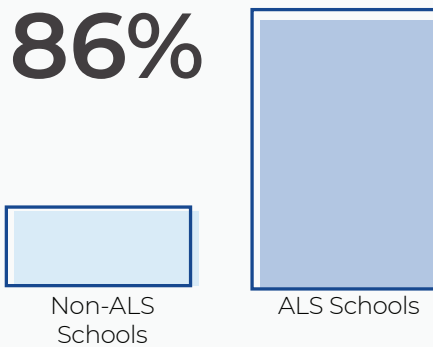# A Third-Party Study of the Effects of Apex Learning on School and Student Outcomes
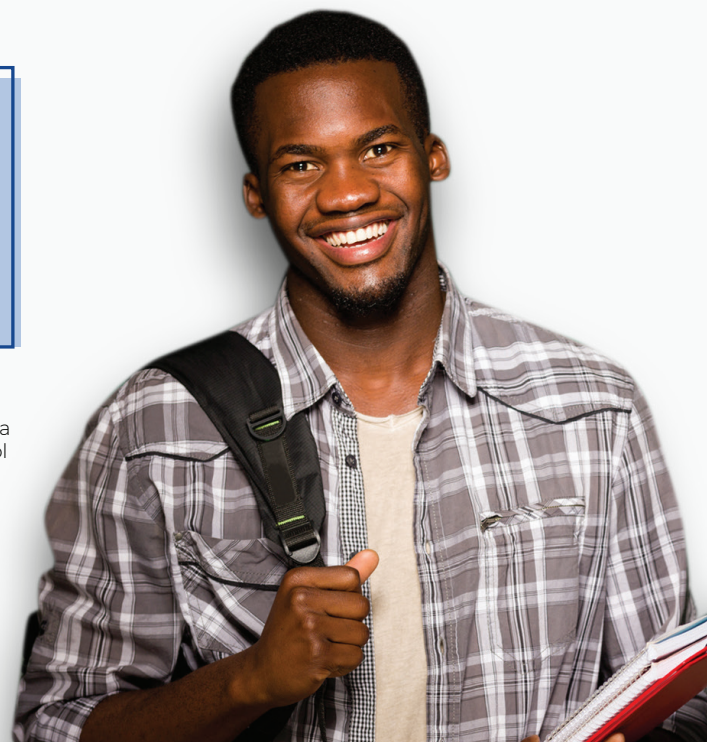
Accelerated Learning Solutions, FL

January 2019

Use of Apex Learning Courses improves student gains and fuels school improvement

86%

Non-ALS Schools

ALS Schools

Percent of Schools Receiving a Commendable Florida School Improvement Rating

Executive Summary

Results of research conducted by Hanover Research indicate that the use of Apex Learning Courses has a positive impact.

Accelerated Learning Solutions (ALS) is a charter school network that operates 21 alternative education high schools in five school districts across Florida. Apex Learning is the sole provider of high school core curriculum used by ALS.

In this study, Hanover Research examined the following:

At the school level

- Florida Department of Education School Improvement Ratings (SIR)
- Student English and mathematics gains reported in the SIR report

**For students enrolled in ALS schools for the entire school year**

- Apex Learning Course pass rates
- Performance on subsequent course work

The results suggest:

- *Eighty-six percent (85.7%) of ALS schools received a "Commendable" school improvement rating compared to 7.86% of non-ALS alternative charter schools.*
- *Students in ALS schools achieved higher academic growth than students in non-ALS alternative charter schools that do not use Apex Learning Courses in English language arts and mathematics.*

Figure 1.1

English Language Arts and Mathematics Growth
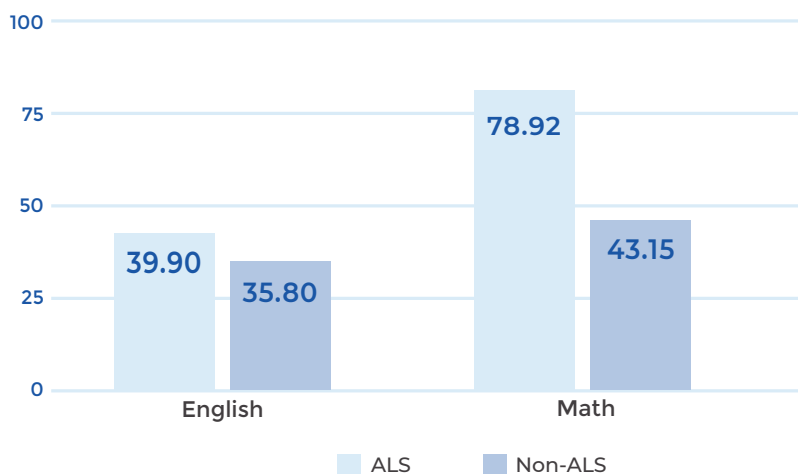
ALS students *N* = 6,389; Non-ALS students *N* = 25,487

- *Overall, ALS students passed 85.2% of Apex Learning Courses and 90% or more of those students passed*

Accelerated Learning Solutions Characteristics

Accelerated Learning Solutions (ALS) is a charter school network that operates 21 alternative education high schools in five school districts across Florida. ALS serves students at-risk of not completing high school in a traditional high school setting and those who return to high school after having dropped out.

Characteristics of ALS schools include:

- Minority students: 84.16%
- Economically disadvantaged students: 36.46%
- Title I schools: 14.29%

Overview of ALS's Implementation of Apex Learning Courses

Apex Learning is the sole curriculum provider for ALS high schools. Apex Learning Courses are used in a blended learning environment that includes teacher-directed instruction and flexible scheduling designed to keep students on track to complete high school.

Upon enrolling in an ALS school, new students complete a General Assessment of Instructional Needs (GAIN) assessment and are placed in an appropriate Apex Learning English language arts and mathematics Course. Students below grade level by two years or more are placed into Apex Learning Foundations Courses. Upon successful completion of Foundations Courses, students are enrolled into subsequent grade-level Courses.

ALS uses a highly structured process to keep students focused on accruing credits needed to graduate. Students work on two Courses at a time and complete coursework at their own pace. Additional Courses are scheduled one at a time as a single Course is completed. Teachers monitor student progress toward mastering state content standards on a weekly basis and offer small group instruction to supplement coursework as needed. Each month, teachers confer with students to discuss the progress they are making toward credit accrual and set course completion goals for the next month.

Courses leading to a Florida State Assessment (FSA) are assessed upon completion. The results of FSA Grade 10 ELA test, FSA end-of-course exams, and other assessments including the P.E.R.T. assessment of college readiness, and the ACT are used by the Florida Department of Education to calculate School Improvement Ratings (SIR) and English language arts and mathematics gains.

Study Purpose

Apex Learning contracted Hanover Research, a third-party research firm, to examine the performance of students enrolled in the ALS charter school network. The researchers were guided by four questions:

1. How did ALS schools perform on the Florida School Improvement Rating System compared to other alternative schools that did not use Apex Learning Courses in the 2016–2017 school year?

2. How did ALS student English language arts and mathematics gains compare to gains made by non-ALS schools not using Apex Learning Courses in the 2016–2017 school year?

3. At what rates did ALS students pass their Apex courses?

4. At what rate did ALS students pass the subsequent course in English language arts or mathematics?

The data used to examine school improvement ratings were publicly available in the 2016–2017 School Improvement Rating report published online by the Florida Department of Education. Apex Learning and ALS provided the data used to address Apex Learning Course performance. This dataset included students who were enrolled in ALS schools for an entire school year in 2014–2015, 2015–2016, or 2016–2017. Students included in the Apex Learning Courses performance dataset (N = 16,349) are:

· non-white (88.5%)

· struggling readers (57%)

· enrolled in special education services (17.9%)

· limited English proficient (13.7%)

· free and reduced-price lunch recipients (8.7%)

Results

Students in ALS schools achieved higher academic growth than students in non-ALS alternative charter schools in Florida that did not use Apex Learning curriculum, particularly in math.

On average, students in ALS schools showed slightly greater English language arts growth (39.9 percent) than students in non-ALS schools (35.8 percent), and students in ALS schools experienced more growth in mathematics (78.9 percent) than non-ALS students (43.2 percent), as measured by the Florida Standards Assessments (FSA) in 2016–2017.

Figure 2.1
English Language Arts and Mathematics Growth
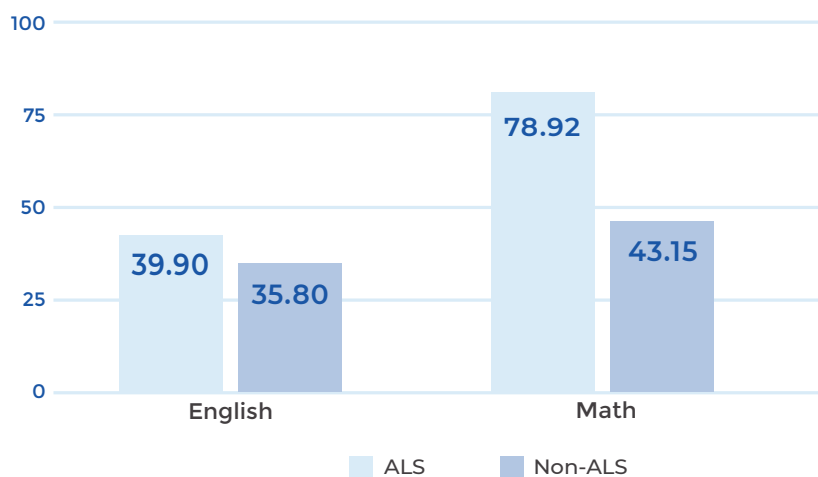
ALS students *N* = 6,389; Non-ALS students *N* = 25,487

ALS schools also had better school improvement ratings (SIRs) than those non-ALS schools.

ALS schools most commonly received a "Commendable" SIR (85.7 percent), while non-ALS schools most commonly received a "Maintaining" SIR (73.5 percent), one level below "Commendable." Of the 21 ALS schools, none had an "Unsatisfactory" rating.

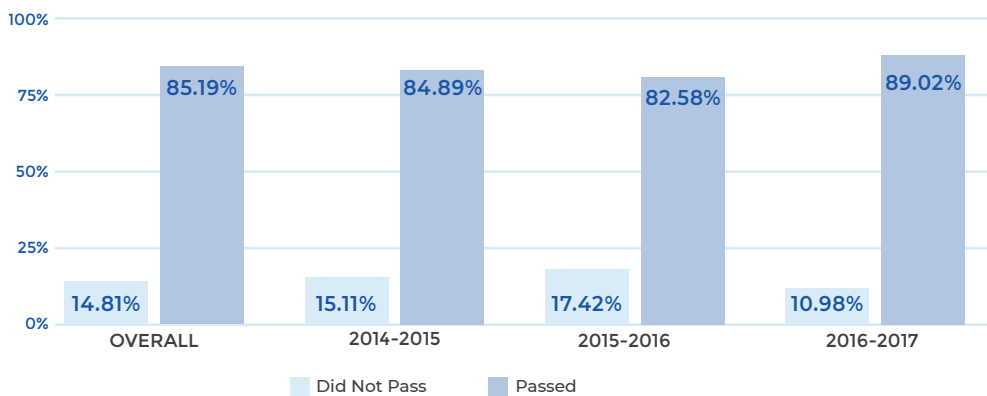**Figure 2.2**
School Improvement Rating Distributions
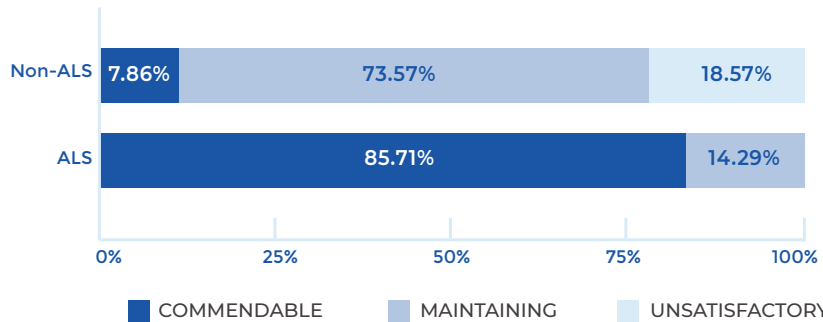
ALS *N* = 21; Non-ALS *N* = 140

Overall, 85.2 percent of course attempts resulted in a passing score across the 2014–2015 to 2016–2017 school years.

Student passage rates in Apex Learning Courses are largely consistent across subject areas, demographic characteristics, and struggling reader subgroups. No specific subgroup saw a lower passage rate than 83.98 percent (all African-American students) or a higher rate than 88.14 percent (all LEP students) (Table 1 located in the appendix).

Figure 2.3
Pass Rates for Attempted Courses by Year

Overall *N* = 16,349; 2014–2015 *N* = 6,374; 2015–2016 *N* = 5,632; 2016–2017 *N* = 4,343
Struggling readers scored below 8th grade reading level on GAIN assessment.

Figure 2.4

Pass Rates for Attempted Courses by Subjects
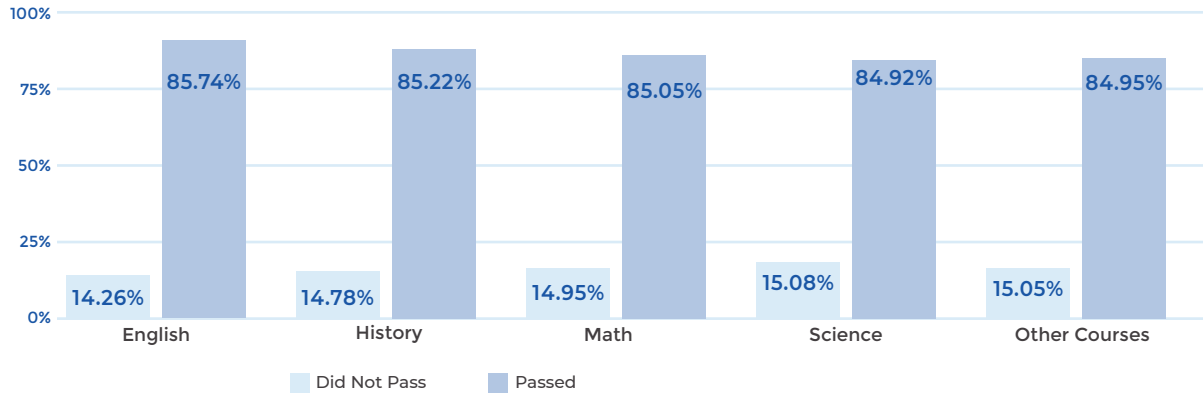
English *N* = 3,737; History *N* = 2,760; Math *N* = 3,678; Science *N* = 2,732; Other Courses *N* = 3,442

Figure 2.5

Pass Rates for Attempted Courses by Struggling Reader Status
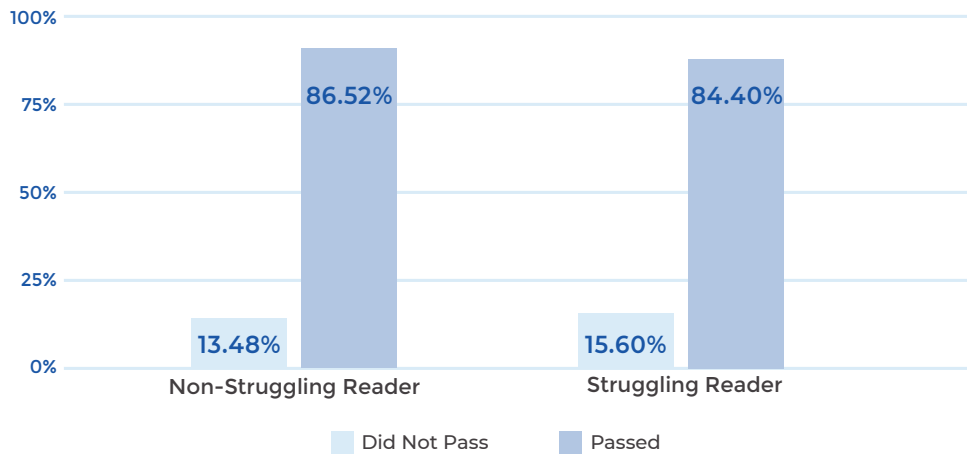
Non-Struggling Reader *N* = 6,820; Stuggling Reader *N* = 9,334

Figure 2.6

Pass Rates for Attempted Courses by Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Status
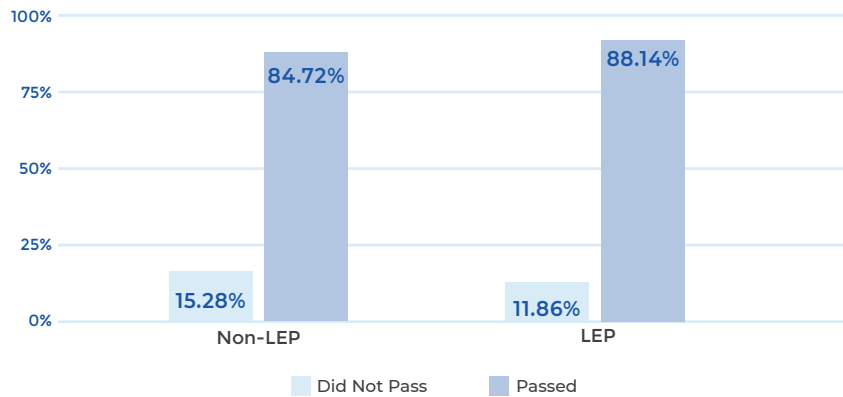

Non-LEP N = 14,106; LEP N = 2,243

Overall, the proportions of students who pass the second course in a course sequence after completing the first course are similar across pathways.

The English 10 to English 11 sequence has the lowest proportion of passers (90.7 percent) while the English 11 to English 12 sequence has the highest proportion of passers (96.0 percent). Completion of English 11 and English 12 is the most common paired sequence, followed by English 10 and English 11, Algebra 1 and Geometry, and English 9 and English 10.

Figure 2.7

Pass Rates by Course Sequence
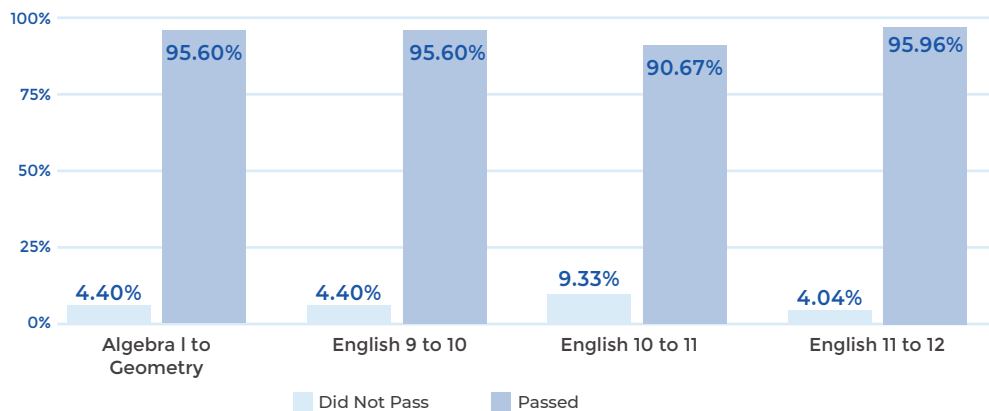
Algebra I to Geometry *N* = 159; English 9 to 10 *N* = 91; English 10 to 11 *N* = 193; English 11 to 12 *N* = 371

Conclusion

Accelerated Learning Solutions uses Apex Learning Courses for high school curriculum in a blended learning environment designed to support students at risk of dropping out or who previously dropped out and have returned to school.

This study examined multiple academic outcomes of program participants and compared school improvement ratings and academic gains of ALS high schools to alternative charter high schools that do not use Apex Learning curriculum.

Findings suggest:

· Students enrolled in ALS alternative high school achieved significantly greater English language arts and mathematics gains on FSA grade level assessments than students enrolled in alternative schools that do not use Apex Learning Courses.

· ALS schools achieved "Commendable" school improvement ratings at significantly greater rates than alternative charter schools not using Apex Learning Courses.

· Students who successfully completed English language arts and mathematics Courses were successful in subsequent courses at a rate of 90% or greater across subjects.

Data and Methodology

Data

Florida Accountability Reports

Hanover consulted publicly-available state accountability ratings data from the Florida Department of Education and provided by Apex. These data include school-level student enrollment and demographics, school improvement rating, and reading and math gains.[1] ALS schools are compared non-ALS schools that were not implementing Apex Learning Courses during the period.

Sample Formation

Apex Learning provided student-course-level enrollment and performance data for ALS students in each of the three years. Courses were standardized and grouped according to course titles and direction from ALS and Apex Learning. In addition to information on student course enrollment and passage, these data also detailed other student demographic and academic characteristics, including free/reduced price lunch status, disability status, Limited English Proficiency status, and struggling reader status. These latter data are used to segment results by student subgroups.

---

[1] For more information, please consult "2017-18 guide to Calculating School Improvement Ratings for Alternative Schools and ESE Center Schools." Florida Department of Education.

Methodology

To assess differences between ALS and non-ALS schools for the Florida accountability analysis, Hanover calculated weighted means for ELA and math gains, along with weighted means for the school-level demographics characteristics and compared means between school groups. This weighting ensures that low-enrollment schools do not disproportionately affect the results for their group.

To assess Apex Learning Course passage rates, Hanover calculated descriptive statistics on the number of courses passed relative to the total number of courses attempted. Course passage rates were similarly calculated for year, subject, gender, race, limited English proficiency (LEP) status, special education status, free or reduced-price lunch (FRL) status, and struggling reader status subgroups. Additionally, Hanover calculated course passage rates for those students who enrolled in the second course of a given sequence after completing the first course of that sequence. Course sequences evaluated are indicated in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1 Course Sequence Analyzed	
Initial Course	Subsequent Course
Algebra I	Geometry
English 9	English 10
English 10	English 11
English 11	English 12

References

Hanover Research (January 2019). ALS Performance Analysis. Arlington, VA. Available at https:// cdn.apexlearning. com/al/als-efficacy-analysis.pdf.

2017–2018 Guide to Calculating School Improvement Ratings for Alternative Schools and ESE Center Schools (June 2018). Florida Department of Education. Tallahassee, FL. Available at http://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/18534/urlt/SIRCalcGuide18.pdf.

Appendix

Table 4.1: Pass Rates of Courses Attempted by Student Subgroups					
Student Subgroups	Did Not Pass		Passed		Total
	N	Percent	N	Percent	
Gender					
Female	975	15.68%	5,243	84.32%	6,218
Male	1,446	14.27%	8,685	85.73%	10,131
Total	2,421	14.81%	13,928	85.19%	16,349
Race					
African American	1,417	16.02%	7,427	83.98%	8,844
White	241	12.82%	1,639	87.18%	1,880
Hispanic	660	13.49%	4,232	86.51%	4,892
Other	91	15.32%	503	84.68%	594
Total	2,409	14.86%	13,801	85.14%	16,210
Limited English Proficient					
Non-LEP	2,155	15.28%	11,951	84.72%	14,106
LEP	266	11.86%	1,977	88.14%	2,243
Total	2,421	14.81%	13,928	85.19%	16,349
Special Education					
Non-SPED	1,986	14.79%	11,439	85.21%	13,425
SPED	436	14.91%	2,488	85.09%	2,924
Total	2,422	14.81%	13,927	85.19%	16,349
Lunch Status					
Non-FRL	2,174	14.57%	12,744	85.43%	14,918
FRL	247	17.26%	1,184	82.74%	1,431
Total	2,421	14.81%	13,928	85.19%	16,349
Literacy Status					
Non-Struggling Reader	919	13.48%	5,901	86.52%	6,820
Struggling Reader	1,456	15.60%	7,878	84.40%	9,334
Total	2,375	14.70%	13,779	85.30%	16,154

where opportunity thrives™

An industry leader with deep expertise in digital curriculum, Apex Learning works closely with school districts across the country to implement proven solutions that increase on-time graduation rates and create opportunities for student success in school and beyond. The company is driven by the understanding that supporting the needs of all students – from struggling to accelerated – strengthens schools and creates stronger communities, brighter futures and a more equitable world. Apex Learning is accredited by AdvancEd and its courses are approved for National Collegiate Athletic Association eligibility. Apex Learning, where opportunity thrives. For more information, visit http://www.apexlearning.com.

Contact

Apex Learning

1215 Fourth Ave., Suite 1500
Seattle, WA 98161
Phone: 1 (206) 381-5600
Fax: 1 (206) 381-5601
ApexLearning.com