

# CASE STUDY

## Reading More and Monitoring Progress Spell Success for Texas Elementary School

Source: Linda Lawrence, library media specialist, Alice D. Contreras Elementary

### Introduction

“At Alice D. Contreras, Reading Is a Family Activity.” This sign on a wall displaying pictures of students and their parents frequenting the school library says it all. Located in an economically disadvantaged area, the educators at this bilingual, Title I elementary school impress upon students the importance of reading and its impact on future success from the moment they enter the school.

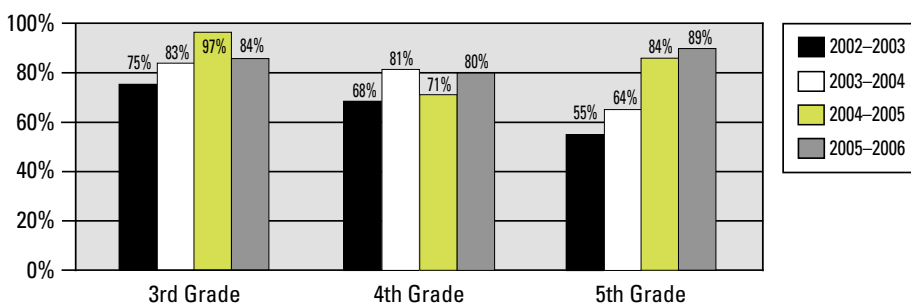
Accelerated Reader™ (AR™) has been in use at Alice D. Contreras since the school opened at the start of the 2001–2002 school year to both encourage and guide students’ reading practice. As a result of the efforts of the school’s exemplary educators, students have achieved steady increases in reading scores on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS)<sup>1</sup> (see Graph 1) and library circulation numbers continue to grow (see Graph 2).



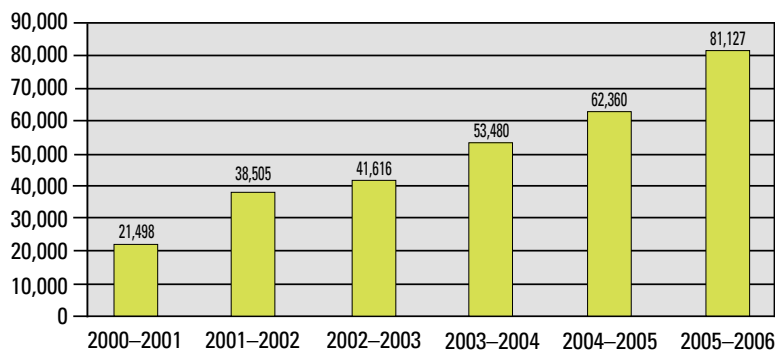
### Educator Background

**Linda Lawrence** is the library media specialist at Alice D. Contreras Elementary. An educator for 36 years, Lawrence has been a librarian for 18 years and previously served as a physical education teacher for 18 years. Of the 18 years she’s worked as a librarian, 13 years have been spent implementing Accelerated Reader and STAR Reading in bilingual, Title I schools. Lawrence earned a bachelor’s degree in physical education from McMurry University and a library media specialist certification from University of North Texas.

**Graph 1: Percent of Students Meeting Standards for Reading on TAKS<sup>2</sup>**



**Graph 2: Library Circulation Growth**



(more information on back)

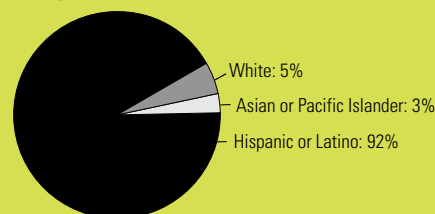
### School Profile

Alice D. Contreras Elementary  
 Students: 870, Grades: Pre-K–5  
 Fort Worth, Texas

### Demographics

Urban  
 Title I  
 Bilingual  
 Free or reduced lunch: 91%

### Race/Ethnicity



## Study Description

Students at Alice D. Contreras Elementary enter school speaking their native language, usually Spanish. As early as possible, they are taught to read and write in this language, transitioning to English shortly thereafter. Part of this transition includes reading books and taking Accelerated Reader quizzes in both Spanish and English. The goal is to have each student proficient in English by fourth grade, and the immediate, reliable and valid feedback from this progress-monitoring, reading practice tool helps the school's educators pinpoint students who comprehend what they are reading and those who do not.

The school library is central to these students learning to read, write, and speak fluent English, as books are a scarcity in their homes, besides those received three times a year as part of the Reading is Fundamental book program. As a result, Lawrence allows students to check out four books at a time and permits returns as soon as students have taken an Accelerated Reader quiz for a book.

Lawrence has started a parent-student reading program to encourage families to carve out time during the day to read together. Now, mothers and fathers alike arrive at school before the first class begins and after the last class ends to sit and read with their children. In an effort to ensure students have as many books available to them as possible, parents are encouraged to visit the library often and check out up to six books at a time. Pictures showing parents visiting the library with their children are displayed prominently on a wall in the front hallway of the school, next to another featuring students pictured with the principal, recognition for students making progress with AR goals.

Other programs are planned to involve parents and further strengthen the reading community at Alice D. Contreras. These include courses for parents to learn to speak English (using Renaissance Learning's English in a Flash software) and earn General Education Development (GED) credentials, a Parents As Teachers program to help parents learn to tutor their children and develop teaching tools, and a Parent Organization.

**"The key to increased reading is having access to as many books as possible and being motivated to read them. Accelerated Reader software and the STAR Reading assessment were tailor-made for that."**

## Results

"The key to increased reading is having access to as many books as possible and being motivated to read them. Accelerated Reader software and the STAR Reading assessment were tailor-made for that."

Lawrence credits AR and the computer-adaptive, norm-referenced STAR Reading assessment with helping her school guide students' reading and monitor their progress. AR Word Count reports are used to keep students motivated and encourage them to read more and STAR Reading is administered three times per school year to track students' growth. At parent-teacher conferences, data from Accelerated Reader Diagnostic and Growth reports are shared with parents.

Since beginning to use Renaissance tools, the percent of students at Alice D. Contreras that have Met Standards<sup>3</sup> in reading has grown steadily in each grade tested (see Graph 1); fifth-grade scores in particular have grown 34 percentage points from 55% of students scoring proficient in 2003 to 89% of students scoring proficient in 2006.

What's more, the impact of Accelerated Reader to encourage teacher-guided, independent reading of self-selected books and the school's support of parent-child programs to foster a love of reading has prompted library circulation to grow consistently since AR was first implemented in 2001 (see Graph 2).

## Conclusion

Lawrence believes that high expectations have helped her students achieve even more. Using intensive reading instruction coupled with Accelerated Reader and STAR Reading has created a culture at Alice D. Contreras where students, parents, and teachers work as team to succeed.

"I know that we have seen the changes on the faces of our students as they develop self-confidence and self-esteem because of their achievements academically, and there is a definite 'Can Do!' attitude growing around here."

<sup>1</sup>Texas Education Agency. (2002). *Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS)*. Austin, TX: Author, Student Assessment Division.

<sup>2</sup>In 2003, the Texas state test changed from the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) to TAKS. Because TAKS is much more challenging than its predecessor, scores from these two assessments are not comparable. Thus, only TAKS scores from the first year after Accelerated Reader implementation to present are shown.

<sup>3</sup>In November 2002, the State Board of Education adopted two performance standards for TAKS: *Met Standard* (i.e. passing) and *Commended Performance* (i.e. high performance). Because TAKS is more difficult than its predecessor TAAS, the State Board and the TAKS Panel agreed to a transition plan giving schools three years to work up to the new standards for passing. While lower scores were considered "passing" in 2003 and 2004, the percent of students at Contreras Elementary reported at having *Met Standards* during these years actually met the higher standards set as the goal for 2005.



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