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Hurricanes disrupt school year but reading performance continues to improve

AUSTIN – Despite an academic year disrupted by hurricanes and evacuations, passing rates on the fifth-grade Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills reading exam rose substantially this year, Commissioner of Education Shirley J. Neeley said today.

Third-grade students posted a six percent increase in the percentage of youngsters who are reaching the Commended Performance level. Students who earned commended status missed very few questions on the test. Passing rates on the Spanish version of the third-grade TAKS also improved this year, while overall performance on the English exam remained stable at third-grade.

“This has been a stressful year for Texas students and teachers, but they have obviously stayed focused on education. We continue to see more and more students who are reading at or above grade level and that is good news. I particularly want to thank the teachers for their hard work. An analysis of these results also confirms what classroom teachers have been telling us. We have a lot of work to do with our Katrina students whose performance lags behind that of Texas students,” Neeley said.

Statewide, 89 percent of the 284,634 students who took the third-grade reading TAKS passed the test. That passing rate matches the rate achieved on the comparable test in 2005. The 2006 passing rates were 81 percent for African-American students; 86 percent for Hispanics and 95 percent for white students.

The percentage of all students reaching the prestigious Commended Performance level rose from 37 percent last year to 43 percent this year.

Among the 28,768 third-grade students who took the reading test in Spanish, the passing rate was 76 percent, up from 74 percent in 2005. The percentage achieving Commended Performance was 16 percent this year, compared to 17 percent last year.

When the performance of 2,414 Katrina or Rita evacuees in third-grade is examined, the data show that 59 percent passed the exam and 17 percent achieved Commended Performance. Almost all these children took the test in English and the vast majority of these students are Katrina evacuees.

“It is critical that all students, including the Katrina children, who failed this test receive additional intensive reading instruction. Whether students are in Texas schools for 30 days or until graduation, our goal is to make them better, stronger students,” Neeley said.

Students must pass the reading TAKS at third and fifth-grades to be promoted to the next grade. Fifth-grade students must also pass the TAKS math test to be promoted to sixth grade. Those who did not pass the reading test they took on Feb. 21 will have two other testing opportunities on April 19 and June 28.

Parents can appeal the retention of their children.

Fifth-grade results

The percentage of fifth-grade students who met the passing standards improved across the board this year. The passing rate for the 291,723 students who took the English-language exam was 80 percent, up from 75 percent in 2005. The 2006 passing rates for the student groups were: 69 percent for African-American students; 73 percent for Hispanics and 91 percent for whites. Twenty-two percent of the students achieved Commended Performance status this year, compared to 23 percent last year.

Of the 7,881 students who took the reading test in Spanish, 65 percent passed, compared to 60 percent last year. The percentage achieving Commended Performance rose dramatically from 10 percent in 2005 to 19 percent in 2006.

Among the 2,548 Katrina or Rita evacuees, the passing rate was 47 percent and six percent reached the commended standard.

“Students cannot succeed in school if they cannot read. We will do all we can do at school to help any child who is a struggling reader. We encourage parents to read with their children at home,” Neeley said.

Please contact your local district or charter school for scores for your local schools. The Texas Education Agency only has statewide results at this point.