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Number of Exemplary and Academically Unacceptable districts and campuses grows

AUSTIN - Increasing passing rates on state tests and a new growth measure contributed to substantial increases in the number of Exemplary schools and districts in the state's accountability ratings system.

High school completion rates and science test results caused the number of Academically Unacceptable districts and schools to increase as well this year. The number of Academically Unacceptable districts increased to its highest level since implementation of the accountability system in 1994.

The Texas Education Agency today released annual rating status for 1,235 school districts and charters operators and 8,322 schools. Ratings are posted at: <http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/account/2009/index.html>.

"We saw increased passing rates on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) for virtually every subject and at every grade when we released test results in May. We knew that boded well for the ratings. A new growth measure called the Texas Projection Measure, which gives schools credit for the academic growth of students, also increased a school or district's chance of earning a top rating," Commissioner of Education Robert Scott said.

Tempering those factors was the high school completion rate, which represents the percentage of students graduating from high school in four years or continuing in high school for a fifth year. Although the completion rate increased to 88 percent from the previous year, 12 percent of the 2008 graduating class left school without receiving a diploma. They either dropped out of school or obtained a General Educational Development (GED) certificate.

"School districts were given two years to adjust to the use of a new, more rigorous dropout definition. Many districts stepped up and worked hard to reduce the number of students who would otherwise have dropped out. Because districts are being held fully accountable for their dropouts, the new definition has resulted in lower ratings for some districts and schools," Scott said.

Exemplary

The number of Exemplary school districts rose from 43 in 2008 to 117 this year. The total number of Exemplary schools increased from 1,000 last year to 2,151 in 2009. That represents about 26 percent of the campuses in the state.

This is the highest number of districts and campuses to receive an Exemplary rating since 2002, the last year of the state's original rating system, which was based on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), dropout rates and attendance rates.

Of those rated Exemplary, 73 districts and 1,111 campuses were elevated from Recognized to Exemplary as a result of Texas Projection Measure or TPM. The district and campus accountability data tables posted on the TEA Web site clearly identify whether the TPM or other accountability provisions were used to increase ratings.

Required by both state and federal law, TPM is a growth to proficiency measure. The goal is proficiency for all students at certain check points within one, two or three years. Those check points are fifth, eighth and 11th grades, which are the grades at which students must pass certain TAKS tests in order to be promoted to the next grade or to meet graduation requirements.

The measure provides information about whether the student is improving academically at a rate that makes it likely that he or she will pass the TAKS at these critical check points.

This year, the basic performance standards needed to achieve an Exemplary rating were a 90 percent or better passing rate in all TAKS subjects for all students and all student groups that meet minimum size criteria, and a completion rate of at least 95 percent and an annual dropout rate of 2 percent or lower.

Recognized

The number of schools and districts that achieved a Recognized rating also rose this year. The number of Recognized districts and charter holders increased from 329 in 2008 to 459 today. The total number of Recognized schools increased from 2,819 last year to 2,930 this year. Slightly more than one-third of the state's districts and campuses earned this rating.

Of those rated Recognized, 178 districts and 1,077 campuses were boosted from an Academically Acceptable rating to Recognized through the use of TPM.

Achievement of a Recognized rating requires meeting a performance standard of 75 percent or higher on TAKS tests for each subject and student group, achieving an 85 percent completion rate and an annual dropout rate of 2 percent or less.

Academically Acceptable

The movement of schools and districts into the two highest and the lowest rating categories left a declining number in the Academically Acceptable rating category. Last year, 818 districts or charter holders were rated Acceptable, compared to 561 today. Campuses rated Academically Acceptable dropped from 3,508 to 2,298.

An Acceptable rating means the district or school has TAKS passing rates of at least 70 percent on English language arts/reading; writing and social studies TAKS exams; at least 55 percent passing rates on mathematics TAKS and at least 50 percent on the science TAKS test. They also have completion rates of at least 75 percent and annual dropout rates of 2 percent or lower.

Seventy-eight districts and 355 schools used TPM to earn an Acceptable rating.

Academically Unacceptable

Schools and districts received the state's lowest rating if they failed to meet the criteria required for an Academically Acceptable rating. This year, 87 districts were rated Academically Unacceptable, compared to 32 last year. This is the highest number of Academically Unacceptable districts in the history of the Texas accountability system.

The number of Academically Unacceptable campuses was 270, up from 202 in 2008. This is the highest number of Academically Unacceptable campuses since 2006.

Forty-eight districts and 63 campuses received this rating solely because of an Unacceptable completion rate. Low passing rates on the science TAKS was the only reason that nine districts and 116 campuses were rated Unacceptable. Those were the two most common reasons for poor performance ratings.

State law requires sanctions to be imposed when a district or school receives an Academically Unacceptable rating. The sanctions increase with each year of poor performance. The sanctions range from the creation of a corrective action plan to closure.

Additional information

The *2009 Accountability Manual*, which details all the requirements of the rating system, is available at: <http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/account/2009/manual/index.html>.

The ratings can be found at: <http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/account/>.

Completion rate and dropout information are available at: http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/research/pdfs/dropcomp_2007-08.pdf.

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