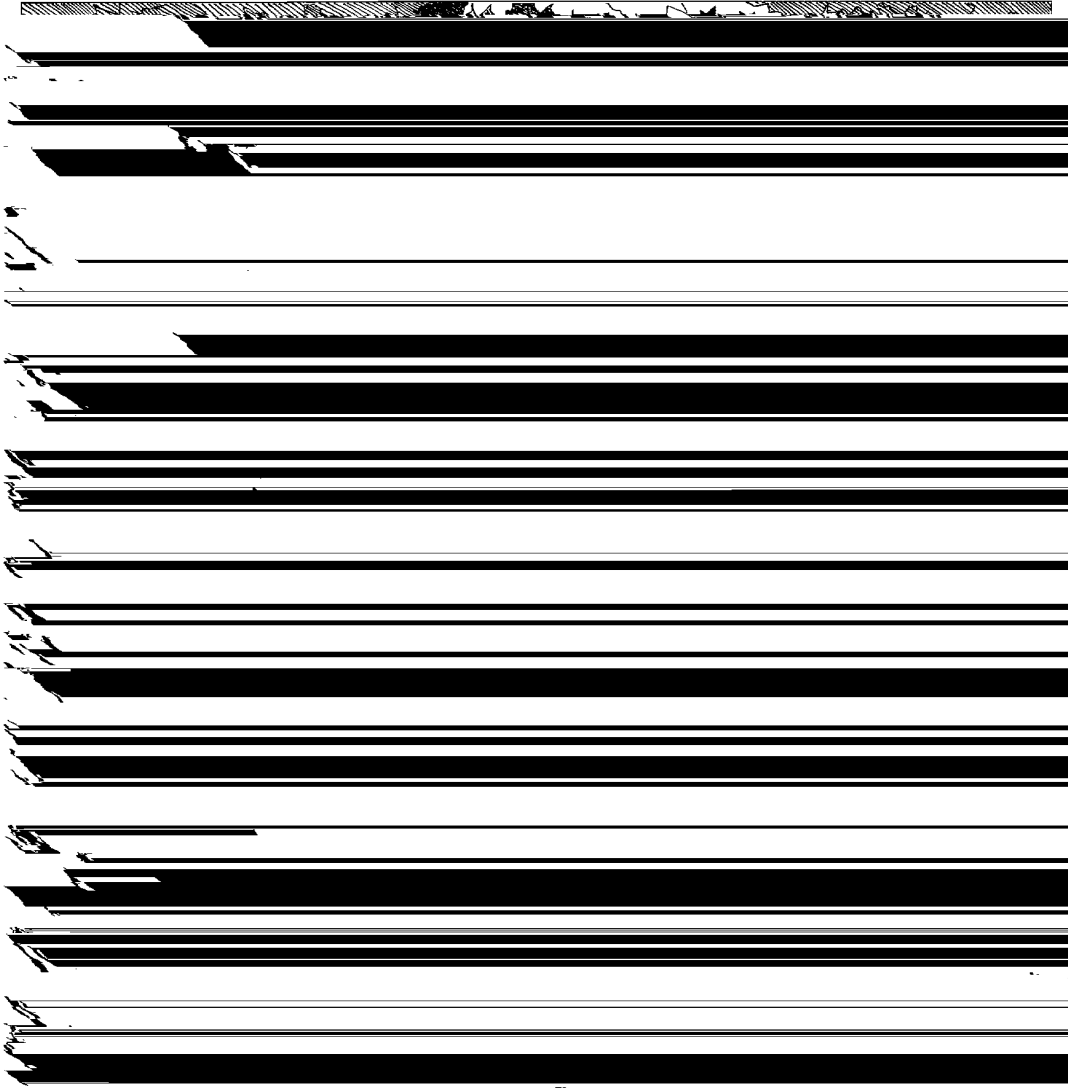# Summer Opportunity to Accelerate Reading (SOAR) Evaluation, 2002

Austin Independent School District

Office of Program Evaluation

October 2002

> *Summer Opportunity to Accelerate Reading (SOAR) Evaluation, 2002*
> *Austin Independent School District*
>
> # *Executive Summary*

T he *Summer Opportunity to Accelerate Reading* (SOAR) 2002 program was Austin Independent School District's summer reading program for students completing kindergarten through grade 2 in May 2002. The purpose of the SOAR program, in its fifth year, is to provide early intervention to accelerate literacy learning for students who are at risk of reading difficulties. The focus of the instruction is balanced literacy, which is a component of the districtwide language arts initiative.

In June 2002, the 19-day program served 2,251 students (2,188 in 2001) at 15 SOAR campuses. Reading instruction was provided by 143 AISD teachers who had received professional development for 1-1/2 days as part of the SOAR summer program. Fifty-six (39%) teachers had taught in the SOAR program during a previous summer. The allocation for SOAR 2002 came from local and state funds. AISD used part of the state *Accelerated Reading Instruction* (ARI) grant money and local dropout prevention funds to support SOAR 2002 for a total of $1,232,214.

The following are facts about the SOAR 2002 program.

- The grade distribution was 19% kindergarten, 52% grade 1, and 29% grade 2.
- The ethnic distribution was 62% Hispanic, 21% African American, 15% Anglo/Other, and 2% Asian.
- SOAR 2002 served special needs students: 31% were LEP (limited English proficient) and 16% were special education students.
- Reading instruction was offered in English (74% of students) and Spanish (26% of students).
- Seventy-eight percent of the SOAR students were from Title I schools.
- Only 62% of the students who were eligible for SOAR attended this optional summer reading program.
- The average attendance rate for SOAR was 85%.
- The average number of days in attendance for SOAR 2002 was 16.2.
- A total of 653 (29%) students attended SOAR for all 19 days.
- The overall pupil-teacher ratio was 16:1.
- Among SOAR teachers, the average number of years teaching experience was 7.5 years.

FINDINGS

Program effectiveness for SOAR was measured using the *Developmental Reading Assessment* (DRA). There is a DRA level that correlates to students reading on grade level at the end of kindergarten (level 2), at the end of first grade (level 16), at the end of second grade (level 28), and at the end of third grade (level 38). Analysis of DRA scores for SOAR 2002 students showed the following results:

- During the 19-day SOAR program, 86% (87% in 2001) of all students with

valid pre- and posttest scores (n=1,994) showed reading improvement by advancing one or more text reading levels on the DRA. The average gain in 2002 was 1.8 (1.7 in 2001) text reading levels with a range from 0 to 8 text reading levels.

∉# Among students with valid pre- and posttest scores, 34.7% gained one text reading level, 27.1% gained two levels, 14% gained three levels, and 10.4% gained four or more text reading levels during SOAR.

∉# Of the 147 students who pretested at Level A (the lowest level), only 31 (21%) remained at this level at the end of SOAR.

∉# A total of 566 (34%) students began the program below grade level in reading

for entering students directly into the SASI data system would eliminate a duplication of time and effort that existed in 2002.

⚏ *Data Management* – Data management was the core of summer school problems. DRA and TPRI spring test scores were not entered in SASI by all of the campuses, thus making it difficult for program managers to know who was eligible for summer school. There was no system in place to hold home schools accountable for data entry of assessment results. In addition, a misunderstanding between the curriculum and programming departments about the type of database to use for transportation assignments caused a delay in sending summer school information to parents. Because the program is only 19 days there is an urgency to have an improved technology and data plan in place and working before the program begins.

⚏ *Program Delivery* - The ARI funds that have previously been used for the SOAR summer program are being used for immediate intervention through the district *Student Success Initiative Tutoring Plan* in 2002-03. Tutoring will be available throughout the year at each campus for students who are at risk for reading difficulties. A portion of the ARI funds will be allocated for summer school for grade 3 students who still need to pass TAKS reading to be promoted to grade 4. It is unclear if the SOAR program will be available for kindergarten through grade 2 in 2003.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are offered to district decision makers for consideration.

1. ***Secure funding to continue providing summer school opportunities for students in kindergarten through grade 2 in 2003.*** The structure and content of SOAR have proven effective for students who have attended the intensive summer reading program. Students have consistently shown accelerated progress in reading during the five years of the program. An additional benefit is that SOAR teachers receive professional development and hands-on learning in balanced literacy that they can use in their classrooms throughout the year. Because ARI monies will be used for accelerated instruction during the 2002-03 school year and for a grade 3 summer program in 2003, AISD will need to find other funds that can be used for summer school for kindergarten through grade 2 students. Summer school costs could be reduced by accurately identifying students who need reading intervention, having fewer and larger summer school sites, and using other grant funding (e.g., Title I, Optional Extended Year, B lp B1ed reading alanc professionaltle I,St who6ional Sh

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2. ***Provide year-round reading intervention for early elementary students who are at risk for reading failure.*** While summer school has been an effective program, there were 38% of eligible students who did not attend SOAR 2002. The 1,384 students who were eligible, but did not elect to attend this optional summer school program need to be supported with reading intervention during the school year. The district's 2002-03 *Student Success Initiative Tutoring Plan* is a good first step toward this goal. As the district prepares grade 3 students for TAKS in spring 2003, the use of ARI funds on immediate reading intervention is wise. Offering an accelerated reading instruction program to students in small groups using ARI monies throughout the school

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

SOAR 2002 Program Staff

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Kathleen Noack, *Sunset Valley*
Dorothy Goodman, *Walnut Creek*

The mission of the SOAR program is to provide early intervention to accelerate literacy learning for primary students in an effort to meet the district and state goal that all students read at or above grade level upon exiting third grade. p

Student Demographics

A total of 2,251 students attended SOAR 2002. Students from all 74 AISD elementary schools and six Austin area private schools attended the program. See Appendix C for a list of the numbers of students attending SOAR 2002 from each of the elementary schools. The largest percentage of students was in grade 1 during the 2001-02 school year. The grade distribution during SOAR 2002 was 19% kindergarten, 52% grade 1, and 29% grade 2. Compared to 2001, there was an increase in the number of grade 1 and grade 2 students and a decrease in the number of kindergarten students attending SOAR 2002. The number of students for SOAR 2002 and 2001 are listed by grade in Table 1.

Table 1: Number of SOAR Students by Grade, 2001 and 2002

Grade	SOAR 2002 Students	SOAR 2001 Students
Kindergarten		

the students attended SOAR six or more days. The largest campus was Walnut Creek with 250 students and the smallest campus was Becker with 71 students. Table 2 shows the number of students enrolled, average daily attendance, and estimated daily attendance percentages for the 15 campuses.

Table 2: SOAR 2002 Attendance

School	# Students Enrolled	Average Daily Attendance	Daily Attendance %*
Allan			

Increase in Text Reading Level

By completing a pre- and posttest with the DRA, it was possible to determine reading improvement during SOAR. During the 19-day SOAR program, 86% of all students with valid pre- and posttest scores (n=1,994) showed reading improvement by advancing one or more levels on the DRA. Students with valid pre- and posttest scores showed an average gain of 1.8 text reading levels, with a range from 0 to 8 levels. As shown in Figure 3, among the students who have a valid pre- and posttest score, 34.7% gained one text reading level, 27.1% gained two text reading levels, 14% gained three

The mean gain level for Spanish language grade 1 and 2 students on the Spanish DRA was 2.2. The mean gain level was slightly less for English language students (1.8 for grade 1 and 1.7 for grade 2). Table 3 shows the mean DRA gain levels by language and grade. Only grades 1 and 2 are included in this comparison because there were no Spanish language students at kindergarten.

Table 3: Mean Gains for DRA Levels by Language and Grade
for SOAR 2002 Students

Grade and Language	Number of Students	Mean Gain Level
Grade 1		
English	698	1.8
Spanish	340	2.2
Grade 2		
English	365	1.7
Spanish	204	2.2

Source: 2002 SOAR data files

The mean gain level on the DRA for all students with valid pre- and posttest scores was 1.8 text reading levels. Table 4 shows the mean gains for DRA text reading levels by grade for SOAR 2002 students. When scores were examined by grade, the average gain in text reading level was lowest (1.4) at kindergarten and the same for grades 1 and 2 (1.9). A review by grade shows 81% of kindergarten, 87% of grade 1, and 88% of grade 2 students showed progress in 2002.

Table 4: Mean Gains for DRA Text Reading Levels by Grade for
SOAR 2002 Students with Valid DRA Pre- and Posttest Scores

Grade 2001-02	Number With Pre- & Posttest	Mean Gain Level
Kindergarten	387	1.4
Grade 1	1,038	1.9
Grade 2	569	1.9
Total	1,994	1.8

Source: 2002 SOAR data files

Number of Students on Grade Level in Reading

There is an urgency to help students read on grade level because of the current state legislation that will require students to pass TAKS (the state academic test) reading in grade 3 to be promoted to grade 4 in 2003. The DRA can be used to chart student progress toward that goal. The DRA text reading level that correlates to students being on grade level at the end of kindergarten is level 2, at the end of first grade is level 16, at the end of second grade is level 28, and at the end of third grade is level 38.

According to the DRA, a kindergarten student is considered an emergent reader and should master levels A, 1, and 2. For a student who is on grade level at the end of kindergarten to remain on grade level, he or she would need to gain:

∉# eight levels (from level 2 to 16) by the end of first grade;

∉# four levels (from 16 to 28) by the end of second grade; and

∉# three levels (from 28 to 38) by the end of third grade.

The average gains listed in Table 4 are equivalent to about one fourth to one half of an academic year progress, depending on the grade level of the student.

To determine if SOAR 2002 provided instruction to students most in need of additional instruction in reading, the grade level equivalent for the DRA text reading levels were examined. The data were analyzed for actual numbers and percentages of students who were below, at, or above grade level (using students with valid pre- and posttest scores).

As shown in Table 5, a total of 304 (15%) kindergarten–grade 2 students were at or above grade level when SOAR began (22% in 2001). Because the DRA is taken at the instructional level (90% accuracy), it is possible that some of these students were not firmly on grade level and needed additional support. However, there were 121 (6%) students who were above grade level at the pretest, which makes their need to attend the SOAR program questionable. Other results from this analysis of DRA pretest scores for SOAR students who had valid pre- and posttest scores include the following:

∉# 85% of students were below grade level at the pretest;

∉# 9% of students were at grade level at the pretest; and

∉# 6% of students were above grade level at the pretest.

In 2001, only 78% of the students who attended SOAR were below grade level at the start of the program, which indicates that teachers identified students for SOAR more accurately in 2002. Table 5 shows the distribution of students by grade according to their pre- and posttest scores and groups the students according to their grade level status (below grade level, at grade level, and above grade level) as determined by the DRA.

Table 5: Number of SOAR 2002 Students at DRA Pretest and Posttest
by Grade Level Standing

Grade Level 2001-02	Below Grade Level		At Grade Level		Above Grade Level	
	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest
Kindergarten (n=387)	247	62	88	112	52	213

Figure 4: Percentage of SOAR 2002 Students Below, At, and Above
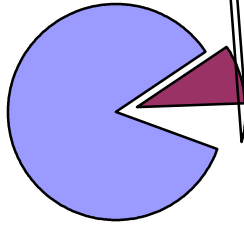Grade Level in Reading at DRA Pretest and Posttest

Table 6: SOAR Program Comparisons, 1998 through 2002

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Number of Sites	3	6	10	12	15
Number of Students Preregistered	619	1,679	3,232	3,331	3,011
Number of Students Attending	388	1,249	2,406	2,188	2,251
Days Offered	19	20	21	19	19
Number of Schools Participating	22	52	59	65	74
Ethnicity					
% Hispanic	47	55	56	58	62
% African American	37	30	22	20	21
% Anglo/Other	16	14	21	20	15
% Asian	<1	1	1	2	2
Number of Students With Pre- and Posttest DRA scores in English	NA	922	1,661	1,438	1,450
Number of Students With Pre- and					

Achievement Data

Figure 5 shows the percentage of students who made a gain in text reading level during the SOAR program in 1998 through 2002. The percentage of students making gains was largest in 2000 and 1999, but it is important to remember that the program was 21 days in 2000 and 20 days in 1999. When comparing the 2002 percentage (86%) of students showing gains with the other 19-day programs (85% in 1998 and 87% in 2001), the percentages are similar.

Figure 5: Percentage of Students Making a Gain in DRA
Text Reading Level During SOAR 1998 through 2002
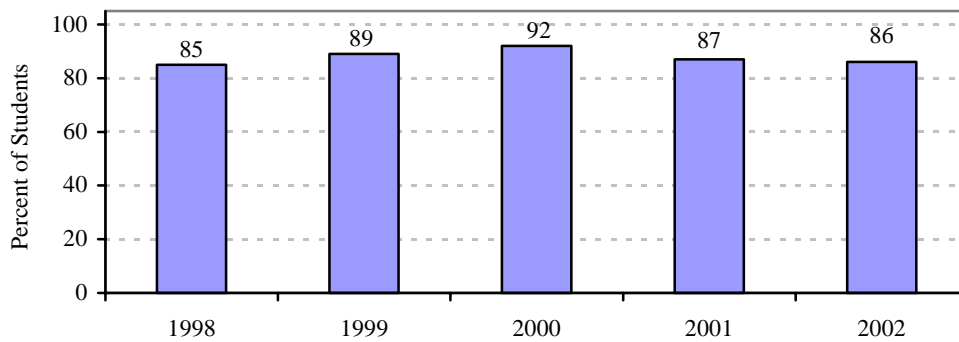
Further five-year comparisons can be made by examining mean gains in text

⍰ At the end of SOAR 2002, 28% (n=109) of students below grade level who had attended the program for **two years** were reading at or above grade level. An additional 15% (n=58) of the students were within one text reading level of being on grade level in reading (text level 14 for grade 1 and level 24 for grade 2 students) at the end of the second year of SOAR.

⍰ At the end of SOAR 2002, 27% (n=12) of students below grade level who attended the program for **three years** were reading at or above grade level by the end of the third year of SOAR. An additional 20% (n=9) of the students were within one text reading level of being on grade level in reading at the end of the third year of SOAR.

These findings show that even if students do not reach grade level in reading after one summer of intervention, it is possible for students to achieve the goal of reading on grade level by third grade with reading support during the school year and the opportunity to attend additional SOAR programs.

LESSONS LEARNED

As this report is being written there is discussion in the district about the 2003 summer school programs. The ARI funds that have previously been used for the SOAR summer program are being used for immediate intervention through the district *Student Success Initiative Tutoring Plan* in 2002-03. Accelerated instruction and intervention will be available throughout the year at each campus for students who are at risk for reading difficulties. A portion of the ARI funds will be allocated for summer school for grade 3 students who still need to pass TAKS reading in July 2003 to be promoted to grade 4. Although it is unclear if the SOAR program for kindergarten through grade 2 will be the same in 2003, the program staff provided many suggestions for ways to improve the program next year.

STRENGTHS OF THE 2002 PROGRAM

> "There is enough structure in the program to provide guidance, yet enough flexibility in activities to meet the learner's needs and learning styles. The balanced literacy approach is a good model for this type of remediation." - SOAR Teacher

Teachers, mentor teachers, and principals overwhelming praised the 2002 SOAR program for its structure, leadership, and curriculum. Areas that received the highest praise include the following:

⍰ *Leadership* – Teachers were very complementary of the leadership at their

cooperatively to make this learning experience beneficial for students." See Appendix F for a complete list of mean responses to the teacher survey.

∉# *Structure* – Overall, teachers commend the structure of the SOAR program. One teacher wrote, "There is enough structure in the program to provide guidance, yet enough flexibility in activities to meet the learners' needs and learning styles. The balanced literacy approach is a good model for this type of remediation."

∉# *Volunteer mentors* – At some campuses, Education Service Center (Region 13) teacher-in-training mentors assisted SOAR teachers with literacy centers, one-on-one reading, and classroom support. This new collaboration with the service center was greatly appreciated by the teachers who participated.

∉# *Materials* – The variety and quality of the materials were highly praised by teachers. This year, teachers received a tub of reading materials that were appropriate for their students rather than having a literacy library. As one experienced teacher commented, "The tub organization was the best improvement I've seen."

∉# *Experienced Teachers and Staff* - At many of the schools, teachers had taught together during the last SOAR summer school, which they said made it easier to "get right to the business of teaching." One teacher said, "It was a pleasure to work with a team of dedicated and professional individuals."

∉# *Training and Preparation Time* – Generally, teachers approved of the organization of the training this year, which allowed more time on the campus and in the classroom. One teacher said, "The training was excellent. Each component of the program was thoroughly explained. Many ideas, activities, and suggestions were provided." In addition, teachers appreciated the SOAR teacher notebook and the two professional books that they were given. Teachers said that the notebook was very helpful in planning lessons for the day.

∉# *Accelerated Student Growth in Reading* – Teachers worked together to provide student success. Word work and guided reading were credited with assisting students progress in reading.

Mentor teachers (n=15) noted that the SOAR program impacted student learning and teacher knowledge in the following ways:

∉# *Student Learning* – Academic progress was impacted because of immersion in literacy with clear expectations for success. Lengthening the language arts block to four hours and having smaller class size helped the children master the skills taught. Students benefited by receiving more teacher time and assistance than is possible during the school year. District mentors said that students were challenged daily by teachers who implemented a structured and rigorous curriculum. In addition, students felt successful and encouraged to do their best. Medals and certificates helped students feel proud of their learning.

∉# *Teacher Knowledge* - SOAR teachers were involved in 1-½ days of professional development before students arrived for summer school and had weekly meetings with mentor teachers and other colleagues. In addition,

forms were improved to include the information SOAR teachers would need to know about their students, not all home campuses completed the forms properly. Teachers said that valuable instructional time was lost in the first week of summer school due to the large number of students without this information.

∉ *Eligibility Criteria* – Most teachers stated that only those students who are in need of reading assistance should attend SOAR. Some students who were recommended in January were on grade level in reading by the end of school. Parents of students who were on grade level by April were supposed to be notified that their child no longer needed to attend summer school. Apparently this did not happen in every case because there were 304 students who attended SOAR who were at or above grade level at the beginning of summer school. One teacher wrote, "I had several students who did not need to be here. Please be clear about the criteria for admittance to SOAR."

∉ *Class Size* – The average class size was higher in 2002 (16:1) than in 2001 (14:1). While the class sizes were smaller during SOAR than during the school year, teachers believe that for the students who need reading intervention a small class size is critical. Most teachers agreed that a class size of 10-12 is ideal to provide the intensive intervention that these below grade level readers need to show progress in reading during the four-week program. In addition, class size at some schools was even higher at the beginning of summer school due to higher than expected enrollment. Additional teachers were hired by the end of the first week, but valuable instruction time was lost. Principals added that there should be a cap on the number of students for SOAR as there is for SUCCESS (16:1).

∉ *Assistance for Special Needs Students* – Many of the SOAR classroom

contact person for SOAR and who is responsible for seeing that all applications for SOAR are complete with the necessary information for a successful summer school experience. According to SOAR principals, a process of educating the home campus principals and teachers about the program goals is needed.

⋕ *Technology Access* – Principals stated that telecommunication and technology/data access for summer (e.g., e-mail and SASI student data system) need to be improved. SOAR staff did not always have access to these systems. SASI class XP was used for enrollment and attendance, but there were difficulties with the system and it was new to data clerks. One principal suggested enrolling students in SASI at registration, rather than using a separate PC software database for registration and then entering student information later into SASI. Because the program is only 19 days there is an urgency to have a technology and data management plan in place and working before the program begins.

COMMENTS FROM PROJECT M

∉# *Data Management* – Data management was at the core of the summer school problems, according to the language arts director. If all campuses would input the spring 2002 DRA and TPRI data, program managers could get a more accurate picture of who needs to attend summer school. There was no system in place to make home schools accountable for the assessment data entry. In addition, a misunderstanding between the curriculum and programming departments about the type of database to use for transportation assignments caused a delay in sending summer school information to parents. The proper data need to be available to those who are making decisions.

∉# *Communication with Home School Principals and Teachers* – All program managers agreed that there should be better communication with home campus principals and teachers to better inform decision making about who should attend summer school. The summer school applications from home campuses often did not contain necessary special needs or language needs of students nominated to attend SOAR. Proper identification of eligible students is critical to the program. Test data need to be entered into SASI so that program managers can assess student needs.

∉# *Coordination with AISD Departments* – While coordination between SOAR and SUCCESS program managers was much improved this year, there were still some areas where coordination with other AISD departments needs improvement. Proof reading the letter from transportation to parents prior to mailing could have prevented the letter from being sent with the wrong start date, which caused many students to show up a day late to summer school. Other challenges with SOAR 2002 included working with Human Resources, Purchasing, and the Grants departments.

SUMMARY

The SOAR program has grown and evolved during its five years of existence. The program has proven successful for a large majority of the approximately 8,000 students who have attended during its five years of operation. Students have consistently shown progress in reading during the program. An additional benefit is that SOAR teachers receive professional development and hands-on learning in balanced literacy that they can use in their classrooms throughout the year.

The 2002 SOAR program served 2,251 students who had completed kindergarten through grade 2 and who were at risk of reading difficulty. The average gain for all students who attended the program was 1.8 text reading levels as determined by the DRA. During the 19-day program, 86% of students with valid pre- and posttest scores showed reading improvement by advancing one or more text reading levels on the DRA.

There is an urgency to help students read on grade level because of the current legislation that will require students to pass TAKS reading in grade 3 to be promoted to grade 4 in 2003. There is a DRA level that correlates to students being on grade level at the end of kindergarten (level 2), at the end of first grade (level 16), at the end of second grade (level 28), and at the end of third grade (level 38).

A total of 566 students (34%) began SOAR below grade level and ended the program at or above grade level. The numbers of students by grade who began SOAR

below grade level in reading and ended the program at or above grade level include the following:

∉# 185 were kindergarten students (75% of kindergarten students who began below grade level);

∉# 237 were grade 1 students (26% of grade 1 who began below grade level); and

∉# 154 were grade 2 students (28% of grade 2 who began below grade level).

While 15% of students with valid pre- and posttest scores began the program at or above grade level, 44% of students were at or above grade level at the completion of SOAR. This shows a 29 percentage point increase in the number of students who were at or above grade level in reading at the end of the program.

The ARI funds that have previously been used for the SOAR summer program are being used for immediate intervention through the district *Student Success Initiative Tutoring Plan* in 2002-03. Accelerated instruction and intervention will be available throughout the year at each campus for students who are at risk for reading difficulties. A portion of the ARI funds will be allocated for summer school for grade 3 students who still need to pass TAKS reading to be promoted to grade 4. It is unclear if the SOAR program for kindergarten through grade 2 will be the same in 2003.

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effective program, there were 38% of eligible students who did not attend SOAR 2002. The 1,384 students who were eligib

Appendices

Appendix A: 2002 SOAR Framework/Schedule
Kindergarten, First, and Second Grades

7:15 – 7:45	Breakfast
7:45 – 8:00	Read Aloud
8:00 – 8:15	Interactive Writing (connected to Read Aloud
8:15 – 8:30	Phonemic Awareness
8:30 – 8:45	Graphophonemic Knowledge
8:45 – 9:15	Word Wall Activities
9:15 9:45	Shared Reading
	Modeled/Independent Writing
9:45 – 10:15	Word Work Lesson
10:15 – 11:30	Guided Reading
	Literacy Centers
11:30 – 11:45	Sharing/Reflection (oral or written)

Note: You must allow 20 minutes within the schedule for lunch.

APPENDIX D: 2002 SOAR ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

For students currently in kindergarten, grade 1, or grade 2 who are tested in *English:*

<u>Kindergarten:</u>
January TPRI – "Still Developing" on screening **<u>and</u>**
January DRA score of A or less

<u>Grade 1</u>
Fall TPRI – "Still Developing" on screening **<u>and</u>**
January DRA score of 8 or less

<u>Grade 2</u>
Fall TPRI – "Still Developing" on screening **<u>and</u>**
January DRA score of 16 or less

For students currently in kindergarten, grade 1, or grade 2 who are tested in S*panish:*

<u>Kindergarten</u>
ELL (English Language Learners) students must attend the LEP summer school

<u>Grade 1</u>

APPENDIX E: READING LEVELS

The following chart roughly illustrates how these levels relate to each other and to school grade levels.

Grade Level (Basal Level)	Guided Reading Level (Fountas-Pinnell)	DRA Level ** (Joetta Beaver)	Reading Recovery Level
K (Readiness)	-	A	-
	A	1	1
K (Readiness)	B	2	2
Grade 1 (Pre-Primer)	C	3	3 & 4
Grade 1 (Pre-Primer)	D	4	5 & 6
Grade 1 (Pre-Primer)	E	6-8	7 & 8
Grade 1 (Primer)	F	10	9 & 10
Grade 1 (Primer)	G	12	11 & 12
Grade 1	H	14	13 & 14
Grade 1 (Late	I	16	15 & 16 (17)*
Grade 2 (Early)	J		
Grade 2	K	18 - 20	*(17), 18, 19, 20
Grade 2	L		
Grade 2	M	24-28	
Grade 3	N	30	-
Grade 3			

Appendix F: Mean Responses to 2002 SOAR Teacher Survey

Survey Questions	All (n=133)
1. The SOAR training sessions provided useful information that I could use to teach students who are low in literacy learning.	

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