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Three of every four Texas schools meet Adequate Yearly Progress

AUSTIN – Seventy-five percent of Texas schools and 66 percent of school districts met federal Adequate Yearly Progress standards in 2008, the Texas Education Agency reported today.

The federal evaluations are based on:

- graduation rates for high schools and districts;
- attendance rates for elementary schools;
- participation and passing rates on state tests for grades 3-8 and 10.

This year to earn a label called “Meets AYP,” the schools and districts had to test at least 95 percent of their students and at least 60 percent of the students had to pass the reading/English language arts state exam and at least 50 percent had to pass the mathematics exam. High schools or districts had to achieve a graduation rate of 70 percent or better for the Class of 2007. Elementary and middle schools were required to achieve at least a 90 percent attendance rate. Schools and districts can also meet AYP by demonstrating significant performance improvement.

The tests used to determine the federal evaluations are the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), which 90 percent of the students in these grades take, and three new variations of TAKS that are used for students with disabilities.

One new exam called the TAKS-Alternate (TAKS-Alt), which is given to students who have significant cognitive disabilities, was included in the AYP calculations last year. Used in the calculations for the first time this year are TAKS (Accommodated) and TAKS-Modified (TAKS-M).

TAKS (Accommodated) is an on-grade level TAKS that contains some modifications, such as the elimination of field test items. Most students with disabilities who need some testing modifications take TAKS (Accommodated). TAKS-M, which is also an on-grade level test, has additional modifications such as fewer items and fewer answer choices.

“School districts have responded to the new federal requirements by significantly increasing the number of students with disabilities assessed on grade level. However, it will take districts some time to fully address the increasing expectations of these new state assessments for students with disabilities,” said Commissioner of Education Robert Scott.

The new tests caused fewer schools and districts to earn a “Meets AYP” label for 2008. This year, 75 percent or 6,122 schools met AYP, compared to 80 percent or 6,447 campuses in 2007. Sixty-six percent or 816 districts earned a “Meets AYP” evaluation today, compared to 1,069 districts or 87 percent in 2007.

Among the approximately 2.2 million students tested statewide in grades 3-8 and 10, results show that 79 percent met the mathematics standard, which equaled 2007 performance levels. This year, 88 percent of the students met the reading/English language arts standard, up from 87 percent in 2007.

The AYP system also looks at the performance of the following student groups: African American, Hispanic, white, economically disadvantaged, special education and limited English proficient. Statewide, the percentage of students in the various groups who met the reading/English language arts standards ranged from 62 to 94 percent.

The percentage of students in the various student categories who met the mathematics standards varied from 50 percent to 88 percent.

Additional details about the AYP ratings for the state, districts and schools are available at <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/ayp/>.

This year, 399 school districts or charter holders and 1,160 schools earned a “Missed AYP” status because they fell below performance targets.

A campus that participates in the federal Title I program and has missed AYP for one year receives assistance from their regional education service center (ESC) and receives first choice to register for statewide professional development opportunities in school support and parent involvement through the TEA-funded Title I Statewide School Support and Parental Involvement Initiative housed at Region XVI ESC in Amarillo.

School Improvement Status and Technical Assistance

If a school that participates in the federal Title I program misses AYP for two or more consecutive years, for the same indicator (reading, mathematics, attendance, or graduation rate), it also become identified for Title I School Improvement status.

The school improvement categories range from Stage 1 to Stage 5. Stage 1 is the entry stage and Stage 5 is the final, and most intensive, stage of improvement. The federal No Child Left Behind Law requires intervention activities to increase at each subsequent stage.

At the Stage 1 level, the school must approve a campus improvement plan and offer its students the option to transfer to another school. Parents must be notified of the transfer option by Oct. 27. By Stage 5, the school must implement a major restructuring. Options for restructuring include replacing most of the staff and turning the school into a charter school. A complete list of sanctions is available at: http://www.tea.state.tx.us/nclb/titleia/sip/2008-09/2008-09_sip.html.

A total of 357 campuses will be in the School Improvement Program this year, based on the preliminary AYP results. Of those, 151 campuses are at Stage 1, up from 115 last year. Seventy-eight schools are at Stage 2, down from 93 in 2007. There are 70 schools in Stage 3, compared to 46 last year. Thirty-seven schools are entering the critical Stage 4, in contrast to 22 that were at this level last year. Twenty-one campuses have reached Stage 5, while only two schools were at this level in 2007. The Stage 5 campuses must begin implementing their restructuring plan now.

Each Title I campus in School Improvement Program (SIP) status receives the following assistance from TEA, the regional service center, or the School Improvement Resource Center (SIRC). SIRC is a TEA-funded Title I statewide initiative housed at Region XIII ESC in Austin to provide technical assistance to SIP campuses.

- Regional ESCs provide a variety of technical assistance and professional development opportunities to campuses. Each ESC varies the assistance available depending on the identified needs of the campus.

- All campuses are able to apply for supplemental Title I School Improvement Program funds to assist with the implementation of the SIP requirements.
- All campuses are required to attend school improvement orientation meetings where the grant, campus requirements, and technical assistance available is discussed and the Texas School Improvement Conference to learn strategies for school improvement.
- All campuses receive a site visit from the SIRC staff and assistance with a campus needs assessment.
- All campuses have access to multiple trainings and resources available from SIRC ranging from commonly used forms to implementation guidelines to quarterly newsletters.

In addition, campuses in each stage of improvement receive the following additional technical assistance.

Stage 1 campuses receive 10 days of administrative leadership mentoring in which the campus administration is able to work with an external mentor to address certain areas of school leadership as chosen by the administration. Campus principals are required to participate in the Campus Administrator Mentor Program (CAMP) and will receive on-site visits and follow-up contacts as part of this program. CAMP is provided by SIRC at no cost to the campus, and the expense for the mentor is paid directly to SIRC from TEA.

Administrative mentoring and coaching are vital components to any leadership development program. Mentors help principals develop personal and professional skills necessary for effective leadership. The mentors are experienced educators and former administrators who will work closely with the principal to build a relationship of trust, to encourage individual capacity for leadership, and to target school improvement. The mentor also assists the campus with meeting highly qualified teacher plan submissions to TEA.

Stage 2-5 campuses receive an external technical assistance provider (TAP) chosen by the campus, which has been selected based on the areas of need of the campus. The TAP is an individual who serves as a hands-on consultant working with campus administration and faculty to guide the school through the improvement process. The TAP works to create a collaborative and positive school environment by developing increased leadership capacity in administrators, and by building content knowledge in teachers to establish a teaching-learning community. The TAP uses a broad knowledge of scientific or evidence-based resources and materials to address the range of administrative, curricular, or instructional needs that might be present on the campus. TAPs act as an external, objective “set of eyes” that provide input and recommendations for campus improvement by:

- Fostering the school environment;
- Building administrator and teacher capacity;
- Increasing school achievement;
- Focusing the entire learning community on student achievement.

The TAP also assists the campus with meeting highly qualified teacher plan submissions to TEA. The TAP is selected by the campus from a list of qualified candidates that is provided by SIRC at no cost to the campus, and the expense for the TAP is paid directly to SIRC from the state education agency.

Stage 2 campuses also have the option to apply for a second grant, SIP Academy Grant, which focuses funding on comprehensive campus needs assessment, data disaggregation, campus planning, and team building to develop a detailed plan for systemic professional development to improve student performance. The campus may apply for two additional years of continuation grants.

Campuses in stage 2-5 also must ensure that Supplemental Educational Services (SES) are available to eligible students. SES provides free tutoring to eligible students, if requested by the parent, from a provider that has been approved by the state. Those campuses offering SES receive technical assistance on the requirements of the program, are provided a statewide management system (called EZSES) for tracking the services, and are provided training throughout the year.

A campus that has remained in school improvement through Stage 4 is required, with assistance from the district, to develop a Restructuring Plan to select a major school improvement activity to implement on the campus. These campuses follow a distinct planning process to choose the restructuring activity and develop the plan for implementation. These Stage 4 campuses receive a review of their Restructuring Plan by TEA and SIRC and follow up assistance as the campus moves into Stage 5 to implement that plan. Additionally, the campus is afforded an opportunity to present its restructuring plan to TEA and SIRC personnel in person prior to approval of the plan.

Stage 5 campuses are required to implement the approved restructuring plan, with oversight and assistance by TEA and SIRC.

Additionally, 50 districts are at the Stage 1 level, while 27 are at Stage 2 and 17 are at Stage 3.

Complete information about schools in the School Improvement Program, as well as more information about the sanctions imposed, is available at:

http://www.tea.state.tx.us/nclb/titleia/sip/2008-09/2008-09_sip.html.