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Preliminary TAKS results show increasing passing rates

AUSTIN – Preliminary results from the 2010 Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) show that passing rates on the standard test rose at grades 3-5 and 7-11 and that an overwhelming majority of the Class of 2011 passed the exit-level state exams required for graduation.

“These test results provide proof that students and teachers worked hard this year and that the reforms we have implemented are working,” said Commissioner of Education Robert Scott. “The high scores also show that Texas students are ready for the more challenging assessment program, the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR), which will begin in 2012.”

Results released today by the Texas Education Agency show that scores on the English-language version of TAKS declined slightly at sixth grade and on the eighth-grade reading test due to upward adjustments in the passing standards.

High School

Students must pass TAKS tests in English language arts, mathematics, social studies and science, along with their courses, in order to earn a diploma from a Texas public high school.

Among this year’s junior class, 98 percent passed the social studies test, 93 passed the English language arts test, 91 percent passed the science test and 89 passed the math test. Students made particularly strong gains in mathematics and science over 2009 performance levels. These passing rates represent gains of one point in social studies, one point in English, six points in science and eight points in mathematics over 2009 passing levels.

Overall, 82 percent of the juniors passed all tests taken, compared to 75 percent who did so in 2009. Of those who didn’t pass all exams this year, most failed only one test. They will have four more opportunities to pass the TAKS before graduation.

“This year’s juniors are the first class that must meet the state’s 4x4 requirement, which requires them to earn four credits of English, mathematics, science and social studies. A growing number of today’s high school students are also taking rigorous Advanced Placement and dual enrollment classes, which provides them with a strong foundation in the core curriculum. All these efforts are paying off and benefitting our students,” Scott said.

Sophomores posted particularly strong gains in comparison to the previous year’s 10th grade class. This year, the passing rates were 90 percent on English language arts, 74 percent on mathematics, 93 percent on social studies and 74 percent on science. Overall, 64 percent of the students passed all tests taken, as compared to 55 percent who did so last year. This means that most 10th-grade students are on track to pass their exit-level TAKS exams next year.

Freshmen showed marked improvement in their passing rates with 92 percent passing the reading test and 70 percent passing the mathematics test. Sixty-nine percent passed all tests taken, as compared to 65 percent who did so last year.

“If graduation rates improve as the TAKS scores did, we should be on track to see a rise in recognized and exemplary accountability ratings for high schools later this summer,” Scott said.

State accountability ratings will be released July 30.

Middle school and vertical scale adjustments

At eighth grade, the passing rates were 91 percent for reading, 80 percent for mathematics, 95 percent for social studies and 78 percent for science. Students must pass the eighth-grade reading and math tests in order to be promoted to high school.

The passing rates were up one to six points on all the tests, with the exception of reading. The reading passing rate in 2009 was 93 percent.

The eighth-grade reading exam is one of four tests in which the passing standards were increased, making it harder to pass the tests this year, because of the implementation of a vertical scale. As required by state law, vertical scales were developed in 2009 for TAKS reading and mathematics tests for grades 3-8. With a vertical scale, a student’s scores can be compared from grade to grade to determine academic growth. This requires a steady increase in difficulty of the test from grade to grade.

In developing the vertical scale, it was necessary to raise the passing standard for the sixth and eighth grade reading tests, as well as for the Spanish-language math tests for grades 3 and 4.

In no case were the passing standards lowered when implementing the vertical scale.

While the passing rate for the eighth-grade reading test showed a two-point drop using the new passing standard, the passing rate would have been 95 percent if the old standard remained in place. That would have meant a two-percentage point increase in the passing rate under the previous standard.

At sixth grade, the passing rates were 86 percent on the reading test, 82 percent on the math test with 76 percent of students passing all tests taken. This represents a one percentage-point increase over the 2009 math test results. However, there was a five-point decline on the reading test because of adjustments made due to implementation of the vertical scale. If the old passing standard had remained in place, the passing rate on the reading test would have been 91 percent.

Seventh grade saw no impact from the implementation of the vertical scale. Passing rates for this grade were 86 percent on reading; 81 percent on mathematics, and 95 percent on writing. Seventy-four percent of students passed all tests taken.

Elementary School

Fifth-grade students must pass the reading and math TAKS in order to be promoted to the next grade. This year 85 percent of the students passed reading on the first try and 86 percent passed the math test on the first try. Eighty-eight percent of the students passed the science test.

A small number of students took the TAKS in Spanish. Among these students, 73 percent passed reading, 44 percent passed math and 51 percent passed science.

At fourth grade, 86 percent passed reading, 88 percent passed math and 92 percent passed writing. Overall, 78 percent passed all tests taken in English.

Among the fourth-grade students who took TAKS in Spanish, 83 percent passed reading, 72 percent passed math and 94 percent passed writing. The fourth-grade Spanish math test was

one of the tests impacted by the introduction of the vertical scale. If the old standard had remained in place, 81 percent would have passed the math test.

At third grade, which is the first grade in which TAKS is administered, 92 percent passed reading and 86 percent passed mathematics. There is no longer a state-mandated promotion requirement attached to the third-grade reading test.

Among the third-grade students who took the exams in Spanish, 85 percent passed reading and 73 percent passed math. The passing requirements were increased on this year's Spanish math test because of vertical alignment. If the old standard had remained in place, 80 percent of the students would have passed the math test.

Graduating seniors

Graduation ceremonies are under way across the state this week. Ninety percent of the Class of 2010 passed all exit-level TAKS tests taken, meeting the state's testing requirement. The Class of 2009 had a passing rate of 86 percent by the end of their senior year.

Since the Class of 1987, Texas seniors must pass state-mandated tests, as well as their classes, in order to receive a diploma from a public high school.

Students have five opportunities to pass the exit-level TAKS in their junior or senior year. The vast majority pass on their first attempt.

Among the Class of 2010, the cumulative passing rate on the tests as of the April 2010 test administration was 97 percent on English language arts, 92 percent on mathematics, 98 percent on social studies and 94 percent on science.

Those who have not yet passed the tests may continue to take the tests until they do pass. Once they have completed all graduation requirements, a diploma is issued.

It is up to each school board to decide whether students who have not met all graduation requirements may participate in commencement ceremonies.

Additional information

Additional information about test results for Texas students will be posted at http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index3.aspx?id=3631&menu_id=793.

At this point, TEA only has statewide results. Scores for local districts and schools can be obtained from your local school district or charter holder.