



Austin Partners in Education Summary Report 2020–2021

Austin Partners in Education Program Description

In 2020–2021, the Austin Partners in Education (APIE) Program aimed to align programs and resources to help Austin Independent School District (AISD) students navigate the new educational landscape brought on by the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic and school closures. While APIE’s goals continued to focus on supporting Early College High School (ECHS) students in acquiring the knowledge and skills needed to enroll, persist, and succeed in postsecondary education, priorities were free to be adjusted based on the shifting needs of students and campuses. As planned, in 2020–2021, APIE supported district academic and college readiness programs through multiple academic coaching services focused on taking college readiness exams (e.g., Texas Success Initiative Assessment [TSI]). This program under APIE is labeled as the College Readiness (CR) Program and has the primary goal of increasing the number of students who meet college readiness standards. APIE staff also implemented the Math Classroom Coaching (MCC) Program, which focuses on providing students with academic support to reinforce and enrich their classroom learning experience. APIE continued its mentoring program, and secondary mentors supported their mentees in a variety of ways. Lastly, APIE’s Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) tutoring program worked closely with the AISD GEAR UP program coordinator, campus facilitators, teachers, and administrators to meet the goals and objectives of the GEAR UP grant and respond to the social, emotional, and academic needs of students.

Program Funding for 2020–2021

The funding amount represents the total cost of each program, so it includes dollars fundraised by APIE to close the gap not covered by AISD and/or the Chamber of Commerce, as well as funding provided by AISD and the Chamber.

- CR Program cost: \$584,000
- MCC Program cost: \$315,000
- Secondary mentoring program cost: \$148,500

APIE Program Evaluation Findings

APIE MCC Program

Four hundred and fifty-six students in 6th-, 7th-, and 8th-grade math were supported through virtual MCC in 2020–2021 in five courses (pre-advanced placement [AP] grade-6 math, grade-7 math, advanced grade-7 math, grade-8 math, and Algebra I pre-AP) with nine teachers at Covington, Martin, and Dobie middle schools. Seventy-five percent of students supported through MCC were Hispanic, 13% were African American, and 9% were White.



Did APIE MCC participants experience changes in academic persistence and/or school engagement, as measured by the AISD Student Climate Survey?

Fifty-nine percent ($n = 269$) of APIE MCC students took the AISD Student Climate Survey in Spring 2021. Aside from a focus on math readiness, MCC also encourages students in their academics more generally by teaching them study skills, problem solving techniques, and the importance of education. Therefore, it was pertinent to assess the responses of students served by MCC on the academic persistence items to see if their responses were similar to or different from students not served by MCC. These items were:

- I feel successful in my schoolwork.
- I can do even the hardest schoolwork if I try.
- I can reach the goals I set for myself.
- I don't give up, even when I feel frustrated.

Students served by MCC and those not served by MCC responded similarly to these four items, with 61% of MCC students responding favorably and 63% of those students not served by an MCC responding favorably (Table 1). In a challenging academic year, it was reassuring to see that students served by MCC, who often need more support than their peers, exhibited similar levels of academic persistence.

Table 1.

Overall, APIE MCC participants' responses and the comparison group's responses on persistence items on the AISD Student Climate Survey in spring 2021 were similar.

| APIE Program | Metric | Not persistent | Persistent |
|-----------------------|------------|----------------|------------|
| APIE MCC participants | Number | 105 | 164 |
| | Percentage | 39% | 61% |
| MCC comparison group | Number | 436 | 745 |
| | Percentage | 37% | 63% |

Source. 2020–2021 AISD Student Climate Survey

What were the academic outcomes for APIE MCC participants, and how did these compare with academic outcomes for similar nonparticipants?

Academic results (grades in math courses and math State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness [STAAR] scores) for students participating in MCC and for a comparison group are provided in Tables 2 and 3. For the sake of these analyses, comparison groups were students from the same schools and in the same grades as those who participated in the APIE MCC Program. Students in the MCC comparison group were served in the same math courses (e.g., Algebra 1 pre-AP) as MCC participants at the same campuses (Covington, Dobie, and Martin).

Students served by an APIE coach had on average higher semester 1 and semester 2 grades in their math courses than did those who were in the same courses on the same campuses but were not served by a coach. Additionally, 6th - and 8th-grade students served by a coach received slightly higher raw scores on STAAR math in 2020–2021.

Table 2.

APIE students participating in MCC had higher average semester 1 and semester 2 grades than did similar students in semester 1 and semester 2.

| Reporting period | APIE Program | N | Mean |
|------------------|-----------------------|-----|-------|
| Semester 1 | APIE MCC participants | 406 | 75.54 |
| | MCC comparison group | 324 | 73.82 |
| Semester 2 | APIE MCC participants | 425 | 77.28 |
| | MCC comparison group | 437 | 75.52 |

Source. 2020–2021 AISD student TEAMS grades data

Table 3.

APIE students participating in MCC had slightly higher raw scores on STAAR math in 6th and 8th grades, but slightly lower average scores in 7th grade.

| APIE Program | Grade | N | STAAR math mean raw score |
|-----------------------|-------|-----|---------------------------|
| APIE MCC participants | 6th | 38 | 14.24 |
| | 7th | 36 | 10.28 |
| | 8th | 77 | 15.04 |
| MCC comparison group | 6th | 312 | 13.49 |
| | 7th | 204 | 13.01 |
| | 8th | 175 | 14.42 |

Source. 2020–2021 AISD student TEAMS records; 2020–2021 AISD STAAR

APIE CR Program

One hundred and seventy-seven students were served by the college and career readiness programs across six high schools: Akins, Eastside, Navarro, Travis, Northeast, and LBJ. Of these students, 85% were Hispanic, 9% were African American, and 4% were White. Additionally, 72 students from Crockett were tutored across the fall and spring semesters. The ECHS coordinator and college readiness advocate at Crockett focused on support for 11th graders, as the Crockett team felt this was the best place for the APIE college readiness advocate, instead of working with 9th or 10th graders on TSI preparation. Tutoring as well as Friday study sessions for multiple Austin Community College dual-credit courses were held that provided students with support on essay writing, preparing for tests, and organizing their own study sessions.

What were the academic outcomes for APIE CR Program participants, and how did these compare with academic outcomes for similar nonparticipants?

In the 2020–2021 school year, the APIE CR Program mostly focused on English/language arts and reading (ELAR), and therefore the outcomes outlined here focus on these subject areas. Additionally, much of the college readiness support was intended to help students prepare for college readiness exams, such as the TSI. Analyses focus on TSI participation and college readiness. For the sake of these analyses, the comparison group was students from the same schools and in the same grades as those who participated in the APIE CR Program (i.e., 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th graders from Akins, Eastside, Navarro, Travis, Northeast, and LBJ). Of note, an updated TSI exam (TSIA2) launched on January 11, 2021.

Table 4.

A greater percentage of APIE CR Program participants than of the comparison group took the TSI in 2020–2021.

| APIE Program | Metric | Took TSI 20-21 | |
|----------------------|------------|----------------|------|
| | | No | Yes |
| APIE CR participants | Number | 28 | 148 |
| | Percentage | 16% | 84% |
| CR comparison group | Number | 3849 | 4562 |
| | Percentage | 46% | 54% |

Source. 2020–2021 AISD student TEAMS records.

Table 5.

APIE CR Program participants were more likely to be college ready in reading than was a group of similar students.

| APIE Program | Metric | Reading Ready | |
|----------------------|------------|---------------|------|
| | | No | Yes |
| APIE CR participants | Number | 120 | 57 |
| | Percentage | 68% | 32% |
| CR comparison group | Number | 6508 | 1903 |
| | Percentage | 77% | 23% |

Source. 2020–2021 AISD student TEAMS records

Note. College ready in a subject area is defined by the Texas Education Agency as a student meeting the college-ready criteria on the TSI assessment, SAT, or ACT.

Table 6.

APIE CR Program participants were as likely to pass TSI ELAR as was a group of similar students.

Source. 2020–2021 AISD student TEAMS records

| APIE Program | Metric | Passed TSI ELAR | |
|----------------------|------------|-----------------|------|
| | | No | Yes |
| APIE CR participants | Number | 76 | 58 |
| | Percentage | 57% | 43% |
| CR comparison group | Number | 2345 | 1777 |
| | Percentage | 57% | 43% |

Mentoring Program

Mentors met weekly one on one with students to build relationships and serve as positive role models. APIE’s secondary mentors supported their mentees in a variety of ways, including:

- Social-emotional support
- Career and college guidance
- Academic/study skill support
- Cultural assimilation

- Relationship building
- Behavioral struggles

With limitations and safety protocols in place due to the pandemic, no outside visitors were allowed on AISD campuses during the 2020–2021 school year. As a result, APIE’s mentoring program pivoted to provide 100% virtual mentoring opportunities, using the Zoom platform. APIE focused on connecting mentors to students in secondary schools, grades 6 through 12, while continuing a second year of support to transition its elementary mentoring program to AISD’s mentor coordinator.

The elementary mentoring numbers (16) were at a historic low in 2020–2021 due to the limitations of having young children, ages 6 through 10, attending Zoom sessions beyond their normal class requirements. Half of the 16 elementary mentors were continuing their support of their mentee from the prior year.

While many more volunteers registered to be a mentor (296), only 181 followed through with being trained. Ninety-five mentors were placed and matched with a student. It was much more difficult to get the mentors placed on a campus and assigned to a student due to the reliance on more campus-based support to make these connections happen. This resulted in 86 mentors who were trained and ready to be placed with a student not being matched before the end of the school year.

In addition to the typical match process and introductions required for a mentoring relationship to begin, it became increasingly difficult for the student and the mentor to connect via Zoom at the correct day and time. This required additional involvement and support by both APIE staff and campus staff. Another challenge was that most of the students who received virtual mentoring services did not always have access to adequate bandwidth and private spaces while working remotely.

Overall, 95 mentors served 95 students, for a total of 2,470 mentoring hours during the 2020–2021 school year (Table 7).

Table 7.

APIE Mentors served 95 students, for a total of 2470 hours in 2020–2021.

| APIE Mentoring Program | N |
|---------------------------|------|
| Elementary mentors | 16 |
| Secondary mentors | 79 |
| Total placed mentors | 95 |
| Total hours | 2470 |
| Number of students served | 95 |

Source. 2020–2021 APIE records

GEAR UP APIE Tutoring

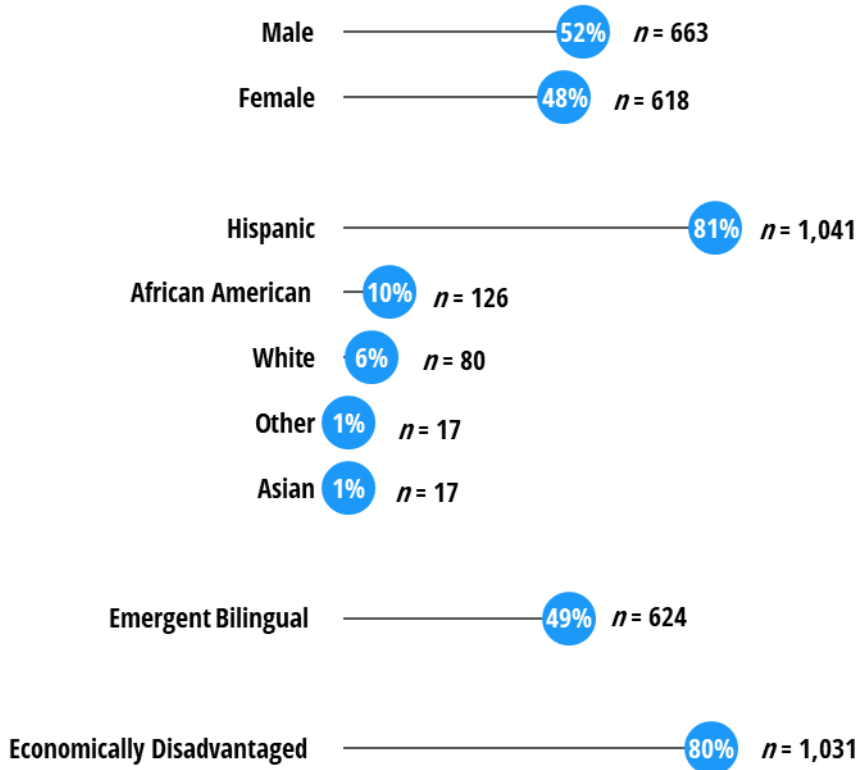
Who participated in GEAR UP APIE tutoring?

APIE tutoring was available to 9th-grade students enrolled in the seven designated GEAR UP high schools in AISD. Of 2,650 GEAR UP cohort students, 48% ($n = 1,281$) received APIE tutoring services in various subjects, including English language arts (ELA), math, science, and college readiness. Many GEAR UP students served by APIE were categorized as high need, having failing grades in their courses for one or more grading periods. GEAR UP participants served by APIE

tutoring were primarily Hispanic (81%) or economically disadvantaged (80%) (Figure 1).

Figure 1.

A majority of GEAR UP APIE participants were Hispanic (81%) or economically disadvantaged (80%).



Source. 2020–2021 AISD student demographics records; AISD eCST data system, 2020–2021
Note. Other includes American Indian or Alaska native and Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander. Only GEAR UP students who participated in small-group or individualized tutoring provided by APIE were included.

Did APIE service participation differ for GEAR UP students according to their racial/ethnic group and economically disadvantaged status?

GEAR UP student participation in APIE tutoring was disaggregated by race/ethnicity and by economically disadvantaged status. The percentage of African American GEAR UP students participating in APIE tutoring was higher than the percentages of Hispanic, White, and Asian students (Figure 2). A greater percentage of GEAR UP students who were economically disadvantaged than of those who were not economically disadvantaged participated in APIE tutoring.

APIE GEAR UP Partnership

APIE aims to improve college and career readiness through student-centric tutoring and mentoring programs. In 2020–2021, GEAR UP continued to partner with APIE to provide tutoring to its students in all 7 GEAR UP high schools. Learn more about APIE at <https://austinpartners.org>

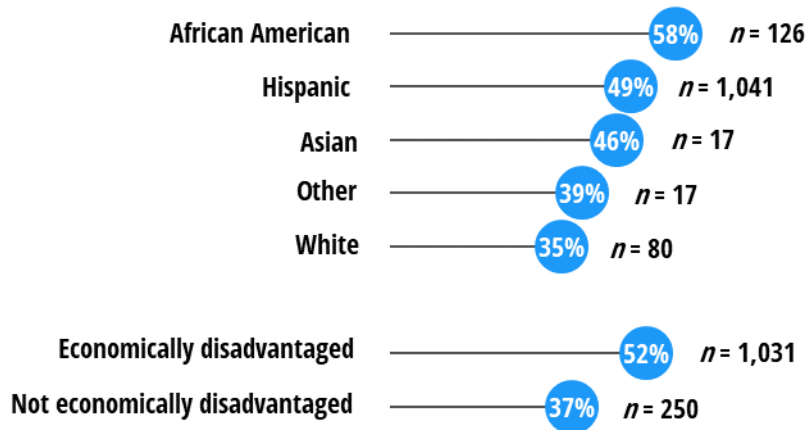
GEAR UP students received APIE tutoring services in two areas:

- General tutoring in ELA, math and science
- College readiness tutoring

Of the 1,281 GEAR UP students who received APIE tutoring, 97% ($n = 1,242$) received APIE general tutoring, and 10% ($n = 122$) received APIE college readiness tutoring.

Figure 2.

Higher percentages of African American and economically disadvantaged students than of their peers participated in APIE tutoring.



Source. 2020–2021 AISD student demographics records; AISD eCST data system, 2020–2021

Note. Other includes American Indian or Alaska native and Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander. Only GEAR UP students who participated in small-group or individualized tutoring provided by APIE were included. The difference in percentage of GEAR UP students participating in APIE tutoring was significant between racial groups and between economically disadvantaged and non-economically disadvantaged groups ($p < .01$).

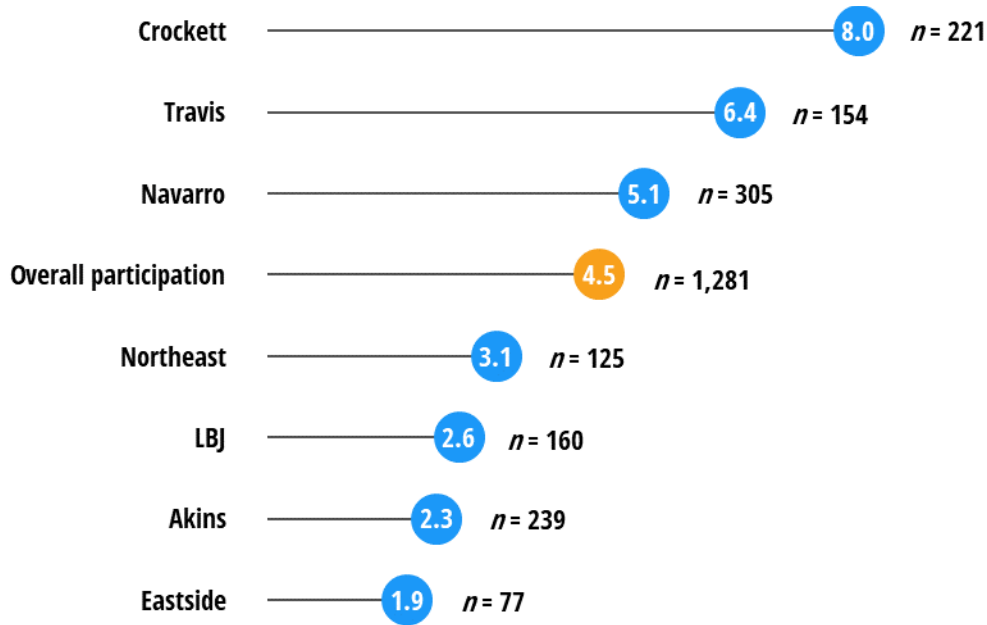
Did APIE service participation vary across GEAR UP campuses?

The percentage of GEAR UP students who received APIE tutoring services within small group or one-on-one settings varied across campuses. On average, participating GEAR UP students received 4.5 hours of APIE tutoring support. Students at these schools also may have received support from an APIE tutor in a whole group setting, whereby the tutor participated in the teacher’s virtual lessons and breakout rooms to provide just-in-time support; however, this type of support was too cumbersome to record accurately on a daily basis and is not included in the summary of dosage.

Tutoring dosage also varied across campuses (Figure 3). Crockett involved 50% of GEAR UP students in APIE tutoring, and the average number of hours each participating student received was the highest among all campuses. Navarro involved 67% of GEAR UP students, and each participating student had 5.1 hours of APIE tutoring, on average. While Travis involved 43% of GEAR UP students, each participating student had 6.4 hours of APIE tutoring, on average. In comparison, 78% of GEAR UP students at LBJ received APIE tutoring, and each participating student had 2.6 hours of APIE tutoring, on average.

Figure 3.

The average number of hours per participating GEAR UP student for APIE tutoring ranged from 1.9 hours at Eastside to 8.0 hours at Crockett.



Source. AISD eCST data system, 2020–2021

Results were summarized for the group of GEAR UP students who participated in APIE tutoring and the group of GEAR UP students who did not receive APIE tutoring. GEAR UP students who did not receive any APIE tutoring may have received academic support or tutoring from other sources that were beyond the scope of this report, or APIE tutoring may not have included students who were most in need of academic support (e.g., not failing their course).

How did GEAR UP students who participated in APIE tutoring perform academically?

GEAR UP students receiving any APIE tutoring had higher advanced-level course passing rates than did GEAR UP students who did not receive APIE tutoring (Figure 4). GEAR UP students receiving any APIE tutoring performed better in grade-level promotion than did GEAR UP students who did not receive any APIE tutoring (Figure 5). The percentages of GEAR UP students that received APIE general tutoring who met the TSI passing standard in ELAR increased from 2019–2020 to 2020–2021 (Figure 6).

Figure 4.

The percentages of GEAR UP students receiving any APIE tutoring who enrolled and completed advanced-level courses were higher than that of GEAR UP students who did not receive any APIE tutoring.



Source. 2020–2021 AISD course enrollment records

Figure 5.

The percentage of GEAR UP students receiving any APIE tutoring who were promoted to the 10th grade level in 2021–2022 was higher than that of GEAR UP students who did not receive any APIE tutoring.



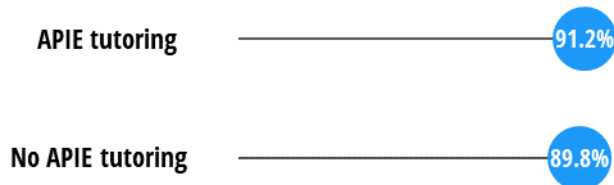
Source. 2020–2021 AISD students records

How did GEAR UP students who participated in APIE tutoring attend school?

APIE staff focused on helping students’ attendance during the virtual school year. Findings demonstrated that the average student attendance rate of GEAR UP students who received any APIE tutoring (91.2%) was higher than that of GEAR UP students who did not receive any APIE tutoring (89.8%) (Figure 7).

Figure 7.

GEAR UP students who received any APIE tutoring had better attendance than did GEAR UP students who did not receive any APIE tutoring.



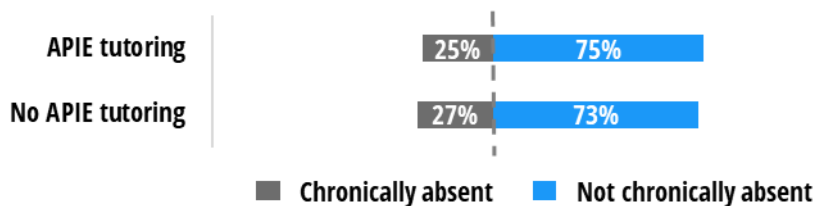
Source. 2020–2021 AISD attendance records

Note. The difference in GEAR UP students’ attendance rates between the two groups was significant ($p = .02$).

Seventy-five percent of GEAR UP students who received any APIE tutoring had an attendance rate greater than 90%, meaning 25% were chronically absent (Figure 8). In contrast, 27% of GEAR UP students who did not receive any APIE tutoring were chronically absent.

Figure 8.

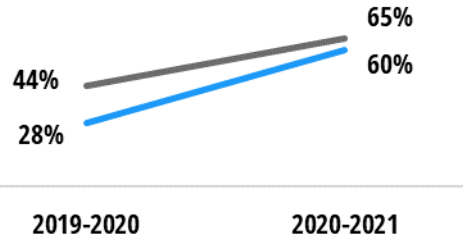
The percentage of GEAR UP students receiving any APIE tutoring who were chronically absent was lower than that of GEAR UP students not receiving any APIE tutoring.



Source. 2020–2021 AISD attendance records

Figure 6.

The percentage of GEAR UP students receiving APIE general tutoring who met the TSI passing standard in ELAR increased from 2019–2020 to 2020–2021, and the increase rate was higher for GEAR UP students receiving APIE general tutoring than for GEAR UP students who did not receive any APIE tutoring.



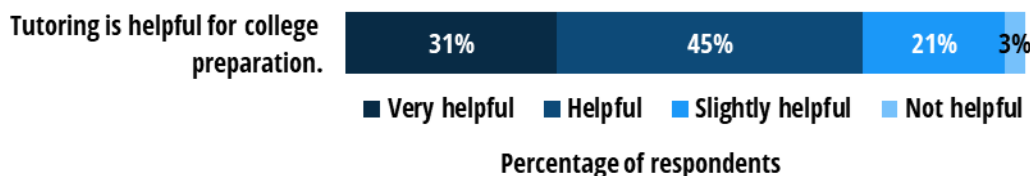
Source. AISD eCST data system, 2019–2020 and 2020–2021; AISD student TEAMS records, 2019–2020 and 2020–2021

What did GEAR UP students perceive about APIE tutoring?

In the spring of 2021, the AISD evaluation team administered a student survey to all GEAR UP high school students. The survey results indicated the majority of GEAR UP students who received tutoring services from APIE tutors agreed that tutoring was helpful in preparing them for college (Figure 9).

Figure 9.

The majority of GEAR UP students receiving any APIE tutoring services agreed that tutoring was helpful for college preparation.



Source. 2020–2021 GEAR UP Student Survey; AISD eCST data system, 2020–2021

Perceptions of APIE’s support in the 2020–2021 school year

Focus groups with teachers and students were conducted at the end of the 2020–2021 school year regarding APIE’s support on APIE campuses and in classrooms served by an APIE support person. Focus group feedback was overwhelmingly positive, as both teachers and students provided examples of how the presence of APIE staff was beneficial, especially in a very challenging year. Students from Akins and Travis and teachers from Covington, Dobie, and Martin participated in the focus groups and provided feedback about APIE programs. Their feedback is summarized below.

Students’ Perceptions

Students overall agreed that their APIE college readiness advocate helped them by spending time tutoring for classes and TSI exams, following up on assignments, answering questions, and talking about future plans. For example, students described that advocates reviewed TSI math questions and content with students before and after the exams to help better prepare students to improve their score and pass. . Students also reported that tutors helped them understand complex material, such as geometry, by going through the content again together. Most students specifically referenced extra time to review material and going more in depth about the topic with their college readiness advocate and said this helped them with their assignments and classes. For papers, tutors helped students get started, collect information, use correct grammar, and proofread. All students reported that the best thing about APIE and the college readiness tutors was how supportive, nonjudgmental, understanding, reliable, responsive, communicative, and easy to talk to their advocate was. According to students, APIE advocates were competent, engaged, and professional and were exceptional at handling the emotional and academic aspects of working with students. In addition to advocates truly believing in helping each student, students felt advocates were great at relationship building, juggling and shifting hats easily, and teaching and working on executive functions. This academic support and mentoring helped students feel more prepared and confident academically and plan for the future.

Teachers’ Perceptions

Teachers overall agreed that the relationships formed between students and APIE coaches and the emotional support offered by APIE coaches had a very positive impact on students receiving services. For example, some students who were never (i.e., before meeting with their APIE coach) comfortable speaking up on Zoom or having their camera on started engaging in class more after meeting with their coach. Additionally, many coaches helped their students be-

come more confident in their skills, including math skills or test taking skills and strategies. Teachers also agreed that the students looked forward to the small group meetings with their APIE coach, and that these interactions with and attention from an adult were beneficial. Because of this more intimate small group setting, APIE coaches were also sometimes more privy to who in the class may be having difficulty with a certain topic, and could bring that information to the teacher, which helped in a year when it was especially hard to reach students and provide individualization. Many mentioned that sometimes just learning a concept or seeing “math in action” from someone other than the teacher was helpful and could aid in breaking up the learning process. Students were also cited as being more willing to ask questions in these small group settings with their coach, which individualized content delivery and helped students understand concepts better. Teachers from one middle school even mentioned that on the days that APIE coaches came, they had more submissions of assignments than on a regular day, which was concrete evidence that the tutors were helping. Finally, teachers mentioned that, especially this year, coaches remained very flexible. If schedules changed, most coaches were willing to adjust, as needed, to best serve the students.

Conclusion

Both students and teachers from APIE campuses had overall positive feedback regarding APIE tutors, coaches, and support, as captured through the focus groups. Additionally, students served by an APIE MCC Program coach and those not served by an APIE coach but from the same campuses had similar responses to the academic persistence items on the AISD Student Climate Survey, providing evidence that, despite the extra support often needed by students served by an APIE coach, their levels of academic persistence were similar to that of their peers. When looking at academic outcomes, a greater percentage of APIE CR Program participants took the TSI and met college readiness requirements in reading, compared with the comparison group. APIE CR participants also passed the TSI reading at the same rate as did the comparison group. . Students served by an APIE coach had, on average, higher semester 1 and semester 2 grades in their math courses than did those who were in the same courses on the same campuses but were not served by an APIE coach. Students served by an APIE coach had higher raw STAAR scores in 6th and 8th grade than did students from their campus who were not served by an APIE coach. Overall, in a very challenging year, APIE support helped keep students on track with their peers, and in some cases, even outperform their peers.

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