

# Texas Education Today

News from the Texas Education Agency



## New SBOE board sworn in

The January-February State Board of Education meeting was the first meeting after the election of all 15 board members in November. During the first meeting after redistricting and an election, the board members must draw for terms of office, elect officers and be assigned to committees.

The board elected Thomas Ratliff, R-Mount Pleasant, as vice chair and Mavis Knight, D-Dallas, as secretary. The chair of the board, Barbara Cargill, was appointed to that post by the governor.

For complete committee assignments [see page 9](#).

## Sunset

### TEA continuation recommended

The Texas Sunset Advisory Commission recently recommended that the Texas Education Agency be continued for 12 years but suggests a number of changes including eliminating the State Board for Educator Certification and transferring adult basic education to the Texas Workforce Commission. [complete story on page 2]

## School Finance

### Funding system ruled unconstitutional

A state district judge on Feb. 4 declared the state's school finance system unconstitutional, saying the state had fallen short of its constitutional obligation to "make suitable provisions for the support and maintenance of an efficient system of public free schools."

[complete story on page 10]

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## Sunset

**TEA recommended to continue for 12 years with changes**

The Texas Sunset Advisory Commission recently recommended that the Texas Education Agency be continued for 12 years but suggests a number of changes including eliminating the State Board for Educator Certification and transferring adult basic education to the Texas Workforce Commission.

A sunset bill with the changes is expected to be filed and considered by the Legislature but a bill had not been filed by press time.

The sunset report noted that the agency lost about one-third of its staff and its general revenue during the 2011 downsizing and was working to adjust to this new reality. Consequently, many of the sunset recommendations call for eliminating or scaling back duties that are not core to the agency's mission.



"Although the agency has recently experienced a drastic downsizing of its staff, its responsibilities have not been similarly reduced. Redefining the agency's powers and duties in statute and eliminating a variety of outdated and unnecessary statutory provisions would allow TEA to focus its resources on key functions," the sunset report issued in January says.

"Moving both regulation of the private driver training industry and management of the adult education program to other, more appropriate agencies, would allow TEA to focus more on its mission for ensuring the delivery of quality primary and secondary education," the report said.

Following are some of the key recommendations adopted by the Sunset Advisory Commission.

- Abolish the State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) and transfer its powers and duties to the Commissioner of Education.
- Remove the State Board of Education's authority to reject proposed educator certification and education preparation rules. (SBEC rules now go to the State Board, which only has the authority to take no action on them or reject them.)
- Require the Commissioner to establish an advisory committee to assist with the regulation of educators and educator preparation programs.
- Transfer responsibility for adult education from TEA to the Texas Workforce Commission.
- Transfer the regulation of private driver training from TEA to the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation.
- Merge the Campus Report Card with the Performance Reports and require TEA to distribute the reports to school districts for dissemination to campuses and parents.
- Eliminate campus distinction designations.
- Eliminate the requirement for school districts and charter schools to file a copy of their depository contracts and related documents with the agency.
- Eliminate the requirement for school district boards of trustees to report the terms of superintendent severance payments to the Commissioner.
- Eliminate the Best Practices Clearinghouse.
- Incorporate the financial solvency review into the FIRST financial accountability system.

◆ See **Sunset review**, page 3



## Sunset review *continued*

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- Require TEA to project revenues and expenditures for districts and charters that will likely become insolvent within three years.
  - Provide the Commissioner with the flexibility to annex a school district to a non-adjointing district.
  - Authorize the Commissioner to work with county commissioners courts to ensure the timely annexation of an insolvent school district.
  - Authorize TEA to reconstitute the governing board of a charter holder.
  - Authorize the Commissioner to suspend operations and pursue revocation of an imminently insolvent charter to ensure it does not open without sufficient funding to complete the term.
  - Clarify the statutory requirements for school administrators to report misconduct by certified educators to TEA.
  - Grant the Commissioner administrative subpoena power to fully investigate certified educator misconduct cases.
  - Establish a five-year renewal process for educator preparation programs (EPP) in statute.
  - Require TEA to develop and implement a policy to guide and encourage more meaningful and comprehensive stakeholder involvement efforts.
  - The full sunset report containing commission decisions is available on the Sunset Commission's website.
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## Education numbers

# Pocket Edition available again in print and online



After a one-year hiatus, the popular Pocket Edition is back. Begun in 1991, the Pocket Edition reports a variety of state-level statistics on topics including:

- Students
- Test Performance & Participation
- Graduates & College Admissions
- Attendance, Completion, & Dropouts
- Accountability Ratings
- Personnel
- Finances

The 2011-12 online edition of the Pocket Edition may be found at [www.tea.state.tx.us/communications/pocket-edition/](http://www.tea.state.tx.us/communications/pocket-edition/).

The Pocket Edition print edition is also available from the TEA Publications Office at a cost of \$6.50 per 50 brochures. For order form go to: [www.tea.state.tx.us/publications/](http://www.tea.state.tx.us/publications/).



## Passing Rates

# Commissioner Williams announces STAAR end-of-course passing rates climb for first group of testers

Commissioner of Education Michael L. Williams announced on Jan. 29, that the latest cumulative results in the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR™) end-of-course (EOC) assessments reveal an increase in passing rates for current 10th-grade students.

The STAAR end-of-course tests were given for the first time last spring to 9th-grade students. The cumulative results track that group of students, including those who retook the end-of-course exams during the summer and fall administrations.

Williams noted that in some cases, the final cumulative passing rate for specific subject areas jumped by more than 10 percent from the initial spring administration of the tests. Increases (per individual subject area) for students who initially took the EOC assessments as 9th graders in spring 2012 include:

### Algebra I

Spring 2012 Passing Rate .....76.8%  
Cumulative Passing Rate: 84.7%

### English I – Reading

Spring 2012 Passing Rate .....67.7%  
Cumulative Passing Rate .....81.2%

### English I – Writing

Spring 2012 Passing Rate .....54.4%  
Cumulative Passing Rate .....72.6%

### Biology

Spring 2012 Passing Rate .....86.4%  
Cumulative Passing Rate .....91.0%

### World Geography

Spring 2012 Passing Rate .....79.7%  
Cumulative Passing Rate .....84.8%

“The improvement in overall performance is directly attributable to the hard work of students and educators across our state,” said Commissioner Williams. “While there is still work to be done to ensure success for all, these improved numbers are indicative of what can occur when the focus is on students

and a commitment to achieve success in the classroom.”

The [results](#) on page 5 show the passing rates for the first administration and the cumulative passing rate after three testing opportunities. The figures do not include any current 10th-grade students who may have enrolled in the public schools since the tests were first given.

*“The improvement in overall performance is directly attributable to the hard work of students and educators across our state.”*

Through the Texas Education Agency’s online learning community, Project Share, the agency has provided the free OnTrack Lessons at no cost to all Texas districts and open-enrollment charters. The online lessons are aligned to the state’s curriculum standards for math, English, science and social studies. Many school districts have used these supplemental lessons to help bolster the skills of students who failed end-of-course exams or who need additional practice in preparation for the exams.

Statewide results for the December EOC retests are available at [www.tea.state.tx.us/staar/rpt/sum/yr12/](http://www.tea.state.tx.us/staar/rpt/sum/yr12/). These results include any student who took the EOCs, and not just the cohort tracked in this study. Results for individual districts are available at [https://tx.pearsonaccess.com/tclp/portal/tclp.portal?\\_nfpb=true&\\_pageLabel=pa2\\_analytical\\_reporting\\_page](https://tx.pearsonaccess.com/tclp/portal/tclp.portal?_nfpb=true&_pageLabel=pa2_analytical_reporting_page)



STAAR End-of-Course Passing Rates - Grade 9					
Spring 2012 Passing Rates			Cumulative Passing Rates		
	# of Students	Passing Rate		# of Students	Passing Rate
<b>Algebra 1</b>			<b>Algebra 1</b>		
Passed	192,127	76.8%	Passed	211,988	84.7%
Did Not Pass	58,187	23.2%	Did Not Pass	38,326	15.3%
<b>English 1 - Reading</b>			<b>English 1 - Reading</b>		
Passed	223,910	67.7%	Passed	268,266	81.2%
Did Not Pass	106,640	32.3%	Did Not Pass	62,284	18.8%
<b>English 1 - Writing</b>			<b>English 1 - Writing</b>		
Passed	179,734	54.4%	Passed	240,060	72.6%
Did Not Pass	150,939	45.6%	Did Not Pass	90,613	27.4%
<b>Biology</b>			<b>Biology</b>		
Passed	277,956	86.4%	Passed	292,675	91.0%
Did Not Pass	43,773	13.6%	Did Not Pass	29,054	9.0%
<b>World Geography</b>			<b>World Geography</b>		
Passed	259,494	79.7%	Passed	276,029	84.8%
Did Not Pass	65,913	20.3%	Did Not Pass	49,378	15.2%
Cumulative Passing Rate includes all administrations (Spring, Summer, Fall 2012)					

### Passing Rates

## Williams: Passing rates top 70 percent for most STAAR tests in grades 3-8

Commissioner of Education Michael L. Williams announced on Jan. 29 that passing rates on most State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR™) tests for grades 3-8 topped 70 percent in 2012. The STAAR was given for the first time in Texas public and charter schools last spring.

Among the results for grades 3-8, the highest passing rates are seen on some 8th grade tests. Eighty percent of eighth-grade students passed the STAAR reading test, 76 percent passed the STAAR mathematics test, and 70 percent passed the STAAR science test.

"We have set the bar higher with a more rigorous test, and our students and teachers are already on a path to meeting those higher expectations," Commissioner Williams said. "I have no doubt results in future years will continue to improve but only if our state elects to keep the focus on educating every child in every classroom in every district across Texas."

According to results compiled by the Texas Education Agency, the subject area with the highest STAAR passing rate at each grade level includes:

#### 3rd Grade

Reading ..... 76%

#### 4th Grade

Reading ..... 77%

#### 5th Grade

Reading ..... 77%

Mathematics ..... 77%

#### 6th Grade

Mathematics ..... 77%

#### 7th Grade

Reading ..... 76%

#### 8th Grade

Reading ..... 80%

◆ See **Grades 3-8 STAAR tests**, page 6



### Grades 3-8 STAAR tests *continued*

Commissioner Williams noted the passing percentages for all areas (except three) are at 70 percent or better. The lowest passing rate (59%) occurred on the 8th grade social studies test could be attributed to the inclusion of new social studies curriculum content, as well as the use of more primary sources in test questions than occurred previously on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS).

"I recognize there has been a lot of anxiety surrounding STAAR tests, but I believe these are encouraging passing rates for the first year of a new more rigorous test," Commissioner Williams said. "Clearly, we still have work to do, but I remain optimistic that passing rates will rise this spring in the second administration of STAAR, just as they have traditionally done in the second year of a new testing program."

As with the high school STAAR tests, passing standards are being phased in for the elementary and middle school tests using a four-year, two-

step process. This approach provides school districts with time to adjust instruction, provide additional training for teachers, and close knowledge gaps.

***"We have set the bar higher with a more rigorous test, and our students and teachers are already on a path to meeting those higher expectations."***

Although students first took the STAAR tests last spring, the passing standards were not finalized until recently for grades 3-8. State law required the passing rates to be set on the high school end-of-course exams first, with the standards for tests in lower grades aligned to those standards. Passing standards for the end-of-course assessments were established last spring.

For spring 2013 testing, results will be released on the normal schedule, which is typically by the end of the school year.

Additional information about grades 3-8 results can be found on the STAAR resources webpage at [www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/staar/](http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/staar/) under the statewide summary reports link. A question and answer document and technical details about the standard setting process are also available on that page.

Following are passing rates for the Grade 3-8 assessments.

Passing Rates for 2012 STAAR – Grades 3-8					
Grade	Reading	Mathematics	Writing	Science	Social Studies
3	76%	68%	–	–	–
4	77%	68%	71%	–	–
5	77%	77%	–	73%	–
6	75%	77%	–	–	–
7	76%	71%	71%	–	–
8	80%	76%	–	70%	59%
– STAAR not required for grade level					



## Recognition

## 16 Texas schools recognized as Blue Ribbon Schools

Sixteen Texas public schools were honored as Blue Ribbon Schools and an Austin principal was recognized as the recipient of the Terrel Bell Award Jan. 28, during the TASA Midwinter Conference.

Since the creation of the Blue Ribbon program by the U.S. Department of Education in 1982, more than 500 Texas schools have received the honor. The program recognizes schools based on one of two criteria:

- dramatically improving student performance to high levels on state tests;
- students scoring in the top 10 percent of their state on state tests.

Austin's Graham Elementary also took home

a second honor when its principal Blaine Helwig received the Terrel H. Bell Award for Outstanding Leadership. Helwig is one of only seven principals in the country to receive the award this year.



*Principal Blaine Helwig*

In announcing the award, the U.S. Department of Education commended Helwig for devising strategies to help students master fundamental math and reading skills and designing a progress monitoring system for teachers that pinpoints what students know and what they need to learn next. The award is named for Terrel Bell, who served as the U.S. secretary of education from 1981 to 1985.

The Blue Ribbon Schools Program is sponsored by the Texas Education Agency and the Texas Association of School Administrators (TASA).



### 2012 Blue Ribbon Schools

#### Blue Ridge High School

Blue Ridge ISD

#### Bray Elementary School

Cedar Hill ISD

#### Chandler Elementary School

Brownsboro ISD

#### Diane Winborn Elementary School

Katy ISD

#### Douglass Elementary School

El Paso ISD

#### East Early College High School

Houston ISD

#### Fox Technical High School

San Antonio ISD

#### George West Primary School

George West ISD

#### Gruver Elementary School

Gruver ISD

#### J. Walter Graham Elementary School

Austin ISD

#### Judge Barefoot Sanders Law Magnet School

Dallas ISD

#### Mission Early College High School

Socorro ISD

#### Montgomery Elementary School

Montgomery ISD

#### Project Chrysalis Middle School

Houston ISD

#### Sundown Elementary School

Sundown ISD

#### William Velasquez Elementary School

Lamar CISD



## Public Service

## New members join the State Board of Education

Seven new members joined the State Board of Education in January after being elected to the post in November and one veteran member returned to the board after a two-year hiatus.



Returning to the board is **Geraldine "Tincy" Miller, R-Dallas**, who previously served on the board from 1984 through 2010. Miller, vice president of the Henry S. Miller Companies in Dallas, served for four years as chair of the state board. She represents **District 12** in North Texas.

**Martha M. Dominguez, the District 1** representative, represents West Texas and much of the border area. Dominguez, **D-El Paso**, is currently the director of support personnel for the Ysleta Independent School District in El Paso. She is the former president of the Texas Association of School Personnel Administrators.



**Ruben Cortez, Jr., D-Brownsville**, is a businessman who represents **SBOE District 2**, which is the area from Brownsville to Corpus Christi. He serves as secretary of the Region 1 Education Service Center board of directors.

**Marisa B. Perez, D-San Antonio**, works as a governmental and community relations specialist for her hometown school district, San Antonio ISD. She previously worked for the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services. Perez represents **District 3**, which stretches from south Bexar County to Starr County.



**Donna Bahorich, R-Houston**, is a community volunteer and past staff member for Sen. Dan Patrick, chair of the Senate Education Committee. She previously worked in the telecommunications industry. Bahorich represents **District 6** comprised of central Harris Co.

**Tom Maynard, R-Florence**, represents **District 10**, which covers Central Texas and surrounding areas. He is the executive director of the Texas FFA Association, the nation's largest state career and technical student organization. Maynard is a former teacher and served on the Florence ISD board of trustees.



**Sue Melton, R-Waco**, is a retired educator who taught for 36 years in the Ross and West school districts. She is a former president of the Association of Texas Professional Educators. Melton represents **District 14**, which stretches from Lampasas to Denton.

**Marty Rowley, R-Amarillo**, is an attorney and a certified mediator. He previously pastored an 8,000-member church. Rowley represents **District 15**, the largest state board district, which covers 77 counties primarily in the Panhandle.



While the new members districts vary dramatically in geographic size, each members represents almost 1.7 million Texans.



## Board Officers and Committees

**SBOE officers elected, committees named**

At the January 30 meeting, the board elected Thomas Ratliff, R-Mount Pleasant, as vice chair and Mavis Knight, D-Dallas, as secretary. The chair of the board, Barbara Cargill, is appointed to that post by the governor. The three officers made the committee assignments and committee members elected chairs:

**Committee on Instruction:**

- Tom Maynard, R-Florence, chair
- Sue Melton, R-Waco, vice chair
- Martha M. Dominguez, D-El Paso
- Geraldine Miller, R-Dallas
- Marisa B. Perez, D-San Antonio.

**Committee on School Finance/Permanent School Fund:**

- Patricia Hardy, R-Fort Worth, chair
- Lawrence A. Allen, Jr., D-Fresno, vice chair
- David Bradley, R-Beaumont
- Ken Mercer, R-San Antonio
- Ratliff, R-Mount Pleasant

**Committee on School Initiatives:**

- Donna Bahorich, R-Houston, chair
- Marty Rowley, R-Amarillo, vice chair
- Cargill, R-The Woodlands
- Ruben Cortez, Jr., D-Brownsville
- Knight, D-Dallas

## Outstanding Educators

**Presidential teaching award finalists named**

The state math and science finalists for the Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching (PAEMST) were honored at the January meeting of the State Board of Education.



Front row, (l-r): math teacher Wendy Hendry, Bransford Elementary School, Grapevine-Colleyville ISD; math teacher Maggie Anderson, Lake Highlands Elementary School, Richardson ISD; science teacher Nancy Gardner, Elliott Elementary School, Frisco ISD; TEA Statewide Science Coordinator Irene Pickhardt, and TEA Director of K-12 Foundation Education Kelly Callaway.

Back row, (l-r): TEA Mathematics/Science Content Specialist Jo Ann Bilderback; science teacher Kelli Halliburton, Clear Spring Elementary School, North East ISD; science teacher Kent Page, Carnahan Elementary School, Northside ISD; and math teacher Stephen Garretson, River Valley Intermediate School, Midway ISD.

**Student Performances**

Students from the Aristoi Classical Academy, a charter school in Katy, performed poems and readings of classical works for the board members and guests at the Feb. 1 SBOE meeting.

The Mariachi Juvenil Azteca Band from Edcouch-Elsa High School in the Edcouch-Elsa ISD entertained State Board of Education members, their families and friends at the Jan. 30 meeting.



## Curriculum

**SBOE gives preliminary approval to Fine Arts TEKS**

Revised curriculum standards for all fine arts instruction for kindergarten through 12th grade received preliminary approval from the State Board of Education on Feb. 1. The curriculum standards outline the topics to be covered in art, music, dance and theater classes.

The current standards, called the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), have been in use in the state's classrooms since 1998. Final approval of the revised standards is expected to occur at the board's April 19 meeting. The updated standards will be used in classrooms beginning with the 2015-2016 school year.

The proposed revisions create standards for dance instruction in the middle schools. Currently, dance standards only exist at the high school level.

The middle school TEKS, with these updates, will also now be based on a student's proficiency level, rather than grade level. For example, if a student

took private violin lessons throughout elementary school, this change would allow the child to be placed in a more advanced middle school orchestra class, rather than in a beginning class. The standards also provide flexibility in the teaching of fine arts in sixth grade regardless of whether the sixth grade is housed at an elementary school or a middle school.

The proposal also increases the number of fine arts classes available at the high school level. Some of the proposed new courses are Musical Theatre and Technical Theatre.

The TEKS given preliminary approval will be posted on the Texas Education Agency [website](#) once they are updated to reflect amendments made by the board. The standards now on the web reflect the draft proposed by TEKS review committees. That proposal was largely accepted by the board with only minor changes.

## School Finance

**Texas school finance system ruled unconstitutional**

A state district judge on Feb. 4 declared the state's school finance system unconstitutional, saying the state had fallen short of its constitutional obligation to "make suitable provisions for the support and maintenance of an efficient system of public free schools."

More than 600 school districts sued the state, saying the current system violates efficiency provisions, inadequately funds schools, and created an illegal state ad valorem tax.

Travis County District Judge John Dietz in a [ruling](#) from the bench agreed with most of the arguments presented by the districts. He did rule that issues brought forth by charter school plaintiffs, such as a challenge to the statutory cap on the number of charter schools, were not constitutional issues. Concerns about these issues should be addressed by the Legislature, he said.

Dietz will issue a formal written ruling in the case later this spring.

The state is expected to appeal the case.

Commissioner of Education Michael L. Williams said, "The bench ruling is simply one step on this litigation's path. All sides have known that, regardless of the outcome at the district level, final resolution will not come until this case reaches the Texas Supreme Court. I'm appreciative of the strong case presented by the Attorney General's Office on behalf of the state. The Texas Education Agency will continue to carry out its mission of serving the students and educators across our state."

Legal wrangling over the school funding system has bounced in and out of the state court system since 1984. Legal experts expect that it could be 2014 before the Texas Supreme Court issues a ruling in this latest case.



## Accreditation

**TEA: No accreditation statuses for school districts in 2012-13**

Commissioner of Education Michael L. Williams announced Feb. 4 that the Texas Education Agency will not assign accreditation statuses to the more than 1,200 independent school districts and charter schools for the 2012-2013 school year.

"In preparation for the transition to the new State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) accountability system, the Texas Education Agency did not assign academic accountability ratings for 2012," Commissioner Williams said. "Because student performance is a key indicator in the state accreditation system, and because that data is not available due to the transition to STAAR, the Agency will suspend the assignment of accreditation statuses until the 2013-2014 school year."

The accreditation statuses are based on state academic accountability ratings, the Financial Integrity Rating System of Texas (known commonly as School FIRST), data reporting, special program effectiveness, and compliance with statutory and regulatory requirements.

Under the Texas Education Code, the commissioner of education annually assigns one of four accreditation statuses to each school district: Accredited; Accredited-Warned; Accredited-Probation; or Not Accredited-Revoked. In the 2011-2012 school year, 97 percent of Texas school districts and charter schools earned full state accreditation.

Though no accreditation statuses will be assigned for 2012-2013, 14 school districts or charter schools that would have received a lower accreditation status (based on a FIRST rating of Substandard Achievement) during the 2012-2013 school year are being notified of that fact. In those cases, the Agency will require some additional steps.

The 2011-2012 accreditation status for each school district and charter school can be found on the TEA website at <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/accredstatus/>.

## In Other Action

**Summaries of SBOE actions can be found online**

The State Board of Education met January 30 – February 1, 2013. Summaries of actions taken by the SBOE can be found on the Texas Education Agency's website at [www.tea.state.tx.us/sboe/actions/](http://www.tea.state.tx.us/sboe/actions/)

**State Board of Education**

Michael L. Williams

Commissioner of Education

Chair, District 8  
**Barbara Cargill, The Woodlands**

Vice Chair, District 9  
**Thomas Ratliff, Mount Pleasant**

Secretary, District 13  
**Mavis B. Knight, Dallas**

District 1  
**Martha M. Dominguez, Ed.D., El Paso**

District 5  
**Ken Mercer, San Antonio**

District 11  
**Patricia Hardy, Fort Worth**

District 2  
**Ruben Cortez, Jr., Brownsville**

District 6  
**Donna Bahorich, Houston**

District 12  
**Geraldine Miller, Dallas**

District 3  
**Marisa B. Perez, San Antonio**

District 7  
**David Bradley, Beaumont**

District 14  
**Sue Melton, Waco**

District 4  
**Lawrence A. Allen, Jr., Fresno**

District 10  
**Tom Maynard, Florence**

District 15  
**Marty Rowley, Amarillo**

