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More districts and campuses earn exemplary rating

AUSTIN – A growing number of Texas school districts and campuses earned the state’s two highest ratings, Exemplary and Recognized, in 2008.

The Texas Education Agency today released accountability ratings for schools and campuses. It also released dropout and completion rates for districts and schools serving students in grades 7-12.

“Accountability ratings provide parents and community members with a standardized way to examine academic performance at their local schools. The ratings help Texans highlight successes and pinpoint areas that need improvement,” said Robert Scott, commissioner of education.

Ratings and data tables for individual schools districts, charter holders and campuses can be found at: <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/account/>.

Ratings are based on student performance on state tests, dropout rates and high school completion rates. However, a school leaver provision remains in place for 2008. Under this provision, the seventh and eighth-grade dropout data and the high school completion data are reported but the leaver indicators cannot cause a lowered campus or district rating. The school leaver provision was kept in place for a second year to give schools time to adjust to significant changes in the methods by which dropout rates are calculated.

Exemplary

This year 43 school districts and 996 schools earned Exemplary ratings. In 2007, 27 districts and 643 schools received the top rating.

An Exemplary rating means all student groups on the campus or in the district had a 90 percent or higher passing rate on all subject areas of the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). The TAKS is given to students in grades 3-11 and covers English language arts/reading, writing, mathematics, science and social studies. The subjects tested vary at each grade level. The state evaluates test results for the following student groups: African American, Hispanic, white, economically disadvantaged and total student body.

Junior high and middle schools also must obtain an annual dropout rate for all student groups that is no higher than 2.0 percent or meets Required Improvement. High schools must earn a high school completion rate of 95 percent. The completion rate represents the percentage of high school graduates plus students who are continuing high school beyond the traditional four years. Only one school used the school leaver provision to maintain an Exemplary rating.

“These schools and districts are top performers. They are great role models for the rest of our schools. I applaud these schools and districts for their outstanding success,” Scott said.

Recognized

The state's second highest rating, Recognized, was earned by 328 districts, which represents 26.7 percent of the districts in the state. This year 34.4 percent or 2,815 schools earned this rating.

In 2007, 217 districts and 2,354 schools were rated Recognized.

A passing rate of 75 percent for all student groups evaluated on all TAKS exams is required to earn this rating. A district or campus can also meet the Recognized level by achieving passing rates on the TAKS of 70 to 74 percent and by showing enough improvement on the TAKS since 2007 to reach a 75 percent passing rate in two years.

They must also obtain a high school completion rate of 85 percent, or have a completion rate of 75 to 84 percent and meet the Required Improvement standard. An annual dropout rate that is no greater than 2.0 percent, or meets Required Improvement which shows that the rate is declining enough each year to be at 2.0 percent within two years must also be obtained. The school leaver provision was used by 13 districts and eight campuses.

Academically Acceptable

This year, 818 or 66.6 percent of the districts and 3,509 or 43 percent of the campuses received an Academically Acceptable rating.

That is a decrease over 2007 levels because more schools and districts have moved into the higher rating categories. Last year, 920 districts and 4,108 campuses were rated Academically Acceptable.

To earn this rating, a school or district must meet the following testing standards:

- A 70 percent or higher passing rate on the English language arts or reading TAKS;
- A 65 percent or higher passing rate on the writing and social studies TAKS;
- A 50 percent or higher passing rate on the mathematics TAKS;
- A 45 percent or higher passing rate on the science TAKS;
- Or meets Required Improvement provisions.

They must also obtain a completion rate of at least 75 percent or meet Required Improvement or have an annual dropout rate of no more than 2 percent or meet Required Improvement provisions.

Use of the school leaver provision allowed 133 schools and 76 districts to maintain an Academically Acceptable rating this year.

Academically Unacceptable

The state's lowest rating was given to 37 districts and 217 campuses. This represents a drop in the number of those earning an Academically Unacceptable rating.

Mathematics and science continued to be the most common reasons for an Academically Unacceptable rating. In 2007, 56 districts and 276 schools received this rating.

Districts or schools that earn an Academically Unacceptable rating face state-imposed sanctions that range from assignment of a Campus Intervention Team to closure. Two schools, Johnston High School in the Austin Independent School District and Sam Houston High School in Houston ISD were closed by the commissioner this year because of multiple years of low ratings.

Ratings released today are preliminary and may be appealed. Ratings become final in October.

Interventions to improve performance will begin based on the assignment of preliminary ratings. If a preliminary rating is changed on appeal, intervention requirements will be reconsidered.

“It is always difficult to impose strong sanctions against a school but we cannot allow students to languish in consistently low performing schools,” Scott said.

High School Completion and Dropout Rates

Statewide, the graduation rate for the 290,662 member Class of 2007 was 78.0 percent. Between ninth grade and the end of 12th grade, 11.4 percent of the members of this class dropped out of school. Additionally, 8.7 percent of the class remained in school beyond the traditional four years of high school and 2.0 percent received a General Educational Development (GED) certificate.

For the 283,698 member Class of 2006, the graduation rate was 80.4 percent, while 8.6 percent of the class continued in school, 2.3 percent received a GED and 8.8 percent dropped out of school. Completion rates for classes in which the national dropout definition is being phased in (i.e., Classes of 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2009) are not directly comparable to completion rates for the Class of 2005 and prior classes, nor are they comparable to each other.

The number of dropouts in grades 7-12 rose from 51,841 in the 2005-2006 school year to 55,306 in 2006-2007. The twelfth grade is the only grade that saw a rise in the dropout rate in 2006-2007.

The statewide increase in the overall dropout rate is believed to be caused by a change in the way the state calculates dropout rates and a growing number of students who do not pass TAKS by the end of their senior year.

Additional Information

The 2008 accountability manual that details all the accountability procedures, plus additional ratings information, is available at: <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/account/>.

The latest dropout report is available at: <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/research/>.

The federal Adequate Yearly Progress evaluations will be released Oct. 8.