

[<<Back to Texas Education News](#)

**Texas Education News**  
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**IN THIS ISSUE:**

[Eighty-Three Percent of Fifth-Grade Students and 75 Percent of Eighth-Grade Students Pass TAKS Math](#)

[New English Language Arts and Reading Curriculum Standards Approved](#)

[2008 TAKS Scores Show Steady Progress at Most Grades](#)

[Texas Students Earn Higher Scores on NAEP](#)

[Urban School Students Score at Highest Levels Ever On State and Federal Tests Report Includes City-by-City Profiles of Big-City School District Trends On Math and Reading Assessments](#)

[El Paso ISD Selects Video Surveillance Solution](#)

**Eighty-three percent of fifth-grade students and 75 percent of eighth-grade students pass TAKS math**

As about 3 million students across the state spent the day taking a Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) exam in math or reading, the Texas Education Agency announced the results of tests given earlier this month. Eighty-three percent of fifth-grade students and 75 percent of eighth graders passed the math TAKS on the first administration. Students in those two grades must pass the math and reading exams to be promoted to the next grade.

This marks the first year that the state's promotion requirements apply to eighth-grade students. It also marks a year of significant change in the state's testing program. In order to comply with requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind Act, Texas has replaced a test called the State Developed Alternative Assessment II or SDAA II, which was an exam given to many students served by special education, with new versions of the TAKS.

TAKS includes a form called TAKS (Accommodated) for student served by special education who meet the eligibility requirements for certain specific

accommodations. The TAKS (Accommodated) form includes format accommodations such as larger fonts and fewer items per page and contains no embedded field-test items. Many students who are receiving special education services this year are taking TAKS (Accommodated).

TAKS (Accommodated), as required by federal law, tests students served by special education on material at the grade level in which they are enrolled. SDAA II allowed students to be tested at their instructional level, which for most children served by special education was lower than the grade level at which they were enrolled.

Test results reported today include both TAKS and TAKS (Accommodated) results. TAKS results reported in 2003–2007 are for TAKS only because TAKS (Accommodated) was not a testing option until 2008.

At fifth grade, 83 percent of the total students who took the TAKS or TAKS (Accommodated) test in English, passed the math exam and 39 percent earned Commended Performance.

Following are the passing rates, called Met the Standard, and Commended Performance levels for the state's major student groups. The percentages represent combined TAKS and TAKS (Accommodated) passing rates.

<b>Student group</b>	<b>Percent Met the Standard</b>	<b>Percent Commended Performance</b>
Asian American	96	70
African American	73	24
Hispanic	80	32
White	90	50
All students	83	39

### **New English Language Arts and Reading Curriculum Standards Approved**

A less repetitive, more grade-level specific set of English Language Arts and Reading curriculum standards will go into use in Texas classrooms in the fall of 2009.

The process of revising the 1997 standards began in 2005. Hundreds of teachers, numerous experts, national facilitators, and State Board of Education members worked on many drafts of the document over that time.

The standards ultimately approved by the board represent a blending of a document crafted by teacher work groups, with the help of facilitators from StandardsWork, and a version drafted by a coalition of English teachers. Many of the same teachers worked on both documents.

The often contentious, extensively debated adoption process ultimately resulted in standards that put more emphasis on the teaching of grammar than do the existing Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS).

Also in a departure from the existing standards, the board agreed to provide Texas teachers with a list of "reading resources websites" that provides a compilation of reading materials, which teachers may use at their own discretion.

Passage of the English Language Arts and Reading TEKS now creates a ripple effect throughout the Texas education system. Professional development on the new standards will be provided to teachers during the next school year.

New textbooks and other instructional material based on the new TEKS will go into the classrooms in the fall of 2010 and 2011. State standardized tests will ultimately reflect the new curriculum framework.

Work continues on standards for other curriculum areas.

Teams of teachers are now working on revising curriculum standards for science and career and technical education. Social studies will then be the next content area addressed.

### **2008 TAKS Scores Show Steady Progress at Most Grades**

Consistent with their past performance, the vast majority of Texas' eighth-grade students met state promotion requirements with 95 percent passing the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) reading exam and 75 percent passing the mathematics test.

This is the first year that eighth-grade students must pass the math and reading TAKS to be promoted to ninth grade. But this represents the third time this group of students have been required to meet promotion requirements that are part of the state's Student Success Initiative. They were required to pass the third-grade reading exam and the fifth-grade reading and mathematics TAKS tests in order to move to the next grade.

Results from the second administration of the eighth-grade math exam are expected soon and should raise the cumulative passing percentage on that test above the current 75 percent before the school year's end. The reading results reported are cumulative totals for the first and second administration.

One more testing opportunity exists for those students who are still trying to master the exams. The eighth-grade math test will be given again on July 1 and the reading exam will be given on July 2.

Additionally, 90 percent of the eighth-grade class passed the social studies TAKS while 68 percent passed the science TAKS. These figures includes results from both the standard TAKS and TAKS (Accommodated), which is a form of TAKS for students served by special education who meet the eligibility requirements for certain specific accommodations.

TAKS (Accommodated), as required by federal law, tests students served by special education on material at the grade level in which they are enrolled. Test results reported today include both TAKS and TAKS (Accommodated) results. TAKS results reported in 2003-2007 are for TAKS only because TAKS (Accommodated) was not a testing option until 2008.

### **Third grade and fifth grade**

Ninety-three percent of third-grade students have passed the reading TAKS on their first or second try. This is the exam, available in English or Spanish, that they must pass to meet the state's promotion requirements.

Results released today show that 83 percent of the 314,376 third graders who took the mathematics test in English passed on the first administration. Seventy-seven percent of the 26,769 students who took the math test in Spanish passed it.

Fifth-grade students must pass both the reading and math exams in order to be promoted. During the first or second test administration, 90 percent passed the reading exam in English or Spanish. During the first administration of the mathematics TAKS given in English, 83 percent of the students passed. Among the 5,233 students who took the math test in Spanish, 48 percent passed.

Any third or fifth-grade student who has not yet passed the reading test may retake it July 2. Any fifth-grade student who has not passed the mathematics test may retake it July 1.

Under Texas law, any student who has not met the promotion requirements in grades 3, 5 and 8 is retained, unless his or her family appeals the retention to a Grade Placement Committee made up of the principal, teacher and parent. Parents should contact their local school to begin the appeal process.

Along with math and reading, fifth-grade students also take a TAKS science exam, which 81 percent mastered. Thirty-seven percent performed so well on the test that they earned a Commended Performance notation.

Among the students tested in Spanish, 35 percent passed the science exam.

#### **Fourth grade:**

Overall, 83 percent of fourth-grade students passed either the TAKS or TAKS (Accommodated) reading test. Eighty-four percent of the students passed the math TAKS or TAKS (Accommodated), while 91 percent met the passing standard on the TAKS or TAKS (Accommodated) writing exam.

When only the scores on the standard TAKS are considered without including scores on TAKS (Accommodated), scores appeared very stable with 84 percent of the students passing the reading test in both 2007 and 2008 and 86 percent passing the mathematics test both years. Passing rates on the writing test rose to 93 percent, compared to 91 percent last year.

The passing rates for students who tested in Spanish were 75 percent for reading, 74 percent for mathematics and 90 percent for writing. When just TAKS scores in Spanish are examined, the passing rates this year were within two points or less of last year's passing rates.

#### **Sixth grade:**

Sixth-grade students showed strong performance with 91 percent of the 315,668 students passing the reading test in English and 45 percent of the student earning Commended Performance.

Eighty percent of students passed the mathematics test, with 37 percent achieving Commended Performance.

When just TAKS results are compared between this year and last year, passing rates on the math test rose from 79 percent to 83 percent. There was a one percentage point increase on the reading exam on the standard test.

Many students have already graduated from bilingual or English as a Second Language programs by sixth grade so only 1,370 students took the sixth-grade reading test in Spanish.

This group had a 50 percent passing rate and a 21 percent Commended Performance rate on the reading test. Of the 1,246 students who took the math test in Spanish, 38 percent passed and 11.3 percent achieved Commended Performance. Sixth grade is the last year that a state test is offered in Spanish.

### **Seventh grade:**

Seventh-grade students were most proficient on the writing exam, with 90 percent passing and 33 percent receiving Commended Performance. Eighty-four percent of the students passed the reading test and 76 percent passed the mathematics exam.

When TAKS (Accommodated) results are excluded, passing rates increased by 2 percentage points on TAKS reading and by 3 percentage points on the math test as compared to last year, while passing rates declined by one percentage point on the writing examination.

### **Ninth grade:**

Eighty-four percent of high school freshmen mastered the reading test but just 60 percent passed the math test. When 2007 and 2008 results for TAKS only are compared, results on the reading test increased from 86 percent to 87 percent, while the mathematics passing rates rose from 60 percent to 63 percent.

### **Tenth grade:**

Sophomores take TAKS tests in four subject areas. Their passing rates were 86 percent in English language arts, which is a combined reading and writing test; 63 percent in mathematics, 88 percent in social studies and 64 percent in science. A greater percent of students – 32 percent – achieved Commended Performance on the social studies test than on the other three subject-area tests.

When TAKS test results only are compared from year to year, this class showed strong improvement. The passing rates on English language arts rose from 84 percent in 2007 to 89 percent this year. Math passing rates increased from 63 percent to 65 percent. Social studies passing rates improved from 86 percent last year to 90 percent in 2008, while science passing rates went from 58 percent last year to 66 percent this spring.

### **Eleventh grade:**

Texas students must pass four exit-level tests, which are first given in 11th grade, along with their classes, to be eligible to earn a state diploma. The Class of 2009 is well on its way to meeting its testing requirements.

Ninety percent of the students passed the English language arts exam, while 95 percent met the standard on the social studies examination. Eighty percent of the students passed the science test and 79 percent passed the mathematics test.

When standard TAKS results are compared excluding the new TAKS (Accommodated) test, this year's 11th grade students had passing rates that were one to five percentage points higher on the four tests than did last year's high school juniors.

Overall, 71 percent of the 11th graders passed all the TAKS or TAKS (Accommodated) exams they took this year. Those who failed one or more tests will have four more opportunities to take the tests between now and the end of their senior year.

Detailed summaries of state-level results may be found at:  
<http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/reporting/>

## **Texas Students Earn Higher Scores on NAEP**

### **Eighth Grade Writing Exam Than Their Ethnic Peers Nationally**

Students in Texas' major ethnic groups earned higher average scale scores on a national eighth-grade writing exam than did their peer groups nationally, according to results released today by the U.S. Department of Education.

Overall, however, scores on the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) writing exam were relatively stable for Texas' eighth graders who earned an average scale score of 151. That is not significantly different from the average scale score of 152 earned by Texan students in 2002. Nationally, eighth-grade students received an average scale score of 154 in 2007, compared to 152 in 2002. The percentage of Texas students who performed at or above the NAEP Basic level was 86 percent in 2007, compared to 83 percent in 2002.

This exam, given to a nationally representative sample of eighth graders, covers narrative, informative and persuasive writing. Texas' diverse student population performed well in comparison to their peers. Texas' white students, who made up 37 percent of the eighth-grade population sampled in 2007, received an average scale score of 165, compared to 162 for white students nationally. White students accounted for 58 percent of the eighth-grade class sampled nationally.

Texas' Hispanic students earned an average scale score of 142, compared to a score of 141 for Hispanic students across the country. In this state, 44 percent of the eighth-grade class is Hispanic, compared to 19 percent for all the test-taking population in the country.

Scores for African-American students were 142 for Texas students and 140 nationally. African-Americans make up 15 percent of the Texas class and 17 percent of the group in the United States.

Among Asian/Pacific Islanders, Texas students posted an average scale score of 167, compared to 166 for the group nationally. Asian/Pacific Islander students represent 3 percent of the Texas population and 5 percent of the national population.

## **Urban School Students Score at Highest Levels Ever On State and Federal Tests Report Includes City-by-City Profiles of Big-City School District Trends On Math and Reading Assessments**

Students in the nation's major city public school districts continue to advance in reading and math on state tests and on the more rigorous federal test– the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). A new report analyzing academic progress in 66 urban school systems in 37 states and the District of Columbia shows substantially higher test scores in 2007 than in 2003 in fourth and eighth-grade mathematics and reading on state assessments. It indicates that the state and national test scores are at their highest levels since academic proficiency data have been collected for urban schools.

*Beating the Odds: An Analysis of Student Performance and Achievement Gaps on State Assessments* by the Council of the Great City Schools compares this past school year's state test scores with those reported a year after the federal *No Child Left Behind* law was implemented in 2002, requiring school districts to report performance levels based on state tests and show the percentage of students who score at the "proficient" level. The *Beating the Odds* findings for the 2006– 2007 school year show that 63 percent of urban school students scored at or above the proficient level in fourth-grade math on their respective state assessments, a whopping 14 percentage point gain from 49 percent in 2003. For eighth-graders, the percentage climbed to 55 percent, compared with 42 percent in 2003, a 13 percentage point rise.

In reading, urban schoolchildren also posted gains over the past four years. From 2003 to 2007, the percentage of fourth-graders scoring at or above the proficient level in reading on state tests rose to 60 percent from 51 percent – a 9 percentage point hike. For eighth-graders, the percentage increased to 51 percent from 43 percent in 2003, an 8 percentage point gain.

Reports for Texas school districts are available here:

Austin Independent School District:  
**<http://www.cgcs.org/BTO8/Austin.pdf>**

Dallas Independent School District:  
**<http://www.cgcs.org/BTO8/Dallas.pdf>**

Fort Worth Independent School District:  
**<http://www.cgcs.org/BTO8/Fort%20Worth.pdf>**

Houston Independent School District:  
**<http://www.cgcs.org/BTO8/Houston.pdf>**

## **El Paso ISD Selects Video Surveillance Solution**

El Paso Independent School District (EPISD) (<http://www.episd.org/>) has elected LenSec (<http://www.lensec.com/>), to provide a district-wide IP video surveillance solution for their network of middle and high school campuses.

First organized in 1883, the El Paso Independent School District is the largest district in the Texas Education Agency's Educational Service Center – Region 19. With more than 63,000 students in 92 campuses, EPISD also is the seventh largest district in Texas and the 57th largest district in the United States. It also is El Paso's largest employer with nearly 9,000 employees and has an annual operating budget of \$446 million.

According to Victor Araiza, El Paso ISD Police Chief, "We needed a comprehensive platform for crisis response that can help us stop an incident before it even occurs. With this new video surveillance system, EPISD police personnel can proactively monitor LenSec's highly intuitive map-based user interface for all secondary campuses in a matter of seconds. As a result, our officers as well as campus administrators will be able to quickly locate areas of concern and investigate those areas in the fastest and in the most efficient way as possible."

Chief Araiza further believes that quick emergency response capability via LenSec's network video surveillance will provide a substantial, positive impact on safety concerns. The new system's presence is expected to encourage good student behavior and provide the ability to archive and document incidents for the accurate execution of both administrative and police procedures.

### **Forney ISD**

Located approximately 20 miles to the east of Dallas in Kaufman County, the district encompasses 85 square miles that includes the city of Forney. The ongoing expansion of the Dallas-Fort Worth metro area has resulted in an accelerated rate of growth within the district. The district is considered one of the fastest-growing districts in North Texas with enrollment growth that averaged almost 16% annually over the past five years. Current enrollment is slightly more than 7,000. Outpacing enrollment gains, taxable assessed valuation has grown dramatically as well at slightly less than 27% annually over the past five fiscal years, reflecting the significant residential development

spurred by the availability of inexpensive land. Growth in the tax base also reflects the inclusion of an electric generating plant in the district as of fiscal 2004. Incorporating the power plant, which represents nearly 18% of the district's total TAV, raises the concern of taxpayer concentration. Taxpayer concentration has declined over time however, and Fitch believes this trend will continue, given ongoing and planned development and less than half of the district currently built-out.

Despite the pressures associated with rapid enrollment growth, financial performance is stable and adequate with the district recording positive net results in five of the past seven years. While audited fiscal 2007 results were slightly below earlier projections, the district still maintained a healthy \$3.2 million balance in unreserved general fund reserves, which equaled 8.6% of spending. The district's goal is to maintain at least 12% of spending in the unreserved general fund balance. Fiscal 2008 reportedly remains on target, and it is anticipated that the district will bring the total general fund balance to \$5 million by the close of the year.

The current offering represents the first portion of a \$70 million authorization approved by voters last year for a second high school. It is anticipated that the district will issue the remaining authorization for the second high school early in 2009 in order to complete construction of the facility and open it by fiscal 2010. The district has some flexibility in regards to future issuances, since district officials report no immediate needs for the remaining \$57 million authorization with capacity in existing facilities. Debt levels remain high, however, even after factoring in state support for a portion of debt service. While only 23% of principal is retired in ten years, the amortization schedule remains fairly level.

## **Northwest ISD**

Northwest ISD encompasses 232 square miles northwest of the Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan area. It serves 16 rural communities in Denton, Tarrant, and Wise counties and has a total of almost 12,000 students enrolled in its schools. Residential development has steadily boosted the district's enrollment at an average annual rate of almost 14% over the past five fiscal years with reportedly little slowdown from the currently softer housing market. Demographic projections indicate an average 14% annual increase in enrollment over the next five fiscal years and 22,000 students by fiscal 2013.

The local economy is tied closely to that of the Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan area and its major employment centers, since much of the district is within commuting distance. Area unemployment rates have consistently been below state and national levels. Wealth levels, as measured by median household buying income, exceed both state and national figures. From fiscal years 1999-2008, the district's TAV growth has outpaced enrollment growth at an average of approximately 20% annually, primarily due to the availability of affordable land that spurred residential development. Mineral reserves of the Barnett Shale field, which underlie the district, have contributed in large part to TAV growth,

most markedly since fiscal 2005. Recent upswings in oil and natural gas prices and greater production have raised concerns about taxpayer concentration; the district's top 10 property taxpayers accounted for roughly 26% of fiscal 2008 TAV and Devon Energy Corp. (long-term issuer default rating of 'BBB+' by Fitch) alone accounts for 13% of total TAV. However, taxpayer concentration has declined over time, and Fitch believes this trend will continue, given the amount of affordable land and proximity to the Dallas–Fort Worth metropolitan area.

Despite pressures associated with rapid enrollment growth and large wealth equalization payments made in recent fiscal years, the district's financial performance has been very strong, reflecting its conservative budgeting and proactive management. The district posted positive operating results in ten of its past 11 fiscal years. Audited fiscal 2007 results were better than budgeted and again impressive; \$14.4 million was added to general fund balance, recording a total fund balance of \$51.2 million, or 47% of expenditures, transfers out, and other uses. This total was well above the district's target of 33%, or four months of current operating expenditures. Although still early in the budgeting process, district officials anticipate adopting the fiscal 2009 budget with another moderate increase to fund balance.

Northwest ISD's debt levels are high, and principal amortization is very slow at 18% in 10 years, which is representative of the district's fast-growth environment and need to meet facility demands, while limiting the impact to existing taxpayers. This issuance is the final installment of a \$224.5 million bond program approved by voters in October 2005 that will fund various school building projects as well as technology needs for the district. In an effort to maintain an interest and sinking fund tax rate of no more than \$0.335 per \$100 of TAV, the Series 2008 bonds are structured with a moderately backloaded maturity schedule. Voters in the district recently approved a \$260 million authorization for additional school facilities, which is anticipated to meet the district's capital needs for roughly 3 years at current rates of enrollment growth. Fitch believes the district's debt ratios will remain high for the foreseeable future as a result of Northwest ISD's slow debt repayment and substantial capital needs to accommodate ongoing, rapid enrollment growth.

## **Frenship ISD**

Frenship ISD is located immediately to the west and south of the city of Lubbock, encompassing 122 square miles, with a portion of the district in the city's boundaries. The district contains the city of Wolfforth with roughly 3,000 residents. Historically a more rural, agricultural area, available land combined with proximity to the regional Lubbock employment base has recently spurred primarily residential development. Estimates indicate only 50% of the district is currently built out. Tax base growth continues to outpace student enrollment gains at slightly more than 14% annually over the past five years. Enrollment growth has been substantial at a five-year annual average of almost 5%; district officials indicate that they believe they will sustain this rate of growth or higher based on recent demographic studies, even with the national slowdown in

housing activity.

Fiscal 2007 continued the district's trend of adding to general fund balance, bringing the total to almost \$11 million or roughly 27% of spending, despite growth pressures. The district has maintained an unreserved general fund balance of no less than 22% since fiscal 2002. Revenues and expenditures remain on target for fiscal 2008 according to district officials, and it is expected that the district will close the year with either breakeven results or a modest drawdown of \$300,000. The district has historically outperformed budget projections through cost containment measures.

The current offering represents the second portion of the district's \$127.99 million authorization, approved with record voter turnout by approximately 70% of the voters last year. The authorization will primarily be used for three new schools, an athletic complex, and renovations to the existing high school. The remaining portion of this authorization is currently projected to be issued in the summer of 2009. This authorization is expected to meet the district's capital needs for the next five to seven years. Debt levels are high, even after factoring in state support for a portion of existing debt service. While only 24% of principal is retired in 10 years, the amortization schedule remains fairly level.

### **Martin Middle School, Texas**

#### Walking Through and Talking About Instruction

"What are your expectations in this classroom? How will I know if your students are learning?" ask Principal Rheba Jones as she talks to a teacher at Martin Middle School in Corpus Christi, Texas. Jones leads a team of observers into every classroom of this 700 student school. As a group, they establish their purpose for visiting. They observe the student work on the walls, current assignments, cumulative portfolios and journals. Then, they debrief as a group. "We ask," notes Jones, "what did we see today? Where are we moving as a school? Did you see evidence of progress in this classroom? Are we moving quickly enough?"

It is all part of a walkthrough process based on inquiry developed by the Learning Research and Development Center at the University of Pittsburgh. "This process moved our school from defining clear expectations to academic rigor," said Jones.

This urban middle school with a student body that is 98 percent Latino and where 78 percent of the students qualify for free or reduced price lunch, has made significant progress. Just three years ago, the school barely held off a "low-performing school" designation, now the school is considered "exemplary" by the state of Texas with 80 percent of the students mastering statewide assessments. Jones is clear on the challenges: "When we started this work we knew it needed to happen, but it was much bigger than we ever thought. We're moving forward now."

Complete report: [http://www.naesp.org/client\\_files/LLC-Exec-Sum.pdf](http://www.naesp.org/client_files/LLC-Exec-Sum.pdf)