



Review of:

**Credit Recovery: A
Technology-Based Intervention
For Dropout Prevention at
Wichita Falls High School**

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Review of:

Credit Recovery: A Technology-Based Intervention for Dropout Prevention at Wichita Falls High School

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Abstract

Attempts are being made across the country to develop programs to improve graduation rates. One type of program is credit recovery. One such program is the Continuous Advancement Placement System (CAPS) at the Wichita Falls High School. This program is based on self-paced, computer delivered instruction using the *A+dvanced Learning System (A+LS)* to accelerate students' earning of credits. The findings show that the students attend school at a higher rate and earn credits at twice the rate of the general student population. Additionally, the CAPS students pass the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) at near the rate of the general population. English Language Learners and Economically Disadvantaged students in the CAPS program passed the TAKS test at rate significantly greater than the general student population in Wichita Falls High School and the comparable populations for the entire State of Texas.

Reviewer Comments

Relevance

Does the evidence provided by the researchers or the developers address a question that is important to your needs?

The evaluation study examines a school system's use of the American Education Corporation's *A+dvanced Learning System™ (A+LS®)* in an intensive credit recovery program termed the Continuous Advancement Placement System or CAPS. The CAPS program is targeted on students who have earned approximately ½ or more of the necessary credits for graduation but who are in danger of not graduating on time due to any one of a number of reasons (e.g., they are ESL/migrant students, they have transferred from another state). With states' putting more emphasis on increasing graduation rates, the question addressed by the researchers should be of interest to a wide range of public school educators.

Do the developers provide evidence that the research they claim supports their product or program links to and flows from relevant theory and theory-based research?

A specific theoretical base is not provided in the research report. The researchers do frame their investigation in terms of previous studies that address: (a) the high dropout rate in the United States and the implications of that high rate, (b) the characteristics of effective dropout prevention programs, and (c) the role that instructional technology plays in successful dropout prevention programs.

Do the research procedures, analysis, and findings support the researcher'/developers' claims?

The research procedures, analyses, and findings indicate the CAPS program that relies on A+LS[®] for its instructional content appears to be a successful credit recovery program. The authors compared CAPS students to students in an accelerated recovery program (termed the Fasttrack program), students in the school's regular education program, and student in the state as a whole. The students in the CAPS program were found to: (a) have earned slightly more than twice as many credits per year as students in the standard education program, (b) have higher, but not significantly so, attendance rates that Fasttrack and Regular Education students, and (c) have pass rates that compared favorably to students in the regular education program and to students in the state as a whole.

Rigor

If the researchers or developers claim a causal relationship between the intervention (product, service, program) and an outcome measure such as student achievement, did they include a control or comparison group in the study, in addition to the experimental group?

Students in the CAPS program were compared to students in the Fasttrack program, students in the school's regular education program, and students in the state as a whole. These comparison groups were existing groups of students in the school and in the state. Given the nature of the data being examined, the different comparison groups incorporated into the analysis are appropriate.

Were the study participants (usually students or teachers or schools) randomly selected and/or randomly assigned to experimental versus control/comparison groups?

Students were not randomly selected and/or assigned to the CAPS program. The program is a highly focused, goal program directed with a continuous emphasis on graduation which serves mainly 11th and 12th grade students who qualify for the program because they are in danger of not graduating on time for a variety of reasons including being a: (a) parent or parent to be, (b) runaway, (c) special education student, Ed./Inclusion (Tactile Kinesthetic Learners), (d) senior at risk (quit at mid-term), (e) transfer from another state, (f) ESL/migrant, (g) truancy case, (h) substance abuser, and/or (i) visual learner. Students with persistent discipline referrals, expulsion, or suspensions did not participate in the CAPS program.

Is sufficient information provided to determine whether the research design, instruments, and procedures are appropriate for answering the research questions posed by the researchers/developers?

The nature of the credit recovery program and the conditions under which it operates indicate that the study was conducted in a suitable way. The statistical analyses employed to analyze the data and the outcome measures used were both appropriate for answering the research questions being investigated.

Were the research instruments and procedures applied with consistency, accuracy, and for the purpose intended by the developers of the instruments and procedures?

The rates of credit completion, attendance, and passing of the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) are indicators that reasonably can be used to judge the success and viability of credit recovery programs.

Systematic Approach

Was the research conducted using carefully planned, logical steps?

The study is best described as a field initiated evaluation of an existing credit recovery program. Students who participated in the program were not randomly selected or assigned but qualified to participate in the program because they were likely not to graduate on time for one or more reasons. Therefore, the researchers systematically marshaled district information to address three research questions:

- Question 1:** Students who participate in CAPS have a higher credit completion rate than students in the regular education program
- Question 2:** Students who participate in CAPS have a higher attendance rate than students in the Fasttrack or regular education programs
- Question 3:** Students who participate in CAPS have a higher TAKS pass rate than students in the regular education program and students in the State of Texas as a whole analyzed by group

Objectivity

Did someone other than the publisher or developer conduct the research attesting to the products or programs effectiveness?

One of the researchers is associated with the publisher and one is associated with the participating school district. Under such circumstance, others might question the objectivity of the researchers. That is one of the reasons the researchers asked for an independent, third party review of their report.

Replicability

With the information provided, could the same researchers likely repeat the study and obtain the same or highly similar results?

Other researchers would be able to conduct a replication of the study with the likelihood of finding similar results. The CAPS program is clearly described in terms of the subject matter, the grade levels targeted, the characteristics of the students served, the delivery setting, the duration and intensity of the program, the staff that administer the program, and the student outcomes that are targeted. However, the circumstances associated with any one particular replication might well dictate modifications of the research methodology (e.g., there may or may not be a knowledge assessment instrument comparable to the TAKS) that might result in presenting different outcomes (e.g., scores on standardized achievement tests such as the *Iowa Test of Basic Skills* or the *Stanford Achievement Test, Ninth Edition*).

With the information provided, could other researchers likely replicate the study's methodology and obtain the same or highly similar results?

There is sufficient information provided such that other researchers could complete a replication of the study using the same methodology (or a very similar methodology adapted to their particular circumstances). The CAPS program is clearly described in terms of the subject matter, the grade levels targeted, the characteristics of the students served, the delivery setting, the duration and intensity of the program, the staff that administer the program, and the student outcomes that are targeted. However, the circumstances associated with any one particular replication might well dictate modifications in data collection methodology (e.g., what constitutes an academic credit or attendance is defined and/or monitored).

Data Analyses and Interpretation

Does the research evidence provided include data or data summaries?

The researchers provide summaries of various data of interest including credits completed, average daily attendance, and TAKS pass rates for different groups of students.

Are significance levels and effect sizes reported?

Tests of statistical significance were conducted and significance levels were reported. Effect sizes were not reported.

Are the conclusions drawn by the researchers/developers clearly supported by the data?

The authors concluded that the results indicated that the Continuous Advancement Placement System (CAPS) program that relies on *A+LS* for its instructional content appears to be a successful credit recovery program. However, the study did NOT directly compare the CAPS program with an alternative credit recovery program. In particular, students were not

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randomly selected to participate in CAPS program nor were students randomly assigned to a control condition. Therefore, it is not possible assess whether CAPS is any better (or worse) than other credit recovery programs. Of course, it is possible that the level of student performance observed may have been due to factors other than the educational features of the CAPS program such as the motivation that comes with being nominated to participate in the program by the school counselor or the motivation associated with being able to operate “outside” the traditional education program. Other credit recover programs with different operational features may, in fact, produce similar outcomes. The next logical step in the examination of the CAPS program would be to conduct a more rigorous test of the intervention using randomized trials or high-quality quasi-experimental designs to compare the CAPS program to alternative interventions employed to facilitate students’ credit recovery.

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