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Eighth-grade students continue to raise the bar; TAKS reading scores for third and fifth grade show moderate change

AUSTIN – Eighth-grade students, who have benefited their entire academic career from the Texas Student Success Initiative, raised the bar on the reading Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) with 92 percent passing the test.

Fifty-one percent of the eighth-grade students earned the prestigious Commended Performance status. These students correctly answered 44 or more of the 48 test questions. Last year 42 percent of the eight graders earned a Commended status, while 89 percent passed the reading exam in 2007. This marks the first year that students must pass the eighth-grade reading test in order to be promoted.

“Once again, this group of students rose to the occasion and improved on the passing rate of previous classes,” Commissioner of Education Robert Scott said.

Among the student groups, 97 percent of the Asian Americans and 96 percent of the white students passed the test in 2008. Eighty-nine percent of Hispanic students and 87 percent of African-American students passed the reading TAKS.

Under the Student Success Initiative, the eighth graders must also pass the TAKS math exam to be promoted. That test will be given on April 8.

“This is a well prepared group of students who have benefited from increased focus on reading. However, we cannot forget those students who need additional time and study to master the reading test,” Scott said.

Of the 310,853 students who took the eighth-grade test, 25,644 failed it on the first try. They will receive additional reading instruction, typically during or after school, and then can retake the exam on April 30 and, if necessary, July 2. The math test will also be given on three occasions.

Third grade

The passing rates on the third-grade English version of the reading exam held relatively steady with 88 percent passing the test, which is a one-point drop from 2007 results. There was a two percent increase in the students who achieved the Commended Performance level. Thirty-eight percent reached this level in 2008, compared to 36 percent in 2007.

Among the student groups, the passing rate was 95 percent for Asian-American students, 94 percent for whites, 84 percent for Hispanics and 81 percent for African Americans.

On the Spanish version of the reading test, 82 percent passed the test, compared to 81 percent last year. The percentage of students who achieved Commended Performance rose from 18 percent last year to 19 percent this spring.

Fifth grade

Eighty-three percent of fifth-grade students passed the reading exam, a one percent increase over last year, and 29 percent reached the Commended Performance level. That's a four point jump in the percentage of students who reached the Commended level.

Among the student groups, the passing rate was 94 percent for Asian Americans, 91 percent for white students, 77 percent for Hispanic students and 76 percent for African-Americans students.

Among the 7,909 students who took the fifth-grade test in Spanish, 70 percent passed, an eight-point decline. The percent of students who reached the Commended level fell from 25 percent last year to 20 percent this year.

“Because such a relatively small population of students takes the fifth-grade Spanish reading test, fluctuations in test scores from year to year are not uncommon,” the commissioner said.

Assistance

Students in third, fifth and eighth grade must pass reading TAKS to be promoted. Fifth graders and eighth grades must also pass the math TAKS. Historically, most students who have failed these high stakes exams on the first try pass them on the second or third attempt.

By law, students who fail these tests must be given extra instructional help. The reading retests for third, fifth and eighth grades will be given April 30 and July 2. Fifth and eighth-grade students will be given three opportunities to pass the math test as well.

If a student fails the exams and is in jeopardy of being retained, parents can appeal that decision to a Grade Placement Committee, which consists of the parents, the child's teacher and the principal. If in unanimous agreement, the committee can promote the child to the next grade but additional instructional help must be provided.

Additional information about the state's testing program is available at:
<http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/index.html>.

District scores available locally

The Texas Education Agency does not yet have scores from the reading test for local districts and schools. However, that information is available from your local district.

Writing exams taken in February are still being scored and those results will be available later this spring.