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March 9, 2007

89 percent of third-grade students and 82 percent of fifth-grade pupils pass reading TAKS in English

AUSTIN – Eighty-nine percent of Texas’ third-grade students and 82 percent of fifth-grade students passed the high-stakes Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills reading test, an exam they must pass to be promoted to the next grade.

That represents a two-percent increase in passing rates at the fifth grade. Passing rates on the first administration of the third-grade test have been stable for the last three years.

Results released today by the Texas Education Agency show that 258,368 of the 291,694 third-grade students who took the test in English passed it, and 103,796 or 36 percent of those tested reached the Commended Performance level. This high achievement level means the students correctly answered at least 34 of 36 test questions.

Among the student groups, 95 percent of both white and Asian-American students passed the test, as did 82 percent of African-American students and 85 percent of Hispanic students.

At fifth grade, 241,609 of the 294,216 students tested passed the reading test. Twenty-five percent of those tested, or 72,981 students, achieved Commended Performance.

Among the student groups, 91 percent of the white students and 93 percent of the Asian-American students passed the test, as did 75 percent of the African Americans and 76 percent of the Hispanics.

Among the students who took the reading test in Spanish, 81 percent of the 28,948 third-grade students passed the test, up from a 76 percent passing rate in 2006. Commended performance was achieved by 18 percent of students.

In fifth grade, 78 percent of the 7,805 students tested in Spanish passed, up from 65 percent in 2006. One-fourth of the tested students reached the Commended Performance level.

Students in these two grades must pass TAKS reading to be promoted. Fifth-grade students must also pass TAKS math, which will be given on April 3.

“These strong results are welcome news to our hard-working students, educators, and parents. They show that most of our students have developed strong and successful reading skills that will help them throughout their lifetimes. We’re particularly pleased to see the strong gains on the Spanish TAKS,” said Commissioner of Education Shirley J. Neeley.

Neeley said she believed the improved passing rates on the Spanish exam can in part be attributed to a professional development training program called Leer Más (Read More), which was funded by the Limited English Proficiency Student Success Initiative project in conjunction with the federal Title III program. This program provided training to educators. The

commissioner said, the program was designed to help improve reading instruction in Spanish and the transition to reading in English. Consequently, it improved the reading performance of students tested in Spanish.

Neeley also said, “I know this is an anxious time for those students who did not pass the test. Their schools will immediately begin to get them extra help to bolster their reading skills. That extra help often takes the form of small group instruction that is above and beyond their normal language arts instruction and after-school tutoring. If past trends hold, most of these children will pass the test on the second or third try,” she said.

The next administration of TAKS reading is April 18, and the third administration is June 27.

In 2006, 95 percent of the third-grade students tested in English and 91 percent of their classmates who took the Spanish TAKS ultimately passed the test by the third administration. At 5th grade in 2006, 91 percent of those tested in English and 86 percent of those tested in Spanish ultimately passed the test.

State law, enacted in 1999, requires students who do not pass the exam to be retained. Fifth-grade students must also pass the TAKS math to be promoted. If a student fails a test required for promotion, state law allows parents to appeal the retention to a Grade Placement Committee made up of the child’s parents, teacher, and principal. The committee can look at the student’s overall performance and determine if the child has a good chance of being successful if promoted. This student must receive additional instructional support the next year, even if promoted.

In the 2004-2005 school year, the most recent year for which figures are available, 3.2 percent of third-grade students and 3.5 percent of fifth-grade students were retained.

Charts showing the February testing results are online at <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/reporting/>.

The Texas Education Agency does not yet have tests results for local districts. Please contact school districts in your area for this information.