

**Education Section  
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# Children in Child Care and Early Education

## INDICATORS

**Subsidized Care:** The percentage of all children under the age of 14 in Harris County receiving subsidized child care through Workforce Commission and its Gulf Coast Workforce Development Board

Year	2001	2002	2003	2006	2007
Indicator	3.5%	3.8%	3.9%	4.9%	4.8%

Source: The WorkSource, Year 2004 Statistics Harris County

**Licensed Facilities:** The number of facilities that meet standards and are licensed under the Child Care Licensing program within the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services

Year	1990	1992	1994	1996	1998	2000	2002	2004	2006	2007
Indicator	1,095	1,236	1,382	1,322	1503*	1566*	1588*	1596*	1,618	1,622

Source: Child Care Licensing, Texas Department of Family and Protective Services

\* Note: Data has been updated to reflect published data reported by Source.

**Children in Child Care:** The capacity/number of children in state licensed or registered child care facilities

YEAR	1990	1992	1994	1996	1998	2000	2002	2004	2006	2007
Indicator	111,617	122,811	134,849	139,195	145,625	148,605	158,053	170,092	173,138	177,012

Source: Child Care Licensing, Texas Department of Family and Protective Services

**National Standards:** The number of child care providers accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children

Year	1990	1992	1994	1996	1998	2000	2002	2004	2005	2006	2007
Indicator	NA	62	59	73	77	86	89	124	149	158	107

Source: NAEYC and Collaborative for Children

**School Age Child Care:** The number of formal programs providing care for children before school, after school, and in some cases during the school year. This indicator excludes licensed child care facilities, licensed family homes, and listed home that provide after-school child care.

Year	1990	1992	1994	1996	1998	2000	2002	2004	2006	2008
Indicator	NA	287	250	283	385	413	478	352	NA	329

Source: City of Houston - ASAP, Harris County Department of Education, Collaborative for Children

A child's healthy development undoubtedly is impacted by his or her first experiences in life. High-quality early education and child care, followed by valuable before and after school activities through adolescence, have been shown to improve life-outcomes for children, especially for low-income and minority youth.

However, with approximately 382,306 children under the age of six in Harris County,<sup>1</sup> and nearly 55% of those children living in households where all parents are working,<sup>2</sup> many families are faced with the difficult decision to choose another caregiver for their children during the workday. Comparable to the cost of a year's tuition at a Texas public university, the average cost of child care for young children (under the age of four) is estimated at \$6,092 a year per child in Texas.<sup>3</sup> Once a

child reaches school age, the average cost for child care before and after school is \$3,778 a year per child.<sup>4</sup> Approximately 47.4% of children in Harris County are living in or near poverty, however, and parents are challenged to look for affordable child care alternatives. The lack of safe, affordable, quality child care is a common barrier to economic self-sufficiency for struggling families.<sup>5</sup>

The Texas Workforce Commission manages federal funds received through a Child Care and Development Block Grant that provides child care subsidies for Texas' low-income children. Through supportive services, The Workforce Commission offers parents the opportunity to gain and maintain employment or to participate in workforce training activities.<sup>6</sup> Although the federal government sets maximum family eligibility standards for

## CHILDREN AT RISK

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## TOP TEN PRIORITY

subsidies at 85% of the state's median income, the state's Local Workforce Developmental Boards have the ability to set local eligibility criteria.<sup>7</sup> Harris County's local development board is the Gulf Coast Workforce Development Board, with direct services being provided to the residents of a 13-county region in the Houston-Galveston Gulf Coast area through The WorkSource.<sup>8</sup>

In 2007, The WorkSource provided child care subsidies to 46,893 children in Harris County under the age of 14.<sup>9</sup> The current family income guideline sets the gross monthly eligibility income for a family of three at \$2,146 for the first month and then \$3,019 for subsequent months.<sup>10</sup> Annually, this is a range of \$25,752 to \$36,228, and averaged at 58.2% of the state's median income for a family of three.<sup>11</sup> However, child care subsidies are not a federal entitlement. As of early 2006, 33,506 children in Texas who were eligible for child care subsidies were on a waiting list and not receiving assistance.<sup>12</sup> In Harris County alone only 10% of the children who are eligible for subsidized child care are being provided services.<sup>13</sup> The number of children on waiting lists for child care subsidies in Texas has been fairly steady over the past years with 36,431 children in 2004 and 35,620 children in 2005 waiting for assistance.<sup>14</sup> However, recent policy changes on local workforce boards have caused some boards to stop taking applications or adding names to the waiting list.<sup>15</sup> With so many families without support for child care and the number of children living in or near poverty, the quality of care being provided to Harris County children comes into serious question.

In an effort to establish and maintain minimum standards for child care facilities, Texas law requires that the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (TDFPS)

regulate all child care operations to protect the health, safety, and well being of children in care. This includes day care facilities, registered family homes, and listed family homes.<sup>16</sup> To qualify for payment by The WorkSource under the child care subsidy program, a child care provider must be approved by the TDFPS.<sup>17</sup> In 2007, the number of licensed or registered child care providers in Harris County reached 1,622 and had an approximate capacity of 177,012 children.<sup>18</sup> Minimum standards established by the TDFPS sets rules for the maximum number of children per caregiver, number of hours allowed for providers to care for children, as well as minimum hours of training and the age of caregivers. For example, TDFPS sets a minimum of one caregiver for every 18 four-year olds and for every 22 five-year olds; requires that he or she be at least 18 years of age; have a high school diploma or GED; and complete eight pre-service hours of training.<sup>19</sup> The focus of most set regulations is on the health and safety of children by "reducing the risk of injury, abuse, neglect, and communicable disease."<sup>20</sup>

For young children in particular, research indicates that a child's healthy development depends on positive and stimulating experiences during the first six years of life.<sup>21</sup> Multiple studies have shown there are significant measurable benefits for a child's cognitive, social-emotional, and language development if introduced to high-quality early child care, especially for low-income children. Specifically, the future academic success of children has shown to be correlated with the quality of early child care and can reap benefits such as higher graduation rates and college attendance, higher math and reading scores, and fewer teen pregnancies.<sup>22</sup> However, meta-analyses have shown that the quality, and thus impact, of early child care is highly variable across public and private sectors.<sup>23</sup>

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) was created more than 80 years ago with the goal to improve the well being of all young children, with particular focus on the quality of educational and developmental services for children from birth through age 8.<sup>24</sup> The NAEYC developed the Accreditation of Programs for Young Children in 1985 and set even higher standards for accreditation in 2006.<sup>25</sup> The NAEYC uses a set of ten standards for high-quality early childhood education and often conducts random visits to ensure that the standards are being met. The ten standards require that child development centers must promote

# Children in Child Care and Early Education (cont.)

positive relationships for all children and adults, implement a curriculum that fosters all areas of child development including social-emotional, use effective teaching approaches that are developmentally and age appropriate, provide on-going assessments, promote the nutrition and health of children, employ a teaching staff with education qualifications including knowledge and professional commitment, establish and maintain relationships with each child's family, collaborate and use the community resources to support achievement of the program goals.<sup>26</sup>

Similar to the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, the NAEYC regulates the number of children per each early childhood educator. There must be at least one educator for every ten preschoolers, ages four and five, in an accredited center. In the United States, as of June 2008, there were 9,009 accredited programs, which served a total of 717,355 children.<sup>27</sup> Texas had the sixth highest number of accredited childcare providers with 396 providers, or 4.4% of all accredited facilities.<sup>28</sup> Of all Texas accredited providers, 15% are within Harris County.<sup>29</sup> In 2007, 107 accredited providers were in Harris County, compared to 158 in 2006 and 149 in 2005.<sup>30</sup> Higher NAEYC child care standards have caused some providers to default on maintaining their accreditation. However, these higher standards are meant to provide a safe and healthy physical environment and maintain policies that ensure high-quality experiences for the children, families, and staff.<sup>31</sup>

Older school-aged children show significant benefits from before- and after-school programs that provide a combination of services to children, families, schools, and communities. School-age care can offer assistance to children with schoolwork, teach life skills, provide recreational activities, and help cultivate social experiences and relationships.<sup>32</sup> Harris County offers such programs through individual school districts and non-profits. Congregations, community centers, apartment complexes, and learning centers have provided space and support for after school programs. In a national survey conducted in 2005, one in four kids reported that they were responsible for taking care of themselves.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, 24% of children in Texas regularly are caring for themselves on average spending nearly seven hours a week unsupervised.<sup>34</sup> Studies show that the lack of adult supervision and self care for children and adolescents lead to increased likelihood of accidents, injuries, lower social competence, lower GPAs, lower achievement test scores, and greater likelihood of participation in delinquent or high-risk activities.<sup>35</sup>

The 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC) is a national program that provides funds to rural and inner-city public schools to plan, implement, or expand projects that benefit the educational health or social service needs of their community.<sup>36</sup> Through the Harris County Department of Education, the CCLC endorsed the Cooperative for After-School Enrichment Program

## School-age Child Care in Harris County

Year	ASAP (City of Houston)		CASE (County-wide Initiative)		Non-Profit Providers
	Number of Sites	Number of Children Served	Number of Sites	Number of Children Served	Number of Sites
2002	95	11,680	70	13,464	NA
2003	89	9,171	70	17,190	NA
2004	70	8,300	87	12,135*	195
2006	42	5,741	85	10,707	NA
2007	32	4,123	115	12,841	NA
2008**	33	2,630	94	10,672	202

Source: City of Houston - ASAP, Harris County Department of Education, Collaborative for Children

\* In 2002, students enrollment was based on one day of student attendance in an after school program. While after-school programs increased in 2004-2005 to 87 sites, overall numbers of students enrolled is reported to have dropped by 29% due to guidelines set to encourage regular attendance. After-school programs were required to try to maintain a 30% attendance rate, therefore, drop-in students are no longer enrolled in the program.

\*\* City of Houston - ASAP provided data for 2008 by averaging the number of active sites and the total enrollment of children provided for from September 2007 through June 2008. Harris County Department of Education provided data for CASE for February 2008. Collaborative for Children provided data for the number of Non-Profit Before and After School Programs for July 2008.

(CASE) that provided after-school enrichment services to more than 12,000 students, in 11 Houston area school districts at 115 sites in 2007.<sup>37</sup> The City of Houston funds after-school programs through the mayor's After-School Achievement Program (ASAP). In 2007, ASAP provided services to more than 4,000 students at 24 school sites and

eight non-profit sites.<sup>38</sup> The number of children served by the ASAP program has decreased significantly over the past years from more than 8,000 children in 2004 and more than 11,000 in 2002.

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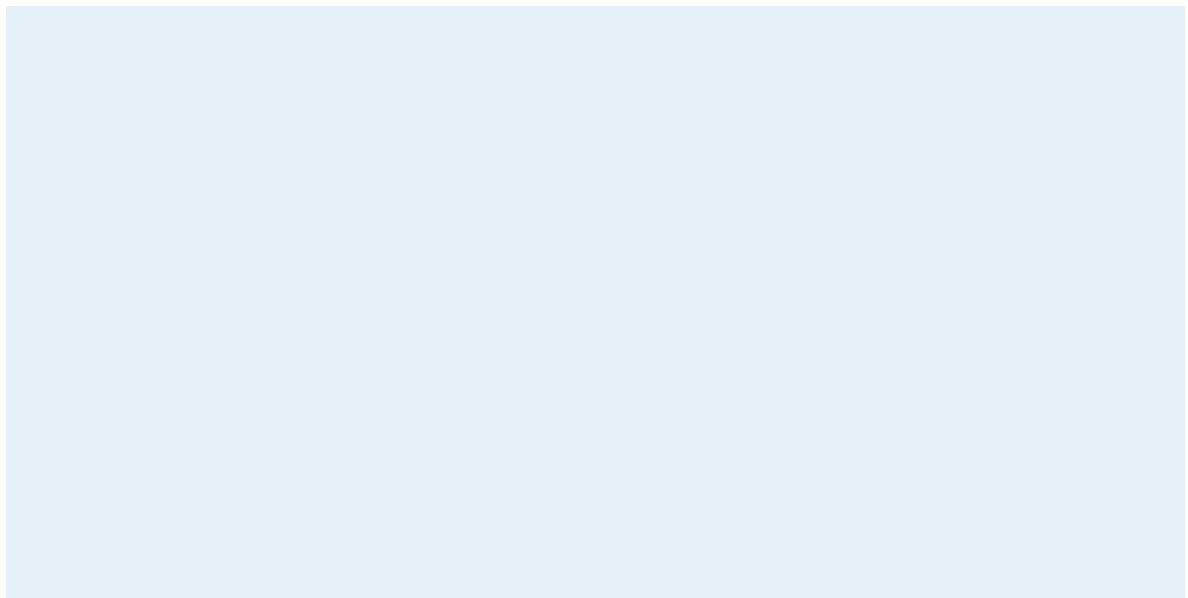
## Policy Implication

Despite federal guidelines that encourage payment rates to child care providers be set no lower than the 75th percentile of the local market rate,<sup>39</sup> Texas providers often receive rates that are 30-40% below the market rate.<sup>40</sup> The result of this is often higher child-to-staff ratios, under-trained staff, and lack of equipment, resources, and materials. Families in Texas utilizing the child care subsidy program usually pay a 9-11% co-payment. However, child care providers report that insufficient reimbursement rates have caused them to discontinue serving low-income children.<sup>41</sup> In spite of an \$18 million in funding during Texas' 80th Legislative Session to improve reimbursement rates paid to child care providers participating in special certification programs, policy makers must evaluate the actual cost of providing high-quality child care and increase child care subsidy reimbursement rates for licensed child care centers.<sup>42</sup> With thousands of families in Harris County awaiting child care assistance, increased funding to provide more working families with child care subsidies is an important element of helping families reach economic security.

An essential component of quality early child care is the knowledge and skills of a child's caregiver. Unfortunately, early childhood educators in licensed child care programs have few requirements in terms of on-going training and professional development.<sup>43</sup> Pre-service hours for child care workers working in licensed child care facilities need to be increased from eight hours.

Finally, a continued need exists for quality, affordable before- and after-school programs. School-age child care programs fill the gaps in communities by offering resources and experiences that families and school sometimes are unable to provide.<sup>44</sup> In 2007, Congress gave the 21st Century Community Learning Centers a long overdue increase in funding, totaling \$100 million additional funds.<sup>45</sup> However, with only 10% of Texas' K-12 children in after-school programs, and 30% likely to participate in after-school programs if they were available, the need for funding for quality care before and after school remains important.<sup>46</sup>

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# Pre-K Enrollment and Head Start

## INDICATORS

**Pre-K:** The number of children enrolled in the pre-kindergarten public school program designed for the improvement of the social, intellectual, language, aesthetic, and physical development of children in Harris County

Year	1990	1992	1994	1998	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2006	2007	2010 Goal
Indicator	14,551	17,897	20,475	22,958	24,563	25,254	28,743	30,731	32,683	35,381	34,965	NA

Source: Harris County Head Start/Early Head Start Collaborative Community Assessment

**Head Start:** The number of children enrolled in the federal Head Start Program in Harris County

Year	1990	1992	1994	1996	1999	2000	2002	2003	2004	2005	2010 Goal
Indicator	3,424	3,806	4,149	5,512	5,178	5,670	7,215	7,568	7,760	8,589	NE

Source: Harris County Head Start/Early Head Start Collaborative Community Assessment

### Head Start: Actual Enrollment

	1999-2000	2000-2001	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006
Area I	927	927	1,483	1,544	1,973	1,328
Area II	1,303	1,485	1,915	1,946	2,364	2,059
Area III	1,300	1,545	1,853	2,214	1,365	2,696
Area IV	1,648	1,713	1,864	1,864	2,058	2,506
Total	5,178	5,670	7,215	7,568	7,760	8,589

Source: Harris County Department of Education, Avance, Neighborhood Centers, Inc. and Gulf Coast Community Services Association

Early childhood education is highly important in preparing children for kindergarten and their eventual path through the educational system. School district-led pre-kindergarten programs and the national Head Start program are essential in providing young children the opportunities to acquire important skills before beginning kindergarten.

A mandated Pre-K program began in Texas in 1984. In Texas, Pre-K is mandated in each district that identifies 15 or more children who are eligible in the system and are at least four years of age. Eligibility for Pre-K is given to those children unable to speak or comprehend the English language, are economically disadvantaged, are homeless, are the children of active military personnel, or the children of someone killed or injured in active duty. The state defines economically disadvantaged as being eligible to participate in the National Free or Reduced-Priced Lunch Program (185% Federal Poverty Level income).

Pre-K enrollment also has risen in recent years, although enrollment declined somewhat between 2006 and 2007. In 2000, 24,563 Harris County children participated in the program, rising to 34,965 in 2007.<sup>47</sup> The state pays

for a half-day Pre-K program. School districts can provide a full-day program and either pay half the difference or compete for state grants. However, half-day programs can be a barrier for working parents. Ineligible students still may attend Pre-K (paying tuition) if all eligible students have been served.

The results of a study from Georgetown University give solid support for the benefits that school-based Pre-K attendance can have on test scores of young children of differing ethnic and racial groups and from differing socioeconomic backgrounds. In this specific study, covering the universal Pre-K program in Tulsa, Okla., positive and statistically significant impacts on students were found for both full-day and half-day programs.<sup>48</sup> The Tulsa program requires Pre-K teachers hold bachelor's degrees and child care certificates, as well as be compensated at the same level as elementary and secondary school teachers. These high-level teaching requirements may impact the results indicating the strength of the Pre-K programs versus the potential results in a program with lower teacher requirements.

Head Start began as a national program in 1965 to address systemic poverty in the United States. Head Start provides comprehensive education, health, nutrition, and parental involvement services to children living in poverty and their parents. The program is directed at children age three to five. In 1995, Early Head Start began as an additional program directed towards pregnant women and children from birth to age three.

Harris County Head Start is divided into four geographic areas directed by different agencies: Area I, Harris County Department of Education; Area II, Avance; Area

III, Neighborhood Centers Inc.; Area IV, Gulf Coast Community Services Association. Head Start programs are required to complete an annual self-assessment every year in mid-spring. In 2007, the federal government reauthorized the Head Start program with new requirements, such as higher teacher credentials and extending the program to children living in up to 130% of poverty.

Within Harris County, Head Start participation has significantly increased since 2000. During the 2005-2006 school year, 8,589 children participated in the program versus 5,670 children in 2000-2001.<sup>49</sup>

### Pre-K Student Enrollment in Harris County by District

District	2003	2004	2006	2007
Aldine	2,684	2,863	2,997	3,083
Alief	1,852	1,924	2,306	2,135
Channelview	311	320	367	390
Crosby	114	127	105	144
Cypress-Fairbanks	1,494	1,732	2,270	2,565
Deer Park	203	213	230	252
North Forest	979	986	992	890
Galena Park	916	1,010	970	989
Goose Creek	768	792	813	753
Houston	14,034	14,823	15,814	15,023
Humble	622	632	667	745
Katy	544	709	892	974
Klein	666	732	961	1,016
La Porte	202	211	227	175
Pasadena	1,902	1,968	2,085	2,098
Spring	895	966	1,260	1,283
Spring Branch	2,233	2,298	1,957	1,925
Tomball	129	166	174	181
Sheldon	140	172	222	283
Huffman	43	39	72	61
Total	30,731	32,683	35,381	34,965

Source: Texas Education Agency

# Pre-K Enrollment and Head Start (continued)

## Policy Implication

Both Head Start and district Pre-K programs are important in giving low-income children learning opportunities that they would not otherwise be able to access. The availability of these programs also positively impacts parents' ability to work and to provide for their families while their children are enrolled at school during the day. The implementation of a universal pre-kindergarten program should be made a priority in Texas. States such as Georgia, Florida, and Oklahoma now have universal pre-kindergarten programs. Universal pre-kindergarten provides equality of access to all families, especially impacting those families ineligible under the current guidelines, yet still struggling with private-sector child care costs. Emphasis also should be placed on high-quality teaching rather than child supervision.

Continuing federal support of Head Start also is essential in supporting families with children living in and near poverty. Head Start provides classes and educational resources to parents in addition to health and development work with young children. The pay levels for both pre-K and Head Start teachers should be increased to better match pay levels of other teachers. With the new requirements authorized for Head Start in 2007, a net \$10.6 million was cut in FY 2008 funds.<sup>50</sup> These authorizations leave the programs with even more requirements to implement while operating under a steadily decreasing budget. The federal government needs to reassess the recent cuts in Head Start appropriations. Decreased funding negatively impacts the program's efforts to comply with new requirements and expand access to more children.

## Economically Disadvantaged Students

**Indicator:** The percentage of students enrolled in Harris County schools who are economically disadvantaged

Year	1990	1992	1994	1996	1997	1998	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Indicator	34.8%	39.3%	43.0%	46.4%	49.2%	50.0%	53.3%	54.9%	53.9%	55.5%	56.6%	58.5%	52.4%	53.6%

Source: Economically Disadvantaged Standard Report, Texas Education Agency

The Texas Education Agency gives students a status of economically disadvantaged if they fall into at least one of three categories: (1) They are eligible for free lunch under the National School Lunch and Child Nutrition Program; (2) They are eligible for reduced-price meals under the National School Lunch and Child Nutrition Program; (3) Their family income is at or below the official poverty line; they are eligible for Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) or other public assistance; they received a Pell Grant or comparable state program of need-based financial assistance; they are eligible for programs under Title II of the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA). They are eligible for benefits under the Food Stamp Act of 1977. Two children living in a household with a single parent will be considered economically disadvantaged if the household makes \$31,765 per year or less.<sup>51</sup>

In 2005, 413,474 economically disadvantaged students lived in Harris County, 58.5% of the student population. The number of economically disadvantaged students in 2006 rose to 433,362, but the percentage of the total student population decreased to 52.4%.<sup>52</sup> These numbers

rose slightly in 2007, when 435,146 economically disadvantaged students were in Harris County, which was 53.6% of all students. In Houston ISD, 82.8% of the students were disadvantaged economically. The district with the highest percentage in 2007 was North Forest ISD, with 94.8%; the lowest was Tomball ISD with 19.6% of its total student population classified as economically disadvantaged.

Research indicates that economically disadvantaged students struggle in public schools as a consequence of their low-income status. Low-income children are faced with several obstacles, such as safe and stable child care, health coverage, housing, and food security. Students deemed economically disadvantaged were 52% more likely to quit school than their more economically advantaged counterparts.<sup>53</sup> Many students are forced to leave school to earn wages to support their families.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act provides federal funds to facilitate the academic achievement of the disadvantaged under Title I to ensure that all children, including those who are economically disadvantaged,

have an equal opportunity to obtain a quality education and reach state achievement standards.<sup>54</sup> These funds can be used for instructional and program improvements, counseling, and parental involvement. In return for this allotment, Title I schools and districts must meet accountability requirements for raising student performance.<sup>55</sup>

On average, families need an income about twice the federal poverty level to meet their most basic needs. Children who live in families below this level (\$42,400 for a family of four in 2008) are considered low income. Texas has 3,027,646 low-income children out of its 6,374,365 children. Slightly more than half of the low-income children, 51%, are under six years old. Most low-income children are Hispanic (67% of all Hispanic children), followed by African American students (57% of all African American children), whites (24% of all

### Harris County vs. Texas

In 2007, 53.6% of students in Harris County were economically disadvantaged, compared to 55.2% of students in Texas.

Source: Texas Education Agency

white children), and Asian Americans (23% of all Asian American children).<sup>56</sup> A high percentage, 62%, of low-income children have at least one parent who is employed full-time, while 21% have at least one parent who is employed either part time or part year, and 17% of low-income children have parents who are not employed. Low-income children in single parent households are nearly the majority, at 44%.<sup>57</sup>

### Policy Implication

It is imperative to invest time and effort in educating students who are economically disadvantaged. More than half of the students in Harris County are economically disadvantaged, and schools need more programs to reach these children. Training programs that help teachers understand the issues low-income children face are important in providing quality education. Reaching out to economically disadvantaged students and changing their perception of education will increase the quality of life for the students and the community as a whole.

## Expenditure per Student

**Indicator:** The average expenditure per student based on the total operating expenses of each school district in Harris County divided by the number of students in membership

Year	1990	1992	1994	1996	1998	1999	2000	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Indicator	3,850	4,304	4,552	5,347	5,702	6,498	6,724	7,045	7,283	6,936	6,151	6,249

Source: Academic Excellence Indicator System, Texas Education Agency

A school district's total operating expenses include salaries, fixed charges, student transportation, school-books and materials, and energy costs. Each district quantifies a value for total expenditures from the general funds allocated per pupil, the average of which is reported with the indicator. The general fund excludes special revenue funds, debt service funds, and capital project funds.<sup>58</sup>

During the 2004-2005 school year, the national average for current expenditure per student was \$8,661. Texas ranked 41st out of the 50 states and the District of Columbia, with an average of \$7,310 spent per student.<sup>59</sup>

### Harris County vs. Texas

In the 2005-2006 school year, Houston ISD expended \$7,472 per student compared to the national average of \$9,138.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Expenditures per student have decreased over the past few years throughout the state, resulting in Texas dropping significantly in the national rankings and is currently one of the lowest in the country. For the 2005-2006

# Expenditure Per Student (continued)

school year, the national average of per pupil spending was \$9,138, and Texas spent well below that amount with only \$7,561 being spent per pupil.<sup>60</sup> These funds include salaries and wages spent on teachers and school staff for instruction and support services. The total amount spent is gathered from a combination of federal, state, and local sources.

School districts in Harris County expended an average of \$6,151 per student from the general funds in 2005–2006. In 2006–2007, the average rose slightly to \$6,249 per student. During this school year, Houston ISD reported the third lowest expenditures per student in Harris County with \$5,790, and Sheldon ISD reported the highest of Harris County with \$7,993 expended per student.<sup>61</sup>

A possible reason for the decrease in expenditure per student in Texas schools is the “65 Percent Rule,” issued under executive order by Governor Rick Perry in 2005. This rule mandates that 65% of school district funds be expended for instruction based on the definition issued by the National Center for Education Statistics. Instructional costs include salaries and benefits for teachers, instructional aides, general instructional supplies, athletics, field trips, music, and art.<sup>62</sup>

The remaining 35% of school district funds are used for support services in the school such as nurses, counselors, libraries, professional development, and food services. The salaries and benefits of administrators, operating costs, transportation, and security are considered support services.<sup>63</sup>

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## Policy Implication

Governor Perry’s “65 Percent Rule” has been a source of some state and national criticism because several services are not defined as instructional but remain a crucial component of public education and student success.<sup>64</sup> The idea behind the rule is to increase funds for classroom use; however, critics argue that the rigid breakdown of funding could impair public schools’ abilities to serve the needs of their students.

While direct instructional services are the obvious priorities for public schools and the students they serve, the money spent on these services are not always related to student achievement. For many schools, especially those in low-income areas, support services such as buses, counselors, and breakfast and lunch programs fill in the gaps that students do not receive at home and give them the potential to attain academic success from the instruction provided in their classrooms.<sup>65</sup> By increasing the expenditure per student in Texas school districts and ensuring that the money is appropriately spent, the state will be investing in the future of Texas’ children and strengthening its national position in the public school system.

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# Average Class Size and Student: Teacher Ratio

Student-to-teacher ratio is most commonly calculated by dividing the number of students enrolled by the number of all educators, including administrators, counselors, and other employees.<sup>66</sup> Therefore, student-to-teacher ratios serve as an accurate form of measurement only of the number of students relative to the number of instructional staff in a school. These numbers do not consider unique circumstances such as special education classes that generally are smaller than traditional instructional classes and often have more than one teacher in the room. Furthermore, counselors, administrators, and other adult staff are considered part of the instructional staff, despite the lack of actual curriculum instruction involved in their positions. Lower student-to-teacher ratios reveal higher availability of teacher services to students.<sup>67</sup>

## Texas vs. the Nation

In 2006, the elementary student-to-teacher ratio in Texas was 21.8, compared to the national average of 19.4 elementary students to one teacher.

Source: National Center for Education Statistics

Since 2000, the student-to-teacher ratios in Harris County schools as well as nationwide have undergone a slow but steady decline. The average student-to-teacher ratio in Harris County schools in 2007 was 15.3 students to one teacher, which is slightly less than the national student teacher ratio in 2007 of 15.7 students to one teacher.<sup>68</sup>

**Indicator:** The average number of students in a classroom by subject and grade per teacher

Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Indicator	22.0	22.5	22.2	22.2	22.0	21.9	22.0	21.8

Source: Academic Excellence Indicator System, Downloads of Selected Data, Texas Education Agency

**Indicator:** The average student-to-teacher ratio in the school

Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Indicator	15.8	15.8	15.6	15.5	15.8	15.6	15.8	15.3

Source: Academic Excellence Indicator System, Downloads of Selected Data, Texas Education Agency

The class size, or number of students in a classroom, is a more accurate tool of measurement. It is the average number of students in a teacher's classroom and is calculated by dividing the number of all students regularly in a teacher's classroom by the number of regular teachers in those specific classes.<sup>69</sup>

When calculating an average class size, TEA includes:

- Classes identified as serving regular, remedial, gifted and talented, career and technology, and honor students.
- Subjects including English language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, foreign language, computer science, business education, vocational, and self contained.
- Teachers labeled as special-duty teacher, teacher, and substitute teacher.
- Only classes coded as regular class. If a teacher teaches more than one class at the same time, the records are combined into a single class.<sup>70</sup>
- Because class size measures the approximate number of students in the classroom, this measure generally will be higher than student-to-teacher ratios.

Of the large school districts in Harris County in 2007, Houston ISD had the highest student-to-teacher ratio with 16.8 students to one teacher. Galena Park ISD and Spring Branch ISD had the lowest ratios of 13.8 students to one teacher. Fifth-grade classes had the highest number of students per class in Harris County in 2007 with about 24 students per class.<sup>71</sup>

Although a slight decline in the student-to-teacher ratio occurred between 2000 and 2007, the average class size of Harris County classrooms has remained nearly the same within the equivalent time period with 22 students in 2000 and 21.8 students in 2007.

Tennessee conducted a four-year longitudinal class-size study, the Student Teacher Achievement Ratio (STAR). They found that students in smaller classes generally were more successful, made better grades, and took more advanced courses in high school. These students also demonstrated better high school graduation rates and were more inclined to pursue higher education. The STAR experiment revealed a decrease in the African American-white achievement gap by almost 38%. The Texas Legislature requires that class sizes from kindergarten through fourth grade should not exceed 22:1.<sup>72</sup>

## Policy Implication

Student-to-teacher ratio and class size are measured in relation to student achievement to ascertain how class size can affect the quality of education. In smaller classes, teachers generally are able to dedicate more individualized attention to students, which produces an increase in student achievement, particularly for disadvantaged students in the early grades. A widening disproportionate racial and economic achievement gap and alarming high school dropout rates indicate that Harris County would benefit from a reduced average class size that matches the National Education Association recommendation of 15 students per classroom for regular early grade levels.

# Charter Schools

**Indicator:** The number of active charter schools serving students in Harris County

Year	1990	1992	1994	1996	1998	2000	2003	2004	2005	2006
Indicator	0	0	0	9	37	39	45	44	45	44

Source: Texas Education Agency

A charter school is a public school providing education through a contract, or charter, granted by the State Board of Education or the board of trustees of an independent school district. These schools are subject to fewer state laws than other public schools, with the goal of being fiscally and academically accountable without undue regulation of pedagogical methods. Like independent school districts, charter schools are monitored by the state and are accredited by the state's testing and accountability system.<sup>73</sup>

The Texas Education Code defines the purposes of charter schools: improve student learning; increase the choice of learning opportunities within the public school system; create professional opportunities that will attract new teachers to the public school system; establish a new form of accountability for public schools; and encourage different learning methods.<sup>74</sup>

While these purposes appear to offer an extremely beneficial option to students and parents, critics argue that charter schools have impeded the success of the public school system primarily because they divert money from traditional public schools.<sup>75</sup> They also argue that because charter schools operate as businesses, they are subject to the market force consequence of being forced to close if they do not meet standards, which deprives students of a stable, continuous education.<sup>76</sup> There has been criticism that charter schools fail to adequately serve students with disabilities or limited English proficiency and that their accountability is difficult to measure and enforce.<sup>77</sup>

Proponents of the charter school movement counter these arguments by offering data suggesting that students are succeeding at higher rates in charter schools when compared to traditional public schools. They insist that charter schools promote healthy competition, challenging public school districts to provide equal or better services to attract and retain students and money.<sup>78</sup>

Four classes of charters are authorized by the Texas Education Code: home-rule school district charters; campus or campus-program charters; open-enrollment

## Texas vs. the Nation

Texas is one of the "Big Six" charter school states, with 207 of the nation's 3,909 charter schools.

Source: U.S. Charter Schools

charters; and college or university charters. Currently, no home-rule school district charters operate in Texas; most charter schools operate under open-enrollment charters, which are granted by the State Board of Education. Two charters have been awarded to local universities.<sup>79</sup>

The popularity of charter schools in Harris County is growing significantly. During the 2000-2001 school year, charter school enrollment was 13,159 students. In the 2006-2007 school year, these numbers almost doubled to 22,605 students.<sup>80</sup>

## *Brown v. Board of Education,* 347 U.S. 483 (1954)

This landmark case established that it was unconstitutional to segregate schools on the basis of race. Before the decision, it was held that separate facilities were acceptable, as long as they were equal. However, in this unanimous opinion the Supreme Court held that despite the equality of schools based on "objective" factors, there were intangible issues inherent in segregating education which could not be remedied. As the court noted, separation of the races in public education has a detrimental effect on minority children as it is interpreted as a sign of inferiority.

In the 2006-2007 school year, 44 active charter schools were in Harris County.<sup>81</sup>

## Charter School in Harris County 2006

Academy of Accelerated Learning, Inc.	Jamie's House Charter School
Accelerated Intermediate Academy	Jesse Jackson Academy
Alief Montessori Community School	Juan B. Galaviz Charter School
Alphonso Crutch's Life Support Center	KIPP, Inc.
Amigos Por Vida-Friends for Life	La Amistad Love & Learning Academy
Bay Area Charter Inc.	Medical Center Charter School
Beatrice Mayes Institute	Meyerpark Elementary
Benji's Special Education Academy	North Houston HS for Business
Calvin Nelms Charter Schools	Northwest Preparatory
Children First Academy of Houston	Raul Yzaguirre School for Success
ComQuest Academy	Richard Milburn Academy
Draw Academy	Ripley House Charter School
George I. Sanchez Charter	SER-Ninos Charter School
Girls & Boys Prep Academy	Southwest School
Gulf Shores Academy	Stepping Stones Charter Elementary
Harmony Science Academy	The Rhodes School
Harris County Juvenile Justice	Two Dimensions Preparatory Academy
Houston Alternative Preparatory	University of Houston Charter School
Houston Can Academy	Varnett Charter School
Houston Gateway Academy, Inc.	West Houston Charter School
Houston Heights High School	YES Preparatory Public Schools
Houston Heights Learning Academy, Inc.	Zoe Learning Academy

# Career and Technology Education Programs

**Indicator:** Average percent of Harris County students enrolled in Career and Technology Education programs

Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Indicator	17.1%	18.0%	18.3%	18.5%	17.9%	18.8%	18.6%	18.5%

Source: Academic Excellence Indicator System, Texas Education Agency

Vocational programs commonly are thought of as curricula that prepare students for entry-level positions and that require no postsecondary education. However, changes in the labor market such as advancements in technology, global competition, and increasingly service-oriented industries have altered occupational skills and, consequently, redefined career and technology education (CTE) programs.<sup>82</sup> Vocational programs have broadened their focus to academic and career preparation that encourages students to pursue higher education.

Career education programs became popular in the 1970s. These programs placed an emphasis on teaching adaptable skills to employment in all occupations, whereas vocational education was focused primarily on skills for a particular occupation. Today, most high schools have adopted career education programs to provide a foundation of skills to enable students to attain gainful employment after graduation, either full-time or while continuing their education or training. The trend with students enrolled in these programs has shifted. When these programs first arose, the majority of the vocational and career education students joined the workforce upon completion of high school. However, in 2001, almost two-thirds of all graduates of career and technical programs entered some form of postsecondary schooling, and these numbers are increasing.<sup>83</sup>

Almost half of all high school students nationwide participate in vocational programs. The success of these programs is because they provide an alternative to traditional curriculum.<sup>84</sup> On-the-job training and practicums accommodate diverse learning styles, and because CTE classes relate directly to career goals, vocational programs engage students otherwise disinterested with strictly academic coursework. CTE courses have been shown to increase average annual earnings.<sup>85</sup>

Approximately one third of the fastest-growing occupations require an associate's degree or a postsecondary vocational certificate.<sup>86</sup> This increased demand for a well-educated workforce has brought about a new trend of advanced technical credit programs in vocational

curriculum. Tech-Prep, a national program funded by the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act, allows students to begin a college technical major while still in high school. In 2007, 821 Texas public school districts with high schools had Tech-Prep program agreements with one or more Texas colleges. Tech-Prep had 53,386 senior students in 2006–2007 in Texas.<sup>87</sup>

Over the past few years, school districts in Harris County have spent about \$165 a year per student on CTE programs, which has remained only slightly above 3% of total expenditures since 2004.<sup>88</sup> Enrollment in these programs has remained steady from 2005 to 2007, numbering approximately 18% of the total high school students in Harris County. The full-time staff dedicated to CTE programs has remained steady over the past few years, at an average of about 3% of the total staff of Harris County schools.

While specific course offerings vary among schools, the Texas Education Association recognizes CTE programs in agriculture, business, health, marketing, home economics, and technological education, with courses ranging from entrepreneurship to applied entomology. Many Texas schools offer licensing and certificate opportunities to CTE students, but there is no state requirement to offer such programs.<sup>89</sup>

## Policy Implication

Despite the confirmed benefits of CTE programs, they are an increasingly smaller portion of the overall curriculum.<sup>90</sup> Teacher quality is a major concern in CTE programs. Improving teacher quality will improve the academic rigor of CTE courses. Harris County and Texas must continue to support vocational programs because they provide students with a curriculum alternative to ensure a competent and competitive workforce. Furthermore, if students are invested in well-developed, well-taught CTE courses, drop-out rates in Texas high schools are bound to improve and a greater likelihood exists that these students will pursue postsecondary education at some point after graduating.

# Alternative Education Programs

**Indicator:** The number of students in Harris County with a disciplinary placement

Year	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Indicator	3.25%	3.51%	3.08%	2.83%	2.35%	2.41%

Source: Texas Education Agency

Alternative Education Programs (AEP) offer unconventional curriculums and resources to students who struggle to succeed in a traditional academic environment. Students may be referred to AEPs if they exhibit poor grades, disruptive behavior, pregnancy, delinquency, or other dropout warning signs. Several different types of AEPs exist including charter schools, disciplinary alternative education programs (DAEP), the GED program, Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Programs (JJAEP), and The School of Choice Alternative Education program.<sup>91</sup>

In 2007, the state's accountability ratings assessed the 399 alternative education campuses in Texas. Six of these campuses were located in Harris County.<sup>92</sup> In Harris County, 19,288 students had a disciplinary placement in some type of AEP during the 2006–2007 school year, representing about 2.4% of the district's total student population. The proportion of students being placed in an alternative, disciplinary setting has remained steady at around 2.5% over the past two years. However, trends

## Houston vs. Texas

In 2007, 399 alternative education campuses were registered in Texas, six of which were in Harris County.

Source: Texas Education Agency, Accountability Ratings Systems

show that individual districts within Harris County have decreased the percentage of students they send to these alternative placements. In 2006–2007, Pasadena ISD had the highest proportion of students with disciplinary placements with 6.4% (3,506 students). Katy ISD had the lowest with .7% (369 students). During the 2004–2005 school year, Pasadena ISD sent 8.7%, or 4,349, of its students to a disciplinary placement, and Katy ISD sent 6.9%, or 3,078, students.<sup>93</sup>

DAEPs have been the source of much attention and criticism the past few years. Students who have violated the law or the student code of conduct can be placed in a DAEP, which is either on self-contained campuses or on traditional school campuses. Under the Safe School Act that the Texas Legislature passed in 1995, school districts must establish and maintain DAEPs.<sup>94</sup> The idea behind this mandate is that schools have the power to remove disruptive students from the regular classroom who repeatedly interfere with instruction or commit serious offenses. This allows the other students in the classroom to receive instruction without disruption and to give the disruptive student a focused atmosphere in which he or she may be more successful.<sup>95</sup>

Since its creation, the number of students placed in DAEPs has increased dramatically, about 47% in five years.<sup>96</sup> The DAEP placements are a temporary situation in which a student attends classes for a limited amount of time and then returns to his or her home campus. However, over the past few years, the length of students' stays at DAEP campuses has increased significantly.

# Alternative Education Programs (continued)

## Policy Implication

Much of the criticism of DAEP centers on the referral process through which students are placed at these campuses and the quality of the instruction and services provided to them. Because each school's code of conduct is different, schools have the flexibility to send students to a DAEP for almost any violation. Approximately 80% of DAEP students are sent through discretionary placements from their schools.<sup>97</sup> Furthermore, under the zero tolerance policy, state law merely requires that to remove a student to a DAEP school personnel have a reasonable belief that a student has committed an infraction of the student code of conduct.<sup>98</sup>

The 80th Texas Legislature passed new bills that have strengthened the accountability standards for DAEPs. Under this legislation, TEA must adopt minimum standards regarding DAEP students' health and safety; student/teacher ratios; reporting of abuse, neglect, and exploitation; transitioning students back to regular classrooms; and training for teachers in behavior management. However, the bill does not define health and safety, nor does the current education code. Student assessment is difficult because academic progress is measured solely by the TAKS. Consequently, students in DAEPs only are assessed year-to-year and against students at other schools. The goal of sending students to alternative education programs is to enable them to acquire the knowledge and skills that will enable them to be successful in environments more suited to their needs. To meet this goal, more changes need to be made to DAEPs and other alternative education settings.

## Limited English Proficiency and Bilingual Education

**Indicator:** The number of students in Harris County who are identified as limited English proficient based on criteria define in the Texas Administrative Code

Year	1990	1992	1994	1996	1998	2000	2002	2004	2005	2006	2007
Indicator	63,042	83,865	100,872	113,265	116,794	125,732	133,590	147,377	151,298	155,613	157,477

Source: Texas Education Agency

**Indicator:** The number of students enrolled in bilingual education or an English as a Second Language (ESL) program in Harris County.

Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Indicator	110,072	113,577	122,964	129,139	137,426	141,731	145,779	147,331

Source: Texas Education Agency

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 defines limited English proficient (LEP) as students whose first language is not English and who need assistance with the English language to participate fully in the regular curriculum.<sup>99</sup>

Under Texas state policy, every student in the state with a home language other than English that has been identified as LEP must be provided the opportunity to participate in a bilingual education or English as a second language (ESL) program. To ensure equal educational opportunity, the Texas Education Code requires that each school district shall: (1) identify limited English proficient students based on criteria established by the state; (2) provide bilingual education and ESL programs

as integral parts of the regular program as described in the Texas Education Code, §4.002; (3) seek certified teaching personnel to ensure that limited English proficient students are afforded full opportunity to master the essential skills and knowledge required by the state; and (4) assess achievement for essential skills and knowledge in accordance with the Texas Education Code, Chapter 39, to ensure accountability for limited English proficient students and the schools that serve them.<sup>100</sup>

Texas has a formal process for identifying students as LEP. When a student enters the district, a home-language survey is conducted to determine the language most spoken in the home and by the family and child.<sup>101</sup>

## Healthy Passages 5th Grade Study

Of the parent respondents, 56% speak a language other than English at home, and 59% rated themselves as having little or no English proficiency.

Language-proficiency assessments are administered in cases where children are not in English-speaking homes.

A student is identified as LEP under the following criteria:

- At pre-kindergarten through first grade, the score on the English oral proficiency test is below the designated level.
- At grades 2-12, the student's score on the English oral language proficiency test is below the designated level; the student's score on the reading and language arts sections of the TEA-approved norm-referenced measure at his or her grade level is below the 40th percentile; or the student's ability in English is so limited that the grade-level administration of the reading and language arts sections of the TEA-approved norm-referenced assessment instrument or TEA-approved test is not valid.<sup>102</sup>

Once a child has been identified as LEP, the parents are notified and must decide whether or not to enroll their child in a bilingual or English as a second language program. TEA reports the number of LEP students each year; however, not all of these students are registered to receive services. About 92% of the students identified as LEP have enrolled in bilingual or ESL programs each year from 2004-2007 in Harris County. Spring Branch ISD has the highest proportion of LEP students enrolling in language programs at 98%, and Crosby ISD has the lowest proportion at 64% during the school years of 2004-2005, 2005-2006, and 2006-2007.<sup>103</sup>

In the United States, bilingual education refers to classroom instruction techniques that incorporate the

native language of English language learners. The goals of these programs are to teach English, foster academic achievement, preserve cultural heritage, and enable English speakers to learn a second language. Research indicates that bilingual programs effectively have met their goals over the past 30 years, but critics argue that these programs make learning English more difficult for LEP students because they are isolated and much of the instruction is given in their native language.<sup>104</sup>

The percentage of LEP students in Harris County schools has been fairly steady, at 21.5% in 2004-2005 and 21.2% in 2005-2006. There was a minor increase in the percentage of LEP students to 21.4% in 2006-2007. For each school year from 2002-2007, four districts had greater than 10,000 students identified as LEP: Houston, Alief, Aldine, and Pasadena. Recently, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD reported more than 10,000 LEP students. In 2004-2005, 10,821 of Cy-Fair students were identified as LEP, and these numbers have risen significantly in the past two years: 12,146 students in 2005-2006 and 13,798 students in 2006-2007.<sup>105</sup>

### *United States v. Texas,*

### *F. Supp. 2d, 2008 WL 3911036*

Recently, the July 25, 2008, order in the long-running case of *United States v. Texas* has provided even further hope for limited English proficiency (LEP) students in Texas high schools. Judge William Wayne Justice wrote that the Texas Education Agency ("TEA") has failed to provide equal educational opportunities in all schools, and in doing so, has violated the civil rights of Spanish-speaking students under the federal Equal Education Opportunity Act. According to the decision, TEA has until Jan. 31, 2009, to create a plan to improve secondary school programs for LEP students, as well as the monitoring of those programs, which is to be implemented during the 2009-2010 school year.

## Policy Implication

TEA reports that the majority of the students recognized as being limited English proficient receive services. Districts are required to provide information about the available language programs in both English and the parents' native language to enable informed decision-making for their children.<sup>106</sup> However, parents often do not receive information in their native language about the benefits of enrolling their children in these programs. Educating them about the obtainable benefits to their LEP children after participating in the program may increase program participation and the overall educational success of the child. Research has shown that classes that offer only instruction in English are often insufficient to meet the needs of LEP students because mastery of basic English language skills is essential for effective participation in the state's curriculum; therefore, bilingual education and special language programs are necessary for these students.<sup>107</sup>

# Special Education Students

**Indicator:** The number of students in Harris County receiving special education services due to one or more disabilities

Year	1990	1992	1994	1996	1998	2000	2001	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Indicator	45,406	51,836	56,274	61,359	67,979	68,019	67,727	62,242	70,143	71,198	70,010	69,432

Source: Texas Education Agency

## Houston vs. Texas

In the 2006-2007 school year, 69,432 students received special education services in Houston, which is 14% of the state's total 494,302 special education students.

Source: Special Education Data, Texas Education Agency

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a federal law that ensures services for children with disabilities. IDEA governs the methods through which state and public agencies provide early intervention, special education, and related services to more than 6.5 million disabled infants, toddlers, children, and youths. Students ages three to 21 receive special education and related services under IDEA Part B. The disabilities referenced under IDEA include mental retardation; hearing, speech or language impairments; visual impairments; serious emotional disturbance; orthopedic damage; autism; traumatic brain injury; other health impairments; or specific learning disabilities.<sup>108</sup>

For a student to receive special education services in Texas, a multi-step investigation must be conducted to assess the student's disability and service plan. To begin this process, usually a parent or teacher refers a student for an individualized evaluation to determine if a need exists for special education.<sup>109</sup> This need can arise when the student is not developing at the same rate as other children or the student is experiencing unusual difficulties with the curriculum and initial intervention has not helped. The school district must give parents a notice of their rights in the form of the procedural safeguard notice and must ensure the notice is understood. The student is assessed in all areas relating to a suspected disability including health, vision, hearing, and motor abilities, language dominance and communicative skills, sociological and emotional status, academic performance, and general intelligence.

The school district is required to conduct a full individual evaluation within 60 calendar days of receiving parental consent, and a reevaluation follows at least once every three years. After the assessment, the school conducts an ARD/IEP planning conference at which school personnel and the student's family gather to discuss the evalu-

ation results, placement options, and other information. Shortly after the planning meetings, Texas schools conduct an ARD (Admission, Review, and Dismissal) meeting. Specific services and goals are discussed, and members of the ARD committee set annual measurable goals for the student, known as the IEP, or Individualized Education Program. This committee reconvenes at least once a year to review and revise the IEPs as necessary.<sup>110</sup>

In Harris County, 70,010 students were in special education during the 2005-2006 school year. This number slightly decreased to 69,432 students in 2006-2007. Just less than 10% of all students in Harris County public school districts have received special education services over the past few years.<sup>111</sup>

In the 2006-2007 academic year, 5,476 (about 8%) of the 69,432 students in special education were identified as emotionally disturbed. This number is a significant increase from a few years ago, when only about 5% of the special education population in Harris County was identified as emotionally disturbed. It is also slightly more than the 7.2% of all of the special education students in Texas who are emotionally disturbed.<sup>112</sup>

## Healthy Passages 5th Grade Study

Of the parent respondents, 14% report being told that their child has a learning disability.

## Policy Implication

Special education programs are designed to give students with disabilities the tools to learn in ways that best meet their needs. These students are placed in small groups, outside of the general classroom, so that they get more individualized attention. However, although the trends show that the numbers of students in special education are increasing, schools are not providing enough staff to adequately meet these students' needs. Furthermore, because many pupils receiving special education services do not take the same high-stakes tests as students in mainstream education,<sup>113</sup> teachers and administrators often overlook them. When placed in the right setting, these students can thrive, and many of them are able to overcome their disabilities. Schools must ensure that these students are given an opportunity.

# Students at Risk

**Indicator:** The percentage of students identified as at risk of dropping out of school in Harris County based on criteria defined in the Texas Education Code

Year	1990	1992	1994	1996	1998	2000	2001	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Indicator	19.9	41.9	420	38.9	41	45.3	45.7	43.7	48.7	51.3	54.9	53.5

Source: Texas Education Agency

Many factors contribute to a child's risk of dropping out of school before graduating. Some of these risk factors include low socioeconomic status, limited English proficiency, failing Algebra I in the ninth grade, and single-parent homes. Texas developed specific criteria for designating a student's at-risk status.<sup>114</sup> A student, under the age of 21, meeting any of the criteria below is considered at risk of dropping out of school.

A student who:

- Has not advanced from one grade level to the next for one or more school years.
- Is in grades 7–12 and did not maintain at least a 70 average in two or more subjects in the current or prior semester.
- Is in Pre-K, kindergarten, or grades 1–3 and has not passed a readiness test or assessment instrument administered during the current school year
- Is pregnant or a parent.
- Has been placed in an alternative education program during the preceding or current school year.
- Has been expelled during the preceding or current school year.
- Is currently on parole, probation, deferred prosecution, or other conditional release.
- Previous report of dropping out of school.
- Is limited English proficiency.
- Is in the custody or care of the Department of Protective and Regulatory Services or has during the current school year been referred to the department by a school official, officer of the juvenile court, or law enforcement official.

## Houston vs. Texas

In 2007, 53.5% of children in Harris County public schools, compared to 48.3% of children in Texas, were considered at-risk of dropping out.

Source: Texas Education Agency

- Is homeless.
- Has resided in the preceding school year or resides in the current school year in a residential placement facility in the district including a detention facility, substance abuse treatment facility, emergency shelter, psychiatric hospital, halfway house, or foster group home.
- Did not perform satisfactorily on an assessment instrument administered to the student and who did not perform more than 110% of the level of satisfactory performance on that instrument the year before.

Albeit not exhaustive, the current list of 13 factors helps identify the likelihood that a child may dropout from school. Unfortunately, the majority are criteria that reflect months or years of disengagement that lead to outcomes such as not passing TAKS, grade retention, expulsion, or being placed in an alternative education program. Although some dropout prevention programs are already in place, an overwhelming number of children are in need of extra academic, physical, and social-emotional support that go unmet within the school system.

## Policy Implication

In response to an alarming number of children designated as at-risk of dropping out, coupled with the actual number of children never graduating high school, a federal competitive grant was established for state and local education agencies to develop programs that support effective, sustainable, and coordinated dropout prevention and reentry programs in high schools with high dropout rates.<sup>115</sup> In 2006, TEA received a \$2.5 million award to work with Communities in Schools, Big Brothers Big Sisters, and Texas' regional education service centers that help aid administrators in their efforts to increase student achievement.<sup>116</sup> The 80th Texas Legislature established that district and charter schools with high dropout rates were required to submit dropout prevention strategy plans to the commissioner by December 1, 2007.<sup>117</sup>

As the number of students identified as at-risk increases, Texas must proactively implement new systems and policies that support the academic, emotional, and social needs of these students. Some of these strategies include lengthening the school day/year, intensive summer catch-up programs, restructuring schools to provide personalized learning, individualized graduation plans, mentoring, service learning, after-school programming, early literacy development, and quality early childhood education.

# Graduation and Dropout Rates

**Indicator:** The average freshmen to senior graduation rate in the Greater Houston Area (26 independent school districts)

Year	2004	2005	2006
Indicator	67.9	69.6	67.8

Source: CHILDREN AT RISK using data from Texas Education Agency

**Indicator:** The percentage of students from a class of ninth graders who drop out and do not return by the fall of their fourth school year and do not meet other completion requirements in the Greater Houston Area (26 independent school districts).

Year	1990	1992	1994	1996	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Indicator	NA	17.2%	17.2%	8.5%	12.8%	6.7%	6.3%	5.5%	4.4%	4.3%	3.8%	3.9%	7.4%*

Source: Secondary School Completion and Dropouts in Texas Public Schools Report, County Supplement, Texas Education Agency

\* Beginning with the 2007 accountability cycle, TEA began using a more rigorous dropout definition, based on the federal definition. This affected dropouts reported for the 2005-06 school year. Therefore, dropout rates are not comparable across years.

**i**n May 2006, 283,698 Texas seniors were expected to stand before their proud parents as they accepted their high school diploma.<sup>118</sup> According to a number of independent research organizations however, nearly one in three students in Texas never experience this academic rite of passage.<sup>119</sup> Students drop out for complex reasons. Students often leave school due to a host of reasons – a sense of disconnection to one’s school, home, or community; boredom; lack of guidance and encouragement from a caring adult; disengaging teaching practices.

In addition to addressing why students drop out of high school, accuracy in the data reported by government agencies has been an issue brought to light by consistent underreporting of dropout rates across the nation and in Texas. In past years, districts and the Texas Education Agency (TEA) have mislabeled students who drop out as transfers under their “leaver code policy.” This policy allowed the TEA to remove students from the cohort of students expected to graduate – thereby masking the percentage of students who actually dropped out before receiving a high school diploma. The definition of an acceptable “leaver,” or a student who “left” school for legitimate reasons, was so lax as to include students who dropped out because they went to jail or expressed plans of returning to school or receiving their GEDs in the future.

The most recent changes to TEA’s completion rate and dropout rate methodology were brought on Senate Bill 186, passed in 2003. To comply with the No Child Left Behind Act, the law forced Texas to change by 2007 the way it reports dropouts to conform to the definitions developed by the U.S. Department of Education’s National

## CHILDREN AT RISK

CHILDREN AT RISK continues to host Annual Education Reform Conferences and publish annual High School rankings with the Houston Chronicle to highlight solutions to improving education experiences and, ultimately, graduation rates. In addition, CHILDREN AT RISK continues to seek transparency in the methodology of reporting graduation rates.

## TOP TEN PRIORITY

Center for Education Statistics (NCES).<sup>120</sup> Since then, TEA’s former 30 leaver codes have been modified, deleted, or combined into 14 codes to meet the NCES definition of “school leavers.”<sup>121</sup> Under the new NCES definition, only students in a GED program who graduate by August 31 of their senior year are considered graduates.<sup>122</sup> To track students more efficiently and reduce the number of records districts must submit, TEA also began using agency files to account for previous Texas public school graduates, students who receive GED certificates by August 31, and students who enroll in other Texas public school districts by September 30. Consequently, districts are no longer required to submit leaver records for students who are accounted for and verified by TEA.<sup>123</sup> Also under NCES, students who leave school because they fail the exit-level TAKS, are enrolled in school but do not attend the first day of school, or were enrolled in an alternative education

## CHILDREN AT RISK vs. TEA Dropout Rates by Schools for 2006

Campus	District	Freshman to Senior Grad Rate*	TEA Grad Rate	Grad Rate Difference	Freshman to Senior Drop-out Rate*	TEA (4 yr) Dropout Rate	Dropout Rate Difference
<b>Top 10 Freshman to Senior Graduation Rates*</b>							
Clements HS	Fort Bend ISD	95.3	96.5	-1.2	4.7	1.6	3.1
Lawrence E Elkins HS	Fort Bend ISD	92.7	92.3	0.4	7.3	2.6	4.7
Taylor HS	Katy ISD	91.9	94.4	-2.5	8.1	1.7	6.4
Stephen F Austin HS	Fort Bend ISD	90.6	95.7	-5.1	9.4	0.5	8.9
Dulles HS	Fort Bend ISD	90.0	91.3	-1.3	10.0	1.7	8.3
Danbury HS	Danbury ISD	89.8	98	-8.2	10.2	0	10.2
Kingwood HS	Humble ISD	89.8	92.7	-2.9	10.2	2.4	7.8
Memorial HS	Spring Branch ISD	87.8	93.5	-5.7	12.2	2.8	9.4
George Bush HS	Fort Bend ISD	87.6	88.2	-0.6	12.4	4.4	8.0
Kempner HS	Fort Bend ISD	87.5	88.9	-1.4	12.5	4.7	7.8
<b>Lowest Freshman to Senior Graduation Rates*</b>							
Lee HS	Houston ISD	24.0	36.6	-12.6	76.0	36.4	39.6
Sam Houston HS	Houston ISD	32.3	57.7	-25.4	67.7	18.3	49.4
Sharpstown HS	Houston ISD	32.4	59.6	-27.2	67.6	26	41.6
Kashmere HS	Houston ISD	33.0	57	-24.0	67.0	29.1	37.9
South Houston HS	Pasadena ISD	34.4	69.5	-35.1	65.6	17.1	48.5
Furr HS	Houston ISD	34.6	66.7	-32.1	65.4	11.1	54.3
Wheatley HS	Houston ISD	35.5	59.5	-24.0	64.5	23.9	40.6
Sterling HS	Houston ISD	35.9	73.3	-37.4	64.1	12.7	51.4
Sam Rayburn HS	Pasadena ISD	37.1	69	-31.9	62.9	14.7	48.2
Smiley HS	North Forest ISD	37.8	71.3	-33.5	62.2	21.5	40.7

Source: Texas Education Agency

\* CHILDREN AT RISK calculations

**NOTE:** Schools with ninth grade centers, unusual patterns of growth, or fewer than 100 students enrolled have been eliminated from the calculations. Charter schools have also been eliminated from this list.

### Healthy Passages 5th Grade Study

Of the student respondents, 99.5% report that they expect to graduate from high school, and 98.9% of the parent respondents reported an expectation that their child will graduate from high school.

program, will not be included in the graduation rate.<sup>124</sup> Changing the TEA definitions of dropouts has allowed for more accurate reporting of dropout and graduation rates.

CHILDREN AT RISK calculates freshmen to senior graduation rates using a method that is similar to the

Manhattan Institute's graduation calculations. A simple calculation was used comparing the number of a freshmen in an entering class and the number of graduating seniors in that school four years later. CHILDREN AT RISK adjusts for overall positive or negative population growth at that school. Compared to state calculations, this is a more stringent measure of how individual high schools performed in the retention of freshmen through graduation. After calculating freshmen to senior graduation rates, a more accurate dropout rate can be assessed.

Longitudinal dropout rates analyze student progress through high school.<sup>125</sup> A cohort of students is tracked

# Graduation and Dropout Rates (continued)

## Graduation Rates by District for 2006

District	TEA Graduation Rates	Freshman to Senior Graduation Rate*	TEA Longitudinal 4-year Dropout Rate	Freshman to Senior Dropout Rate*
Aldine	72.8	NA	10.1	NA
Alief	71	54.7	16.8	45.3
Channelview	71.7	47	16.4	53
Clear Creek	90.2	79	1.2	21
Crosby	87.3	74.1	6.8	25.9
Cypress-Fairbanks	89.1	74.9	2.2	25.1
Dayton	78.9	68.5	9.1	31.5
Deer Park	87	83.2	1.4	16.8
Fort Bend	89.8	84.7	4.4	15.3
Friendswood	92.9	78.9	1.0	21.1
Galena Park	83.1	66.3	6.6	33.7
Goose Creek	73	55.7	12	44.3
Houston	67.1	48.8	17.9	51.2
Huffman	87.8	84.2	1.7	15.8
Humble	84.7	77.1	7.7	22.9
Katy	90.6	80.5	2.2	19.5
Klein	84.5	67.4	5.3	32.6
La Porte	84.4	71	5.8	29
North Forest	77.5	46	16.1	54
Pasadena	74.3	46.3	11.5	53.7
Pearland	90.8	NA	3.3	NA
Sheldon	78	58.5	9.3	41.5
Spring	89.8	70	1.7	30
Spring Branch	84.3	66.4	7.8	33.6
Tomball	86.4	76.1	6.4	23.9
Waller	81	66.7	8.2	33.3

\* CHILDREN AT RISK calculations

**NOTE:** Districts that have ninth grade centers have been eliminated from the CHILDREN AT RISK calculations (NA).

over a number of years, from the time students enter a specified grade until the fall following their anticipated graduation date.<sup>126</sup> Then, the dropout rates are calculated by dividing the total number of students from the cohort who dropped out by year four by the number of students in the cohort.<sup>127</sup> Students who transfer in or out of the class are added or subtracted accordingly. Therefore, longitudinal dropout rates are not generated by grade level. This type of measurement is considered to be more stable over time when compared with annual dropout rate measurements.<sup>128</sup> Districts are not held accountable for dropouts

until the fall after their anticipated graduation date; however, schools can be held accountable for dropouts years after they have left school.

For the class of 2006, the Texas' self-reported graduation rate was 80.4% with Houston ISD at 67.1%.<sup>129</sup> CHILDREN AT RISK's calculated graduation rate for HISD was 48.8%. According to TEA, approximately 13.7% of students in HISD continued high school after their cohort finished, while Texas' average was 8.6%.<sup>130</sup> Overall, TEA reports that the longitudinal dropout rate in Texas was 8.8% for the class

## Top 5 Freshman-to-Senior Graduation Rates

School	School District
Clements High School	Fort Bend ISD
Lawrence E Elkins High School	Fort Bend ISD
Taylor High School	Katy ISD
Stephen F Austin High School	Fort Bend ISD
Dulles High School	Fort Bend ISD

\* CHILDREN AT RISK calculations using TEA data

of 2006. HISD reported a dropout rate two times that at 17.9%.<sup>131</sup> When broken down into ethnicities, TEA reported that Texas and HISD showed that minorities are dropping out at much higher rates than whites. In HISD, Hispanic students are nearly three times more likely to drop out at 21.3% when compared to the white student dropout rate of 7.8%.<sup>132</sup> African American students, with a 17.8% dropout rate in HISD, also are more likely to quit school than white students in the area.<sup>133</sup>

Dropping out of high school correlates with a number of negative outcomes. For example, the median income for high school dropouts age 25 and older in Harris County was \$19,570 in 2007.<sup>134</sup> In comparison, the

## Freshman-to-Senior Dropout Rates by District

Top 3 Best	Top 3 Worst
Fort Bend	Channelview
Huffman	Pasadena
Deer Park	Channelview

\* CHILDREN AT RISK calculations using TEA data

median income of those 25 and older in Harris County who have received a high school accreditation (including a General Educational Development certificate) was \$26,411.<sup>135</sup> In addition, 25.1% of the dropout population age 25 and older live below the poverty line.<sup>136</sup> In terms of health, dropouts over the age of 24 tend to report being in worse health than adults who are not dropouts, regardless of income. Dropouts also account for disproportionately higher percentages among prison and death row inmates.<sup>137</sup> It has been estimated that the United States could reduce the number of crimes committed by 100,000 a year and save \$1.4 billion annually, if it graduated 1% more males from high school per year.<sup>138</sup>

## Policy Implication

Dropouts cost a state in many different ways – through higher crime and incarceration rates, increased welfare, more dependence on public health care, and most significantly, the future economic benefits of earning a high school diploma. Texas’ failure to graduate so many of its students is a tragic story of wasted human potential and tremendous economic loss. Current demands for a highly educated labor market have created many barriers for those without high school diplomas, and individuals without a high school diploma face many difficulties in securing jobs with mere livable wages. Adolescents that drop out are three times as likely to be unemployed, underemployed, or working for very low wages.

The media alarm surrounding high school dropout rates is therefore well-warranted. Four-year graduation rates in Houston have fallen below 50%, according to CHILDREN AT RISK calculations. Independent evaluators have proven that state and national dropout calculations are inadequate and inaccurate. NCLB’s overemphasis on test-driven accountability, without a balanced enforcement of graduation rate accountability, has created perverse incentives for school officials to “push out” low-performing students, thus unintentionally worsening the dropout crisis. Thus, the calculation techniques of a great number of schools and districts permit many exceptions and fail to depict high school dropout and graduation rates accurately.

The quality of our future workforce, social services, and economy depends on the current education of our children. The vital connection between education and prosperity necessitates that public officials address this dropout crisis. Texas, considered the leader in creating and maintaining longitudinal data on its students, must take the lead. Officials must implement an accurate and transparent system of monitoring dropout and graduation rates, even where these rates are attached to accountability. Officials must work as well to enhance graduation rates; improved data is meaningful only in the context that it can be used to identify schools and districts that are failing their students, and to undertake the reform necessary to improvement. There has been substantial work done to identify some of the essential components of high school reforms that relate to keeping more students in school. It is time for us to take this knowledge and put it to use. Texas must realize that failure to look to the future will result in disastrous consequences for our state tomorrow.

# High School Rankings

**C**HILDREN AT RISK produces the Greater Houston High Schools Ranking Report every year to draw public attention to the state of our public education system. Published by the Houston Chronicle every spring, the analysis evaluates high schools on their performances based on a number of criteria including graduation rates, SAT/ACT performance, and enrollment in upper-level courses. In 2006, Houston ISD, the largest district in Harris County and the seventh-largest district in our nation, graduated only 48.8% of freshmen students in four years.

In 2008, the scope of high schools included in the analysis grew to rank 145 high schools in the Greater Houston area. The methodology became more stringent with regard to high school performance indicators. High schools were evaluated in 14 areas, and standards were set to judge how well high schools performed in not only graduating our students but also preparing them for college.

Houston ISD featured three of its high schools, DeBakey High School for Health Professions (ranked second), the High School for the Performing and Visual Arts (ranked third), and the High School for Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice (ranked ninth), in the top 10 High Schools in the Greater Houston area in 2008. However, the largest number of its schools, 14, ranked in the bottom tier. A common theme among these successful schools is a small, close-knit community of dedicated staff and students who share common interests. Among the top 10 were more affluent, suburban high schools including Memorial High School in Spring Branch ISD and Cinco Ranch in Katy ISD. However, YES Prep Southeast Campus, with its focused mission to have all students graduate from a four-year college or university, ranked first. Not included in the Rankings Report in 2007 due to its relatively new establishment, YES Prep Southeast ranked as the best overall high school in 2008. With nearly 80% of its student body qualifying for free or reduced-priced lunch, YES Prep demonstrates that with adequate support systems and high expectations every child can achieve academic success.

The 14 indicators used to evaluate a high school's performance included the percentage of 11th grade students who achieved Texas Success Initiative standards in English Language Arts, and Math Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) tests. According to the Texas Education Agency, this level of proficiency in reading, writing, and

Rank	Campus	District
Top 10 High Schools		
1	YES Prep Southeast Campus	YES Prep Public Schools
2	DeBakey High School for the Health Professions	Houston ISD
3	High School for the Performing & Visual Arts	Houston ISD
3	Clements HS	Fort Bend ISD
5	Cinco Ranch HS	Katy ISD
6	Memorial HS	Spring Branch ISD
7	Taylor HS	Katy ISD
8	Westchester Academy for International Studies	Spring Branch ISD
9	High School for Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice	Houston ISD
10	Stephen F Austin HS	Fort Bend ISD

mathematics skills is necessary prior to enrolling in college. Also included in the analysis was the percentage of 11th grade students who passed the exit-level social studies and science subject tests of the TAKS. Due to feedback from previous rankings, CHILDREN AT RISK included the percentage of students who not only took the SAT and advanced placement (AP) exams but also the ACT and International Baccalaureate (IB) tests.

CHILDREN AT RISK assumes a well-performing high school will encourage all of its students to take the SAT/ACT test in preparation for college admission. Similarly, a high school should have a greater percentage of its student body taking at least one AP or IB test because AP/IB exams are an indication of college readiness and demonstrate if a high school is encouraging students to take challenging higher-level courses that prepare them for college. The study examines whether or not high schools are adequately preparing students for these exams. To judge schools on their passing performance, analysts used the mean SAT and ACT test scores and reviewed the percentage of students who passed at least one AP or IB exam. The study included the percentage of students who took and received credit for at least one advanced course. These include, but are not limited to, AP, IB, and dual-enrollment courses.

Other factors such as class size, four-year same-school graduation rates, percentage of students who completed the Texas Recommended High School Plan, and the percentage of economically disadvantaged students continued to be included the analysis. With the ultimate

## *Engle v. Vitale*, 370 U.S. 421 (1962)

In this landmark decision, the United States Supreme Court ruled that prayer in schools was a violation of the Establishment clause of the First Amendment, because it attempted to “establish or endorse” a religion. Since *Engle*, the court has also ruled against clergy led prayer at high school graduation ceremonies, in *Lee v. Weisman*, 505 U.S. 577 (1992), as well as student led prayer at football games, in *Sante Fe ISD v. Doe*, 530 U.S. 290 (2000).

goal being children leading successful lives, high school graduation is the first step to ensuring that success. Consequently, the greatest weight in the High School Rankings Report is given to four-year, same school graduation rates (27%), with significant weight also given to low socio-economic status (18%). Many experts, including CHILDREN AT RISK, conclude that schools deserve recognition that are successful with a student population that is historically the least likely to score well on standardized tests and the most likely to drop out. The Texas State Board of Education Recommended High School Program, consisting of 24 credits, is designed to

prepare high school graduates with a solid foundation in English, math, science, and social studies. It also includes foreign language, speech, fine arts, economics, technology studies, health education, and physical education. Rather than meeting minimum requirements to graduate, a top-performing high school requires students to achieve this state standard as their academic goal.

All subject-area TAKS scores, SAT/ACT, and AP/IB success are weighted equally at 10% in each category. Because rigor in high school is an important indicator of whether or not students are prepared for college-level work, CHILDREN AT RISK weighted the percentage of students enrolled in advanced courses at 5%. Class size and the percentage of students graduating under the Texas Recommended Plan are weighted equally at 10%.

However, high schools with separate ninth-grade centers, night schools, or alternative education programs are not included in this analysis. Also, a high school must have more than 100 students enrolled and must have had a full freshman class for four consecutive years, beginning in fall 2002-2003.

# High School Rankings (continued)

Rank	Campus	District
Tier 1		
11	Lawrence E Elkins HS	Fort Bend ISD
12	Dulles HS	Fort Bend ISD
13	Clear Lake HS	Clear Creek ISD
14	Stratford HS	Spring Branch ISD
15	Eastwood Academy	Houston ISD
16	Lamar HS	Houston ISD
17	Kempner HS	Fort Bend ISD
18	Klein HS	Klein ISD
19	Kerr HS	Alief ISD
20	Bellaire HS	Houston ISD
21	Carnegie Vanguard HS	Houston ISD
22	Cy-Fair HS	Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
22	George Bush HS	Fort Bend ISD
24	Kingwood HS	Humble ISD
25	Friendswood HS	Friendswood ISD
26	Harmony Science Academy	Charter School
27	Hightower HS	Fort Bend ISD
28	Clear Brook HS	Clear Creek ISD
29	Barbers Hill HS	Barbers Hill ISD
30	Royal HS	Royal ISD
31	Needville HS	Needville ISD
32	Katy HS	Katy ISD
33	Montgomery HS	Montgomery ISD

Rank	Campus	District
Tier 2		
34	Galena Park HS	Galena Park ISD
35	Westside HS	Houston ISD
36	Deer Park HS	Deer Park ISD
37	Foster HS	Lamar CISD
37	Oakridge HS	Conroe ISD
37	Hargrave HS	Huffman ISD
40	Cypress Falls HS	Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
40	Cypress Creek HS	Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
42	Westfield HS	Spring ISD
43	Sweeny HS	Sweeny ISD
44	Brazoswood HS	Brazosport ISD
44	Spring HS	Spring ISD
46	Jersey Village HS	Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
47	Klein Collins HS	Klein ISD
48	Langham Creek HS	Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
48	Cankey Creek HS	Conroe ISD
50	Humble HS	Humble ISD
51	Spring Woods HS	Spring Branch ISD
51	Mayde Creek HS	Katy ISD
53	Clear Creek HS	Clear Creek ISD
54	Cypress Springs HS	Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
54	Cypress Ridge HS	Cypress-Fairbanks ISD
54	Lamar Cons HS	Lamar CISD
57	Willis HS	Willis ISD
58	Tomball HS	Tomball ISD
59	Magnolia HS	Magnolia ISD
59	Hempstead HS	Hempstead ISD
61	B F Terry HS	Lamar CISD
62	Crosby HS	Crosby ISD
63	Anahuac HS	Anahuac ISD
64	Waller HS	Waller ISD

Rank	Campus	District
Tier 3		
65	La Porte HS	La Porte ISD
65	Barbara Jordan HS	Houston ISD
65	Ball HS	Galveston ISD
68	Danbury HS	Danbury ISD
69	Washington BT HS	Houston ISD
70	Hastings HS	Alief ISD
71	Tarkington HS	Tarkington ISD
72	Milby HS	Houston ISD
73	Liberty HS	Liberty ISD
74	Klein Oak HS	Klein ISD
75	Conroe HS	Conroe ISD
76	Chavez HS	Houston ISD
77	Hardin HS	Hardin ISD
78	Carver HS For Applied Technology/Engineering	Aldine ISD
78	Brazosport HS	Brazosport ISD
80	Sterling HS	Goose Creek CISD
80	East Chambers HS	East Chambers ISD
82	Dayton HS	Dayton ISD
83	Davis HS	Houston ISD
84	Angleton HS	Angleton ISD
85	Forest Brook HS	North Forest ISD
86	Austin HS	Houston ISD
86	Scarborough HS	Houston ISD
86	Taylor HS	Alief ISD
89	Thurgood Marshall HS	Fort Bend ISD
90	Northbrook HS	Spring Branch ISD
91	Waltrip HS	Houston ISD
92	Texas City HS	Texas City ISD
93	Alta Academy	Houston ISD
94	Pasadena HS	Pasadena ISD
94	Santa Fe HS	Santa Fe ISD
96	Dobie HS	Pasadena ISD
96	Lee HS	Goose Creek CISD
98	Hull-Daisetta HS	Hull-Daisetta ISD
99	Sharpstown HS	Houston ISD
99	Stafford HS	Stafford ISD

Rank	Campus	District
Tier 4		
101	Channelview HS	Channelview ISD
102	Reagan HS	Houston ISD
103	Alvin HS	Alvin ISD
104	Furr HS	Houston ISD
104	Smiley HS	North Forest ISD
106	North Shore HS	Galena Park ISD
106	C E King HS	Sheldon ISD
108	Cleveland HS	Cleveland ISD
109	Elsik HS	Alief ISD
110	Jesse Jackson Academy	Charter School
111	Hitchcock HS	Hitchcock ISD
112	Calvin Nelms HS	Charter School
113	Klein Forest HS	Klein ISD
114	Columbia HS	Columbia-Brazoria ISD
114	Worthing HS	Houston ISD
116	Yates HS	Houston ISD
117	Sam Houston HS	Houston ISD
118	Madison HS	Houston ISD
119	Willowridge HS	Fort Bend ISD
120	Jones HS	Houston ISD
121	New Caney HS	New Caney ISD
122	Lee HS	Houston ISD
123	Dickinson HS	Dickinson ISD
124	Splendora HS	Splendora ISD
124	Comquest Academy	Charter School
126	South Houston HS	Pasadena ISD
127	Sam Rayburn HS	Pasadena ISD
128	La Marque HS	La Marque ISD
129	Raul Yzaguirre School For Success	Charter School
130	Southwest HS	Charter School
131	Girls & Boys Prep Academy	Charter School
132	H P Carter Career Center	Houston ISD
133	George I Sanchez HS	Charter School
134	Westbury HS	Houston ISD
135	Kashmere HS	Houston ISD
136	Wheatley HS	Houston ISD
137	Sterling HS	Houston ISD
138	Clear View Education Center	Clear Creek ISD
139	Houston Heights HS	Charter School
140	Quest HS	Humble ISD
141	Contemporary Learning Center	Houston ISD
142	American Academy Of Excellence Charter School	Charter School
143	North Houston HS For Business	Charter School
144	Houston Can! Academy Charter School	Charter School
145	Alphonso Crutch's-Life Support Center	Charter School

# Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate

**Indicator:** The percentage of 11th and 12th grade HISD students that scored at or above the criterion for passing the AP and IB examinations

Year	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Indicator	NA	71.2%	74.3%	67.4%	64.9%	61.4%	64.0%	66.8%	59.1%	54.7%	54.1%

Source: Texas Education Agency

**Indicator:** The percentage of students in Harris County who scored at or above the criterion for passing at least one of the AP or IB examinations

Year	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Indicator	64.9%	66.1%	62.1%	59.0%	56.3%	57.4%	55.5%	54.2%	53.0%	49.6%

Source: Texas Education Agency

Advanced Placement (AP) exams allow high school students the opportunity to receive credit or an advanced standing at most universities in the country through 37 AP courses and exams in 22 subject areas. Different high schools offer varying AP classes in literature, languages, history, and math.<sup>142</sup>

The International Baccalaureate Organization is a non-profit educational organization established in Geneva, Switzerland, in 1968. Its purpose is to promote quality education for children around the world. Students age 16–19 are allowed to take diploma program courses and in some cases receive International Baccalaureate (IB) diplomas. At the end of the course examinations or two-year course study, students take IB examinations to receive possible college credit. Six public high schools in Harris County offer IB courses and diplomas: Bellaire High School, Dwight D. Eisenhower High School, Humble High School, Klein Oak High School, Mirabeau B. Lamar Senior High School, and Westchester Academy for International Studies.<sup>143</sup>

The AP and IB examinations allow high school students to get a head start on college-level coursework and to improve their writing and problem-solving skills. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) tracks the percentage of students passing the AP and IB examinations in the state of Texas has decreased over the past few years.<sup>144</sup> In 2004, the mean score of passing examinees in Texas was 53.9%. In 2005, this decreased to 51.8%, and in 2006, the percentage of students who passed decreased further to 51.3%.<sup>145</sup> Students in Harris County passed these exams at a rate slightly higher than the state average in 2004 and 2005, but these numbers also have decreased over the past three years. In 2004, the mean score of passing examinees in Harris County was 54.2%. In 2005, this

## Texas vs. the Nation

In 2006, 51.3% of AP and IB examinees in Texas passed the exams, compared to the national average of 58%.

Source: The College Board

number decreased to 53% and further decreased in 2006 to less than the state average at 49.6% of students passing. Katy ISD has the highest passage rate of the large school districts in the Greater Houston area at 84.8% in 2005 and 83.6% in 2006. The district with the lowest performance on AP exams in Harris County is North Forest, with only 2% passing in 2005 and 1.5% in 2006. Houston ISD is the largest school districts in the Greater Houston area and its numbers are slightly higher than the state average with 54.7% passing in 2005 and 54.1% passing in 2006.<sup>146</sup>

When considering these numbers, take into account how the number of students taking the AP and IB exams changes each year. The number of examinees has been increasing in Texas due to additional state funding, appropriated by the 79th Texas Legislature to the TEA for the AP/IB Incentive Program. In 2003, 15.7% of all HISD students took the AP and IB exams; this number has been steadily rising over the past few years to 18.7% of HISD examinees in 2006.<sup>147</sup>

## Policy Implication

The state of Texas has made advances in creating more opportunities for low-income students to take AP/IB tests by decreasing the cost of these exams. Unfortunately, while more students take these exams, more students are failing. The AP and IB program are great tools to get students prepared for rigorous coursework and college-level thinking, so students enrolled in these courses must be more adequately prepared for the academic challenges presented.

# Gifted and Talented Students

**Indicator:** The total count of students enrolled in gifted and talented classes in Harris County

Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Indicator	53,220	54,176	48,811	48,825	50,771	52,188	54,316	55,301

Source: Academic Excellence Indicator System, Texas Education Agency

**Indicator:** The percentage of Harris County students enrolled in gifted and talented programs

Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Indicator	8.70%	8.10%	6.80%	6.70%	6.60%	6.50%	6.40%	6.30%

Source: Academic Excellence Indicator System, Texas Education Agency

Texas defines gifted and talented students as children or youth who perform at or show the potential to perform at a remarkably high level of accomplishment when compared to others of the same age, experience, or environment and who exhibit high-performance capability in an intellectual, creative, or artistic area; possess an unusual capacity for leadership; or excel in a specific academic field.<sup>148</sup> The Texas Legislature passed legislation regarding the education of gifted students for the first time in 1977. The identification process for recognizing gifted and talented students consists of teacher recommendations and evaluations, achievement and aptitude tests, and/or good grades.<sup>149</sup>

While no one perfect program exists for teaching gifted and talented students, numerous methods can be incorporated such as accommodations in the regular classroom, part-time assignment to both regular and special classes, full-time grouping with students of similar abilities, and acceleration or grade advancement. Enrichment programs that consist of assignments and activities that broaden and deepen the knowledge of students is the most commonly used method for teaching the gifted and talented.<sup>150</sup>

Instructors who work with these students should be trained to challenge and nurture the students' unique strengths and help with the development of the skills necessary to learn the curriculum. Approximately 61%, however, of the nation's teachers do not have training in gifted and talented education.<sup>151</sup> Moreover, many potentially gifted and talented students go unrecognized due to the lack of qualified instructors and achievement tests that can miss some of the most talented students tested.

About 6% of all students in the nation receive gifted and talented education. The percentage in Harris County schools is consistent with this figure: 6.4% of all students in Harris County were enrolled in gifted and talented programs in 2006 and 6.3% in 2007. A gradual decrease in these percentages has occurred since 2000, when 8.7% of students were recognized as gifted and talented.<sup>152</sup>

In the 2006-2007 school year, 55,301 students enrolled in a Harris County gifted and talented course. The districts in the county spent an average of \$93.15 per student on these programs but employed less than 3% of their staff as gifted and talented instructors.<sup>153</sup>

## Policy Implication

Gifted and talented education involves the smallest percentage of students, the smallest percentage of teachers, and receives the least amount of funding in Harris County schools. Many potential GT students generally are overlooked due to inaccurate identification method. Their boredom often leads to behavior problems and poor grades. Unqualified teachers may associate poor grades and behavior problems with poor academic performance instead of recognizing the advanced capabilities of the student. Teacher evaluations and recommendations can be flawed due to lack of sensitivity and inadequate training, leaving educators insufficiently able to recognize the gifted and talented students within regular classrooms.<sup>154</sup>

Most schools, however, should be able to identify 15% or more of their student populations as gifted and talented.<sup>155</sup> By improving the methods for identifying students, encouraging, and recruiting more certified gifted and talented instructors and increasing funding as necessary for GT programs, the unique strengths of these valuable students will be nurtured.

# College Admission Testing

**Indicator:** The mean ACT score for students in Harris County

Year Calculated	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Indicator	20	19.9	19.9	20	19.8	19.7

Source: Academic Excellence Indicator System, Texas Education Agency

**Indicator:** The mean SAT score for students in Harris County

Year	1990	1992	1994	1996	1998	1999	2000	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Indicator	861	868	880	991	988	989	977	975	969	977	971	969	961

Source: Academic Excellence Indicator System, Texas Education Agency

The SAT and ACT are standardized tests frequently used by colleges and universities in the United States to aid in the selection of incoming students. Due to the variability and subjectivity of evaluating students for high school preparation and college readiness across states, the SAT and ACT serve as methods of determining how prepared a student may be for higher education.

Until March 2005, SAT test scores were comprised of two sections, critical reading and math. Beginning with the class of 2006, the College Board fully implemented a writing component into the SAT and increased the score maximum from 1600 to 2400.<sup>156</sup> The content of the SAT was changed to better reflect what students are, or should be, learning in high school. Written understanding and expression, an undeniably important skill for success in college and beyond, was fully integrated into the SAT through a section that includes multiple-choice questions measuring a student's ability to identify sentence errors, improve sentences and paragraphs, and an essay.<sup>157</sup> Changes were made to the math and reading component of the exam. Within the math section, problems were expanded to cover other areas typically taught during third-year high school math courses and quantitative comparisons were eliminated. Formerly known as the verbal section, the reading component now includes short and long reading passages and analogies have been eliminated.<sup>158</sup>

Including the writing component, the mean SAT score for the class of 2007 in Texas was 1481 compared to the national mean SAT score of 1511.<sup>159</sup> Due to the novelty of the writing component, many state reports and universities have yet to embrace fully the revised SAT. Texas reports a state average of 991,<sup>160</sup> while the national average in reading and math was 1021 for the class of 2006.<sup>161</sup> Harris County fell below both the state and national average with a mean score of 961. The College Board reports that Texas had a mean average of 999 for the class of 2007 compared to the national average of 1017.<sup>162</sup> Texas continues to rank in the lowest quartile when compared to the rest of the nation. In

## Texas vs. the Nation

Texas ranks as the 44th lowest mean SAT score and the 40th lowest average ACT score in the nation.

Sources: Texas and College Bound Seniors, 2007. College Board; Average ACT Scores by State: 2007 ACT-Tested Graduates. ACT, Inc.

2004, Texas ranked 48th in average SAT scores; in 2006, Texas ranked 44th.<sup>163</sup> Similarly, students in Harris County continue to show almost no positive growth with an average math and reading score of 975 over the last decade. Of all Texas graduates in 2007, 52% participated in the SAT compared to the national participation rate of 48%.<sup>164</sup>

The ACT, unlike the SAT, is a curriculum-based test that broadly assesses a student's educational development in four skill areas – English, mathematics, reading, and science. Because the ACT tests are based on what is taught in high school, students generally are more comfortable with the ACT than they are with traditional aptitude tests such as the SAT.<sup>165</sup> The ACT reports college readiness benchmark scores that signify the “minimum score needed on an ACT subject-area test to indicate a 50% chance of obtaining a B or higher or about a 75% chance of obtaining a C or higher in the corresponding credit-bearing college courses, which include English composition, algebra, social science and biology.”<sup>166</sup> These scores, derived from the actual performance of students in college, are 18 for English, 22 for math, 21 for reading, and 24 in science.<sup>167</sup> After a curriculum survey of the nation's high schools and colleges to determine the writing skills that are being taught in high school and those expected of first-year college students, the ACT incorporated an optional writing component to the test in 2004–2005.<sup>168</sup>

In 2007, 30% of Texas graduates took the ACT. The average composite score was 20.5<sup>169</sup> compared to a national average of 21.2.<sup>170</sup> Only 63% of test takers in

## Mean SAT Score by Ethnicity

	Class of 2003		Class of 2004		Class of 2005		Class of 2006	
	Harris County	Texas	Harris County	Texas	Harris County	Texas	Harris County	Texas
Asian American	1034	1074	1066	1070	1053	1095	1043	1096
White	1054	1054	1042	1050	1035	1059	1027	1059
Hispanic	894	911	926	913	918	902	918	903
African American	845	841	859	843	857	855	856	860

Source: Academic Excellence Indicator System, 2006, 2007. Texas Education Agency

## Comparison of Verbal and Math SAT Scores

Class of	Verbal		Math		Writing	
	Texas	National	Texas	National	Texas	National
2003	493	507	500	519	NA	NA
2004	493	508	499	518	NA	NA
2005	493	508	502	520	NA	NA
2006	491	503	506	518	487	497
2007	492	502	507	515	482	494

Source: Texas and College Bound Seniors, 2006, 2007. College Board

Texas were considered prepared for college-level English composition, 41% were ready for algebra, 47% prepared in social science, 24% in biology, and only 19% of test-takers were prepared for college-level work in all four test areas.<sup>171</sup> In Harris County, the class of 2006 achieved an average score of 19.9, less than both the Texas and national average. Similar in pattern to average SAT scores, ACT scores hover between 19.7 and 20, showing little change over time.<sup>172</sup>

Over the years, minority and low-income students severely have been underrepresented in higher education and in the nation's college admission test takers. African American and Hispanic minorities continue to lag behind their peers in test scores. For the class of 2006, African American students in Texas scored, on average, nearly 200 points less on the SAT than their white counterparts. Hispanic students scored 150 points less than their peers.<sup>173</sup> Again, the ACT average test scores show a similar pattern with African American and Hispanic students

## ACT Comparison

Class of	Texas	National
2003	20.1	20.8
2004	20.2	20.8
2005	20.2	20.9
2006	20.3	21.1
2007	20.5	21.2

Source: ACT High School Profile Report, 2007. Texas. ACT, Inc.

scoring nearly five and four points lower, respectively, than their white counterparts.<sup>174</sup> However, the class of 2007 had the most diverse SAT takers group on record, with minority students comprising 39%<sup>175</sup> with more African American, Hispanic, Asian American students, and first-generation college goers and students whose first language was not exclusively English who have ever taken the test prior.<sup>176</sup> A 31% increase occurred in the number of students receiving SAT fee waivers.<sup>177</sup>

## Policy Implication

Despite growing skepticism that the college admission tests do not truly reflect a student's critical thinking ability or aptitude to succeed in college, Texas high school students continue to show the least growth and one of the lowest average SAT and ACT scores when compared to the nation. Texas must work to continue to increase the overall rate of participation, with specific focus on minority and low-income students. Texas must work even harder to increase the rigor of students' coursework to prepare them for high-level thinking and equip them with the skills needed to succeed for life after graduation.

# Student Assessment: TAKS

**Indicator:** Average percentage of students in Harris County passing the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) tests in all subjects in all grades

Year	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Indicator	69.6%	67.7%	62.1%	64.5%	67.1%

Source: Academic Excellence Indicator System, Downloads of Selected Data, Texas Education Agency

In 1999, the 76th Texas Legislature mandated that the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) would start being administered in the 2002–2003 school year. The TAKS replaced the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) to provide an improved measurement of student achievement based on the curriculum set by the basic curriculum for all Texas schools in each subject area at each grade level.<sup>178</sup> The test was created through combined efforts of the Pearson Educational Measurement, the Texas Education Agency, and Texas educators. The Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) is the state-mandated curriculum and determines the objectives and guidelines tested on the TAKS.<sup>179</sup>

The TAKS is administered to students each year from grade 3 through grade 11 in different subject areas for each year. The mathematics assessment is given every year. Reading is tested at grades 3–9, and English language arts is tested in grades 10 and 11. Students in grades 4 and 7 are given the writing exam; science is tested at grades 5, 10, and 11, and the social studies exam is given to students in grades 8, 10, and 11. Students who have not mastered the English language can take their exams in Spanish in grades 3 through 6. One prerequisite for a student to receive a high school diploma is a satisfactory performance on each TAKS exam taken in grade 11.<sup>180</sup>

In 2006, an average of 64.5% of students in all grades in Harris County school public school districts passed TAKS

## Houston vs. Texas

In 2007, 89% of third-grade students and 82% of fifth-grade students in Texas passed the TAKS reading test, compared to 85% of third graders and 76% of fifth graders who passed in Houston ISD.

Source: Texas Education Agency

exams in all subjects, which is 2.4% higher than those that passed in 2005. In 2007, this number increased to 67.1% of all students passing all exams. Since 2003 when the TAKS was first administered, Katy ISD has been the top-performing school district in the Greater Houston area having the highest percentage of students passing in 2007 with 82%. North Forest ISD has been the lowest performing district every year that the TAKS has been administered, with 37% of all students passing all tests.<sup>181</sup>

Studies show that, while each state administers an annual assessment under the requirements of No Child Left Behind, a great discrepancy exists between the proficiency levels in each state. One study compared each state's exam against the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and issued letter grades based on the strength of that state's own proficiency standards. In 2005, Texas's overall grade was D+ and ranked 37th out of the 48 states assessed.<sup>182</sup>

## Percentage Meeting Performance Standards on All Tests

Year	5th Grade	8th Grade	10th Grade	11th Grade
2003	63.4%	70.1%	55.4%	54.3%
2004	60.7%	64.6%	49.3%	72.0%
2005	52.4%	58.7%	39.8%	65.1%
2006	64.3%	52.3%	47.1%	64.8%
2007	67.4%	60.0%	48.0%	67.0%

Source: Academic Excellence Indicator System, Downloads of Selected Data, Texas Education Agency

## Passing TAKS All Grades, All Tests, by District

District	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Aldine	69	65	59	63	67
Alief	59	57	53	56	58
Channelview	56	57	49	52	58
Crosby	71	68	58	63	68
Cypress-Fairbanks	82	79	74	73	75
Deer Park	83	81	76	78	79
North Forest	37	39	32	34	37
Galena Park	71	69	60	62	65
Goose Creek	66	66	63	65	67
Houston	58	57	50	52	57
Humble	77	73	68	72	73
Katy	85	83	79	81	82
Klein	80	77	71	74	75
La Porte	75	75	69	69	69
Pasadena	70	67	62	62	63
Spring	70	66	60	62	62
Spring Branch	79	77	74	76	78
Tomball	78	77	72	76	79
Sheldon	58	52	48	54	59
Huffman	70	69	64	66	69
Average Score:	69.6	67.7	62.1	64.5	67.0

Source: Academic Excellence Indicator System, Downloads of Selected Data, Texas Education Agency

## Passing TAKS All Grades, All Tests, Racial and Ethnic Breakdown

	African American	White	Hispanic	Asian	Native American
2003	57.7%	78.9%	62.8%	84.3%	79.7%
2004	55.5%	77.5%	61.5%	83.7%	72.2%
2005	49.1%	72.3%	55.1%	81.8%	65.2%
2006	51.5%	76.5%	57.5%	83.0%	69.5%
2007	55.1%	78.6%	61.0%	83.1%	67.5%

Source: Academic Excellence Indicator System, Downloads of Selected Data, Texas Education Agency

## Policy Implication

Since its inception in 2003, the TAKS has been received a great deal of skepticism and has been blamed for the decreasing quality of classroom instruction. The accountability system of the Texas Education Agency is based on these high-stakes tests, so the school districts are under tremendous pressure to train their students to perform well on these tests, which can consequently limit the focus of students' overall learning experiences. While a standard statewide assessment does serve as a critical check on schools, a reform to the TAKS and the way it is administered may serve to increase student achievement.

# Math and Science

## Texas vs. the Nation

The U.S. ranked above On the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), Texas students performed above (286) the national average (280) in math and below (143) the national average (147) in science.

Source: National Center for Education Statistics: NAEP

## U.S. vs. the World

The U.S. ranked above the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMMS) international averages for both fourth- and eighth-grade math and science.

Source: National Center for Education Statistics: TIMMS

## INDICATORS

**5th Grade Math:** Average percentage of Harris County students who met standard performance on 5th grade math TAKS

Year	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Percentage (English)	76.3%	80.0%	77.5%	81.9%	85.0%
Percentage (Spanish)	56.4%	60.6%	42.7%	46.7%	59.3%

Source: Academic Excellence Indicator System, Texas Education Agency

**5th Grade Science :** Average percentage of Harris County students who met standard performance on 5th grade science TAKS

Year	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Percentage (English)	54.7%	68.2%	61.4%	74.8%	76.8%
Percentage (Spanish)	17.2%	32.5%	23.8%	33.3%	40.2%

Source: Academic Excellence Indicator System, Texas Education Agency

**8th Grade Math:** Average percentage of Harris County students who met standard performance on the 8th grade math TAKS

Year	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Percentage	63.3%	67.7%	63.3%	68.7%	73.9%

Source: Academic Excellence Indicator System, Texas Education Agency

**8th Grade Science:** Average percentage of Harris County students who met standard performance on 8th grade science TAKS

Year	2006	2007
Percentage	60.9%	69.5%

Source: Academic Excellence Indicator System, Texas Education Agency

**11th Grade Math:** Average percentage of Harris County students who met standard performance on the 11th grade math TAKS

Year	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Percentage	71.3%	85.7%	73.6%	77.6%	78.1%

Source: Academic Excellence Indicator System, Texas Education Agency

**11th Grade Science:** Average percentage of Harris County students who met standard performance on 11th grade science TAKS

Year	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Percentage	70.7%	84.6%	72.3%	75.6%	78.1%

Source: Academic Excellence Indicator System, Texas Education Agency

The Texas Essential Knowledge of Skills (TEKS) represents the basic curriculum for all Texas schools in each subject area at each grade level. The mathematics TEKS are assessed annually through the math TAKS, which is administered every year from grades 3 through 11. The science TEKS are assessed less frequently, in grades 5, 10, and 11. In 2005, the State Board of Education adopted passing standards for an eighth-grade science TAKS, which began being administered in 2006.<sup>183</sup>

Since the TAKS was first administered in 2003, trends show significantly higher passing rates in both the math and science TAKS with students who are in elementary school at grade five and high school at grade 11. Students taking the TAKS in middle school traditionally have not done as well comparatively.<sup>184</sup> Over the past few years, the percentage of Harris County English-speaking students meeting TAKS performance standards has increased annually.

In 2007, an average of 85% of Harris County fifth-grade students taking math TAKS in English and 76.8% of fifth graders taking science TAKS in English met standards.<sup>185</sup> The percentage of students who took these exams in Spanish and met the performance standards was significantly lower at 59.3% for math and 40.2% for science. During this same year, 73.9% of eighth graders met the TAKS math standards, and 11th graders came in slightly higher at 78.1%. Results for the science TAKS were much less optimistic for eighth graders; only 69.5% met standards, and 11th graders saw a passing percentage identical to that of the math exam at 78.1%. Katy ISD had some of the highest performance rates across grade levels and subjects, and North Forest ISD was consistently the lowest. With the exception of Sheldon ISD, all school districts in Harris County that administered that TAKS in Spanish to fifth-grade students saw drastically lower proportions of students who met performance standards when compared to the English tests.<sup>186</sup>

Government officials have started to focus efforts on improving the math and science competency of students in Texas. Governor Rick Perry launched the Texas Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math Initiative (TSTEM) aimed at improving math and science achievement. This initiative has served as a new component of the Texas High school Project (THSP), which is a \$180 million public-private initiative with the goal of increasing graduation and college enrollment rates all over Texas. Provided with funds from the THSP, TSTEM is working to develop the nation's leading innovation economy workforce through the establishment of academies for students, training centers for teachers, and curriculum that can be used to strengthen math and science performance for students across Texas.<sup>187</sup>

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## Policy Implication

Currently, students who are “somewhat comfortable” with mathematical and scientific equations, have “adequate problem-solving skills,” are “developing abstract thinking,” and make “some connections” across concepts are able to meet the TAKS performance standards.<sup>188</sup> Although trends show that percentages of students in Harris County who are meeting the TAKS performance standards consistently are increasing, the standards need to be reevaluated to ensure that students are truly acquiring the essential knowledge and skills in math and science. Furthermore, elementary school students who take the math and science TAKS in Spanish must be more adequately prepared to meet and rise above these performance standards at a level consistent with their peers who take the exams in English. Numerous opportunities are available for young students who have a good foundation of math and science, both in higher levels of education as well as in the job market.

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# Agenda for Change

## Testing and Assessments

- Pilot an alternative to the TAKS exam. The average pass rate for students in Harris County is lower than that of the state, and Texas has one of the lowest proficiency standards in the country.
- Increase government efforts that focus on improving math and science competency of students in Texas. While students in Harris County are improving performance on math and science assessments, they must have better competency in the subject areas to continue to succeed at higher grade levels.
- Provide more accessible opportunities and encouragement for high school students to pursue rigorous high school curricula, college level course work, and advanced placement exams.

## Dropouts

- Develop a transparent method for calculating accurate dropout rates. Children at Risk conducted a study finding that Houston ISD has a current graduation rate of 48.8%.
- Target students “at-risk” for dropping out in earlier grades by implementing smaller learning communities which address students’ needs on a more individualized basis.
- Grant funding for longer school days in underperforming districts to keep students engaged in the classroom and school activities.
- Support of Educational Programs
- Augment vocational programs around the state to provide more students with a broad range of skills that enhance their ability to compete in the workforce. Currently, only 18% of students in Harris County are enrolled in these programs.
- Extend funding to school districts for Pregnancy Related Services (PRS) to teen parents until graduation.
- Enhance bilingual education programs provided to the greater than 100,000 limited English proficient students in Harris County without isolating these students from their English-speaking peers.

## Teacher Quality

- Strengthen policies for teachers regarding disciplinary/behavior management to better equip teachers with tools to decrease referrals to Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs (DAEP). Approximately 80% of DAEP students are sent from schools with a zero tolerance policy towards disciplinary treatment.
- Encourage exemplary teachers to work in hard-to-staff and hard-to-serve schools by providing them with incentive pay. Highly skilled and dedicated teachers

## Early Childhood Education

- Implement a mandatory universal kindergarten and program in Texas to ensure that all children have access to a sound educational start. The availability of these programs also positively impacts parents’ ability to work and to provide for their families while their children are enrolled at school during the day.
- Continue federal support of Head Start and Early Head Start which is essential in supporting families with children living in and near poverty. Establish smaller student-to-teacher ratios in Kindergarten and Pre-Kindergarten.

## Child Care

- Increase pre-service hours for child care workers working in licensed child care facilities. Currently, the minimum requirement is eight hours. Early childhood educators in licensed child care programs have few requirements in terms of on-going training and professional development.
- Continue to emphasize the need for quality, affordable before- and after-school programs. School-age child care programs fill the gaps in communities by offering resources and experiences that families and school sometimes are unable to provide.