who earned credits took the related EOC exam at the end of the school year (Table 4). It is possible that DELTA students who did not take the EOC exams had already taken and passed the EOC assessment in a prior year but had not yet passed the corresponding course.

There were significant differences in EOC performance between DELTA and comparison students for various subject areas. Students in DELTA and in the comparison group met passing standards at similar rates for the biology and U.S. history EOC assessments. However, significant differences between the two student groups were observed for the Algebra I, English I, and English II EOC assessments (Table 4). Despite the fact that the comparison group passed some of the EOC assessments at higher rates, caution should be used in interpreting these results because the DELTA and the comparison student groups were matched on ethnicity, socio-economic status, and English learner status, which may not have corresponded to the same proportion of students with at-risk status in both groups. Nor did the matching account for prior academic performance.

Table 4.

While DELTA students performed similarly to a matched comparison group on biology and U.S. history tests, they passed at significantly lower rates on Algebra I and English I and English II EOC tests.

EOC Content Area	DELTA			Comparison		
	Earned credit	Took EOC	Met standard	Earned credit	Took EOC	Met standard
Algebra I*	135	22 (16%)	55%	268	200 (75%)	81%
English I*	224	52 (23%)	31%	315	214 (68%)	50%
English II*	230	78 (34%)	36%	361	284 (79%)	51%
Biology	101	13 (13%)	85%	318	217 (68%)	81%
U.S. History	267	65 (24%)	85%	543	406 (75%)	91%

Source. AISD student records (STAAR_EOC)

Notes. Only DELTA students who earned credit in the relevant content area are included.

* Significant differences were found using a chi-square test of goodness of fit, $p < 0.01$.

Graduation Outcomes

Preliminary AISD graduation data for 2018–2019 indicated positive outcomes for DELTA participants. Of the 1,286 12th-grade students enrolled in DELTA courses, 85% ($n = 1,097$) graduated; 7% ($n = 92$) did not graduate from AISD because they moved back to their home country, died, were placed in or opted to home school, moved to a private school in or out of Texas, or received a general equivalency diploma (GED); 5% ($n = 60$) enrolled in another non-reportable public or charter school; and 3% ($n = 39$) had missing information. In addition, 13 (1%) of the students who graduated were originally in the 2017 or 2018 graduating cohorts, further evidence that DELTA helped at-risk students to graduate from high school.

Student Opinions About the Program

Students completing their credit recovery program courses in April and May of 2019 were asked to provide feedback about the program as they exited their course. A total of 799 DELTA students received an electronic link to the survey, and 31% ($n = 246$) of them filled out the survey.

Overall, DELTA students had positive perceptions of the program. Of the students who answered the survey, 79% indicated they believed the program helped them stay on track to graduate, 83% were satisfied with the program, and 85% would tell their friends and classmates to enroll in a credit recovery program if they needed a credit. In open-ended items, several students indicated that the program helped them better understand the material and that teachers were helpful in facilitating their learning.

In addition, when asked about challenges the students may have faced in the DELTA program, the following topics surfaced. The lesson, test, or overall course felt too long, making it difficult for them to stay focused and motivated to complete the course. They had difficulties understanding the subject in which they were taking a course. They struggled with their own time management and self motivation to stay on track. In addition, some students indicated they had issues learning from an online platform.

Students provided suggestions about how some issues could be attenuated and how the program could improve. Students indicated that having more access to teachers for help with the subject matter and guidance through the course could have helped them stay on track. In addition, students mentioned that shorter course material and the possibility of skipping parts of the course they already had mastered would have helped them stay motivated. Students also felt that allowing them to work on their coursework outside the classroom, having a clear course structure or guideline, and having more course options would improve their experience in the program.

Lastly, of the 246 students who answered the survey, 7% ($n = 17$) indicated they quit working on a credit recovery class before completing the credit. When asked why they quit their class, not needing the credit to graduate and not having enough time to complete the course were the most common reasons for quitting those courses.

Teacher and Campus Staff's Opinions About the Program

In Spring 2019, 27 DELTA teachers and 204 administrative staff (e.g., counselors, principals, and assistant principals) who were in charge of referring and enrolling students in the program were asked to provide feedback about DELTA. All DELTA teachers and 34% ($n = 69$) of the administrators answered the survey.

Overall, teachers and administrators reported positive perceptions of the program. When asked about their preparation for teaching the courses, 93% indicated they felt well prepared or trained to teach online courses. In addition, 81% believed their students were well informed about the program goal, requirements, and expectations, and 74% felt parents and guardians were well informed about the program. When teachers were asked



about how helpful they felt the program had been to their students, 96% felt the program was meeting students' needs, 92% thought students were engaged during classes, and 93% felt the program helped students stay on track to graduate.

Teachers and administrators provided their insights to open-ended questions. When asked about program highlights and best practices, both teachers and administrators identified the opportunity to recover a credit or attendance, the accessibility to students via an online platform, the self-paced curriculum, and the guidance and mentorship students received from teachers as the most valuable aspects of the program. When asked about areas of the program that could be improved, both groups noted more teachers per class would have been helpful.

Conclusion and Recommendations

During 2018–2019, 13% of AISD's high school students enrolled in DELTA courses; 49% of these students were in 12th grade, and 85% of the 12th graders in DELTA graduated from high school. In addition, 1% of the graduating students were part of prior cohorts, indicating that DELTA helped students stay on track as well as recover credits to graduate. However, students' course and EOC outcomes and feedback from students, teachers, and administrators suggested some areas where the program can be improved. Therefore, the following recommendations are provided:

Given the lower EOC passing rates in Algebra I and English I and II for DELTA students, compared with rates for a matched group, adjustments to the algebra and English curricula should be reviewed to determine areas for improvement.

Given the lower percentage of students who completed math courses and the longer time to complete those courses, staff should investigate the reasons students seemed to have more difficulty with this subject area. For example, students may need more teacher support in understanding and progressing through math content than through other subject areas.

Given staffing concerns about the teacher-to-student ratio in some campuses, consideration should be given to increasing the number of teachers and of classes offered at those sites. This would help lower the teacher-to-student ratio per class, allowing teachers to provide students with more assistance and guidance.

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