

Texas Education Today

News from the Texas Education Agency



National Teacher of the Year addresses SBOE

Amarillo teacher Shanna Peebles spoke to the State Board of Education in September about her experiences as the 2015 National and Texas Teacher of the Year. As the representative of seven million U.S. teachers, she has traveled to places such as the White House and the Middle East to talk about education and teaching.

Peebles also sat down with the TEA to [talk](#) about her year as the National Teacher of the Year.

Graduation rates rise

According to the Texas Education Agency (TEA) report, *Secondary School Completion and Dropouts in Texas Public Schools, 2013-14*, the graduation rate for the Class of 2014 was 88.3 percent, which is 0.3 percentage points higher than the previous record set by the Class of 2013. [[complete story on page 2](#)]

New Bond Guarantee Program rules

The State Board of Education approved the Bond Guarantee Program to back bonds issued by school districts to construct student and teacher housing, if the housing is an integral part of the educational mission of the school district as determined by the commissioner. [[complete story on page 3](#)]

Heroes for Children

Heroes for Children honorees were selected by the State Board members and recognized for volunteering their time, talents and skills in support of the public schools in their communities. [[complete story on page 5](#)]

Fees waived for military veterans

As of Sept. 1, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) will begin waiving certain educator certification fees for eligible military service members, military veterans and military spouses. [[complete story on page 4](#)]

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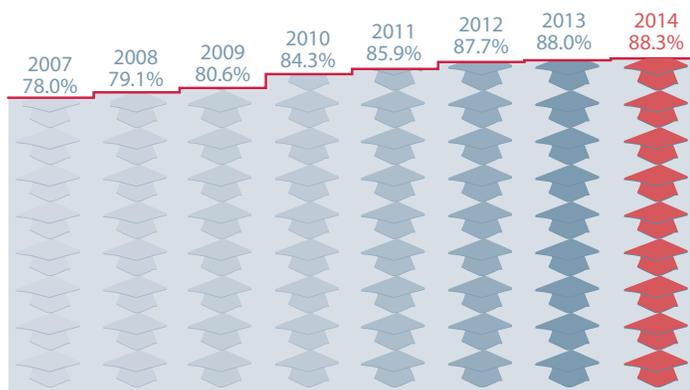
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TEA

Graduation rate rises for seventh straight year

The Texas high school on-time graduation rate set by the Class of 2014 reflects another all-time high for the state and marks the seventh consecutive year the overall rate has increased.

According to the Texas Education Agency (TEA) report, *Secondary School Completion and Dropouts in Texas Public Schools, 2013-14*, the graduation rate for the Class of 2014 was 88.3 percent, which is 0.3 percentage points higher than the previous record set by the Class of 2013.



Out of 333,286 students in the Class of 2014 Grade 9 cohort, 88.3 percent graduated within four years. An additional 4.3 percent of students in the Class of 2014 continued in high school the fall after their anticipated graduation date and 0.8 percent went on to receive General Educational Development (GED) certificates.

Commissioner of Education Michael Williams – who has focused on efforts to close the achievement gap in Texas – also noted the Class of 2014 numbers reflect another year of ongoing improvement in graduation rates for African-American and Hispanic students.

Graduation Rates by Group

Class Year	African-American	Hispanic	White
2014	84.2	85.5	93.0
2013	84.1	85.1	93.0
2012	83.5	84.3	93.0
2011	80.9	81.8	92.0
2010	78.8	78.8	91.6
2009	73.8	73.5	89.7
2008	71.8	70.8	88.8
2007	70.7	68.5	88.2

“The graduation numbers for the Class of 2014 tell us that school districts and charters are working every day to assure every student makes it to the finish line,” said Commissioner Williams. “Texas continues to lead the way in its efforts to close the achievement gap among all its student groups and other states are taking note of our efforts.”

Other notable graduation findings included in the *TEA Secondary School Completion and Dropouts in Texas Public Schools, 2013-14* are:

- Though the graduation rate for the Class of 2014 reflects some modest increases from the previous year, they are still all-time highs for Hispanic (85.5 percent) and African-American (84.2 percent) students.
- Asian students in Texas had the highest graduation rate (94.8 percent) in the Class of 2014 Grade 9 cohort. White students posted the second highest graduation rate at 93 percent.
- Females in the Class of 2014 Grade 9 cohort had a higher four-year graduation rate (90.4 percent) than males (86.3 percent).
- The graduation rate for economically disadvantaged students in the Class of 2014 Grade 9 cohort was 85.2 percent, the same as the Class of 2013. However as a comparison, the graduation rate for economically disadvantaged students in the Class of 2009 Grade 9 cohort was 78.3 percent.
- For the Class of 2014, the four-year graduation rates for students identified as English language learners in Grades 9-12 was 71.5 percent and for students in special education programs was 77.5 percent.

The U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) is the federal entity with primary responsibility for collecting and analyzing data related to education in the United States. In 2003, the 78th Texas Legislature passed legislation requiring dropout rates be computed according to the NCES dropout definition.

A dropout is defined as a student who is enrolled in public school in Grades 7-12, does not return to public school the following fall, is not expelled,

◆ See **Graduation**, page 3



SBOE

New rules approved for the Bond Guarantee Program

The State Board of Education approved additional changes to the rules for the bond guarantee programs for both independent school districts and charter districts at its September meeting.

The board approved allowing the Bond Guarantee Program to back bonds issued by school districts to construct student and teacher housing, if the housing is an integral part of the educational mission of the school district as determined by the commissioner.

The board modified the definition of nationally recognized statistical ratings agency to include qualifications.

The board also increased the multiplier used for calculating the bond guarantee capacity from 3 to 3.25 and requested the commissioner revisit his rules addressing the formula used to determine the reserve fund that is set aside for the program to protect against defaults by charter districts that have been granted the guarantee.

Because the amendments to the school district rules were approved by less than two-thirds majority vote of the board, the rules will be effective beginning with the next school year.

Under the charter district rules, the board approved allowing guarantee program to be used for student and teacher housing if the proposed housing is contemplated in the charter application and the housing is an essential and integral part of the educational program included in the charter contract.

The board approved an amendment that modifies the definition of nationally recognized investment rating firm. The amendment requires firms that rate charter schools for the Bond Guarantee Program to have at least one previous charter school rating before being approved.

The board also approved an amendment that requires the commissioner to maintain a 5.0 percent reserve so that charter school guarantees do not exceed capacity as the value of the fund changes and new guarantees are issued.

The amendments to the charter school rule will be effective 20 days after filing with the Texas Register.

Graduation *continued*

and does not: graduate, receive a GED certificate, continue school outside the public school system, begin college, or die.

The TEA report shows that the longitudinal dropout rate for the Class of 2014 Grade 9 cohort was 6.6 percent (the same percentage as the Class of 2013), with the rate for Asian students at 2.4 percent, white students at 3.6 percent, Hispanic students at 8.2 percent and African-American students at 9.8 percent.

Out of 2,238,400 students who attended Grades 7-12 in Texas public schools during the 2013-14 school year, 1.6 percent were reported to have dropped out, the same percentage as the previous year.

Other annual dropout findings from the report include:

- For the 2013-14 school year, the number of dropouts in Grades 7-12 increased to 35,358, a 1.9 percent increase from the 34,696 students who dropped out in 2012-13.
- In 2013-14, a total of 3,974 students dropped out of Grades 7-8, and 31,384 dropped out of Grades 9-12. The Grade 7-8 and Grade 9-12 annual dropout rates were 0.5 percent and 2.2 percent, respectively.
- As in the previous year, the 2013-14 Grade 7-12 dropout rates for African-American (2.2 percent) and Hispanic (2.0 percent) were higher than the rates for white (0.8 percent) and Asian (0.5 percent) students.
- The Grade 7-12 dropout rate for males (1.9 percent) exceeded the rate for females (1.3 percent) in 2013-14. More males dropped out from Grade 9 (5,458) than from any other grade. By contrast, more females dropped out from Grade 12 (4,235) than from any other grade.

The complete *Secondary School Completion and Dropouts in Texas Public Schools 2013-14* report is available at tea.texas.gov/acctres/dropcomp_index.html.



SBOE

Certification fee waivers available to military

As of Sept. 1, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) will begin waiving certain educator certification fees for eligible military service members, military veterans and military spouses.

The changes stem from Senate Bill 807, which the Texas Legislature passed this spring.

Fees that will be waived for eligible members of the military community include those for the standard certificate, probationary certificate, one-year certificate, educational aide certificate and the review of credentials.

The certification fees associated with fingerprinting, preliminary criminal history evaluation, renewal (including late and reactivation fees) and reinstatement will not be waived.

Fees associated with certification examinations will be waived depending on which testing vendor administers the examination. Examinations administered by the Educational Testing Service (ETS), which include the Texas Examinations of Educator Standards (TExES), the Texas Examinations for Master Teachers (TExMaT), the Texas Assessment of Sign Communications (TASC), and the Texas Assessment of Sign Communications-American Sign Language (TASC-ASL) examinations, will have \$11 of the registration fee waived. Registration fees for examinations administered by the American

Association of Family and Consumer Sciences (AAFCS), the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), and the National Occupational Competency Testing Institute (NOCTI) will not be waived.

One must apply for the military exemption before finishing the certification application. The following documents must be submitted for review:

- A written request for the exemption, including your TEA ID or the last four digits of your social security number
- Active duty service members – A military ID (front and back) and current state ID
- Veterans – A DD-214 (Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty) that shows release or separation from active duty was under honorable conditions and current state ID
- Military spouses of active duty service members – The spouse's current state and military ID (front and back), active duty service member's military ID (front and back), and a copy of the marriage license
- Current email address and daytime phone number

After the military documents have been reviewed, eligible members of the military community will be notified by email with instructions on how to proceed with the certification process.

TEA

Guidance on use of drones by Texas schools

The Texas Education Agency has been contacted by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) regarding the potential use of drones by school districts and charters at school-related activities.

The following information was provided by the FAA and is being shared for your reference:

The FAA has serious concerns about the safety of operating an unmanned aircraft system, otherwise known as drones, near people or stadiums and can enforce breaches of flight safety.

Superintendents and administrators are urged to reference the FAA website www.faa.gov/uas/

[model aircraft/](#) where guidance is spelled out under Model Aircraft (Hobby or Recreation only).

There are two additional helpful links: www.faa.gov/uas/publications/ (Know Before You Fly.pdf) and www.faa.gov/uas/no_drone_zone/. These two links illustrate the Do's and Don'ts of UAS flying and also various types of No Drone Zone signage examples for designated prohibited areas.

Should you have any questions regarding this issue, please contact FAA Public Affairs Officer Lynn Lunsford in the FAA Fort Worth Regional Office at (817) 222-4610.



TEA SBOE recognizes school volunteers as Heroes for Children



The 2015 Heroes for Children are: front row (left to right) Bonita Henderson, District 10; Kim Hadaway, District 4; Joe Ramirez, District 1; Julie Stevens, District 6; Julie Enlow, District 11; Marilyn Kingman, District 7. Standing, left to right, Jane Barnes, District 8; Orlando Lopez, District 15; Valarie Said, District 9; Jennifer Sanchez, District 12; Kenneth Parks, District 2; Raul "TJ" Tijerina, District 3; Jennifer Kampermann, District 14, and Nancy Andrus, District 5. Not pictured is Bill Barnes, District 8 hero.



Texas school volunteers, who provide hundreds of hours of volunteer service to Texas public schools, were recognized by the State Board of Education (SBOE) at the September board meeting.

The 16 Heroes for Children honorees were selected by the State Board members and recognized for volunteering their time, talents and skills in support of the public schools in their communities. Each hero received a certificate of honor, a copy of the resolution and photographs commemorating the ceremony. The name of each hero was also engraved on a plaque that is permanently displayed at the Texas Education Agency

Recipients of the 2015 Heroes for Children award, along with a brief description of the contributions each has made to Texas schoolchildren, follow:

SBOE District 1, Socorro ISD

Joe Ramirez

Ramirez is credited with helping organize the East Lake High School Parent-Teacher-Student Association (PTSA) and also helping other struggling PTSA's throughout the school district get back on track.

SBOE District 2, Brownsville ISD

Kenneth Park

A volunteer for many years, Parks works to bring help and donations of food, holiday presents, a mobile medical unit and other items to the many homeless students who attend the district.

◆ See **Heroes**, page 6



HEROES *continued*

even his own resources to benefit the students.

SBOE District 4, Galena Park ISD

Kim Hadaway

Hadaway is a constant presence at Cimarron Elementary School, where she helps out in the library and serves on the health advisory committee, parent advisory committee and the District Planning Advisory Committee.

SBOE District 5, Wimberley ISD

Nancy Andrus

Andrus worked with other parent advocates in the district and coordinated efforts to support legislation for age-appropriate testing for Texas public school students.

SBOE District 6, Klein ISD

Julie Stevens

Stevens has served as the district's volunteer coordinator for four years and serves as the parent liaison for the Klein ISD Education Foundation, overseeing the annual fund raising event, while also serving as a classroom volunteer at Benignus Elementary School.

SBOE District 7, Barbers Hill ISD

Marilyn Kingman

After working for 32 years as a classroom teacher, Kingman returned to the classroom as a math tutor for struggling high school students. She also assists the district's Future Farmers of America (FFA) program by taking care of the show animals.

SBOE District 8, Conroe ISD

Bill & Jane Barnes

The couple has played a major role the last eight years supporting the many athletic booster clubs at The Woodlands College Park High School, which help to raise scholarships for many student athletes.

SBOE District 9, Texarkana ISD

Valarie Said

For the past 23 years, Said has guided fund raisers, special events and served as a classroom

volunteer, always going above and beyond in support of the students in the Texarkana ISD.

SBOE District 10, Killeen ISD

Bonita Henderson

Over the last four years, Henderson donated more than 4,000 volunteer hours serving faculty, staff and students through the PTO, site-based decision making committee, fund raisers, classroom support and popping popcorn for the district's movie night.

SBOE District 11, Weatherford ISD

Julie Enlow

Enlow spent the last two summers ensuring students were provided a hot lunch during the summer by implementing the Weatherford Healthy Kids Summer Lunch Program. In 2015, the program provided more than 8,500 meals for children.

SBOE District 12, Prosper ISD

Jennifer Sanchez

In addition to all her other volunteer duties, for the last seven years Sanchez has spearheaded the district's Box Tops for Kids program, gathering more than 500,000 Box Tops. The district has earned almost \$50,000 through the program.

SBOE District 13, Harmony Science Academy – Grand Prairie

Deborah Cannon

Cannon has volunteered in many capacities for hundreds of hours for the charter school, from serving on the PTO board to assisting with picture day, book fairs, carnivals, picnics, and anything the school needed her to do.

SBOE District 14, Midway ISD

Jennifer Kampermann

Kampermann created the Mothers of Midway (MOMs) Facebook and information network to help the district share informative, timely and important information with other parents and the community. The MOMs network also provides positive posts and cheers accomplishments of both students and teachers alike.

SBOE District 15, Amarillo ISD

Orlando Lopez

Creator of the mentoring program "Boys to Men" at the Sunrise Elementary School, Lopez is also responsible for helping resurrect the campus PTO, offering outreach and support to parents.



TEA

94 percent of districts and charters earned Met Standard

Ninety-four percent of school districts and charters across Texas achieved a rating of Met Standard under the state accountability rating system.

The Texas Education Agency released the ratings for more than 1,200 school districts and charters and more than 8,600 schools in August.

Districts, campuses and charters receive one of three ratings under the accountability system: Met Standard, Met Alternative Standard, or Improvement Required. School district ratings (including charter operators) by category in 2015 are as follows:

District and Charter Ratings

2015 Rating	District	Charter	Total	Percent
Met Standard/Alternative	983	168	1,151	94.4%
Met Standard	983	136	1,119	91.8%
Met Alternative Standard	N/A	32	32	2.6%
Improvement Required	40	17	57	4.7%
Not Rated	1	10	11	0.9%
TOTAL	1,024	195	1,219	100.0%

"The 2015 state accountability system takes into account a number of factors unique to the 2014–2015 school year," said Commissioner of Education Michael Williams. "As in previous years, most districts, charters and campuses met the state standards, which reflects well on our public education system and for the economic future of our state."

The 2015 ratings are based on a system that uses a range of indicators to provide greater detail about the performance of a district or charter and individual campuses throughout the state. The performance index framework includes four areas:

- **Student Achievement** – Provides a snapshot of performance across all subjects
- **Student Progress** – Measures year-to-year student progress by subject and student group
- **Closing Performance Gaps** – Emphasizes the academic achievement of economically disadvantaged students and the lowest performing racial/ethnic student groups

- **Postsecondary Readiness** – Emphasizes the importance of earning a high school diploma that provides students with the foundation necessary for success in college, the workforce, job training programs or the military

Due to the changes in the state assessment program last school year, for 2015 accountability, a campus or district must meet the target on either Index 1 or Index 2 plus meet the target on Index 3 and Index 4. The performance target for Index 1 was also increased from 55 percent in 2014 to 60 percent in 2015.

In April, Commissioner Williams announced that results of 2015 State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR®) in mathematics for grades 3–8 would be excluded from the 2015 state accountability system. The commissioner reached his decision following numerous discussions with math teachers, parents, and superintendents across the state regarding new curriculum standards in mathematics. New rigorous math standards were adopted by the State Board of Education in April 2012 with implementation for grades K–8 in the 2014–2015 school year.

◆ See **Accountability**, page 8



Accountability *continued***2015 Campus Ratings by Category and School Type (including charter campuses)**

2015 Rating	ELEM	MIDDLE	HS	K-12	TOTAL	PERCENT
Met Standard/Alternative	4,166	1,555	1,453	298	7,472	86.4%
Met Standard	4,166	1,544	1,221	272	7,203	83.3%
Met Alternative Standard	0	11	232	26	269	3.1%
Improvement Required	426	102	43	39	610	7.1%
Not Rated	62	56	285	161	564	6.5%
TOTAL	4,654	1,713	1,781	498	8,646	100.0%

In addition, results from STAAR Accommodated (STAAR A) and STAAR Alternate 2 (a redesign of the original STAAR Alternate) were also excluded from the 2015 state accountability system. The U.S. Department of Education no longer allows Texas to use modified assessments (such as the STAAR Modified), which had been used for students receiving special education services that met certain participation criteria. Those students were administered the STAAR Accommodated this year. In addition, House Bill 5, passed by the Texas Legislature in 2013, required TEA to redevelop the STAAR Alternate test which is designed for the state's most cognitively disabled students. STAAR Alternate 2 was administered for the first time this school year.

Educators, school board members, business and community representatives, professional organizations, parents and legislative representatives from across the state provided assistance and advice to TEA during development of the current accountability system.

An overview of the substantial differences in state accountability between 2014 and 2015 (in PDF format) is available on the TEA website at ritter.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/account/2015/20150205mtg/2015%20Acctb-Commissioner%20Final%20Decisions_Final_April%208.pdf.

Campuses that receive an accountability rating of Met Standard are also eligible for distinction designations. Distinction designations are

awarded to campuses based on achievement on performance indicators compared to a group of 40 campuses of similar type, size and student demographics.

Distinction designations can be earned for:

- Academic Achievement in Reading/English Language Arts;
- Academic Achievement in Mathematics;
- Academic Achievement in Science;
- Academic Achievement in Social Studies;
- Top 25 Percent: Student Progress;
- Top 25 Percent: Closing Performance Gaps; and
- Postsecondary Readiness.

In 2015, 4,388 campuses that achieved the Met Standard rating earned some type of distinction designation. However, only 153 high schools, middle schools and junior high schools earned a distinction designation in all seven categories that were evaluated for that campus.

In addition, districts and charters (except for those comprised of only one campus) are eligible to receive a distinction designation for postsecondary readiness. The distinction takes into account factors such as graduation rates, ACT/SAT participation and performance, Career and Technical Education (CTE) graduates and dual credit course completion rates. Postsecondary readiness is the only distinction at the district level. Twenty-four school districts and charters earned this distinction for 2015.

♦ See **Accountability**, page 10



SBOE

Number of Texas students taking ACT sets new mark

More Texas Hispanic students in the 2015 graduating class took the ACT college admission test than any other student demographic, according to a report released in August by ACT. The strong numbers led the state in setting a new ACT participation mark.

Of the 124,764 Texas students in the 2015 graduating class taking the ACT college admission test, almost 40 percent (48,934) were Hispanic. It's the second consecutive year where the number of Hispanic students represented the highest number of examinees of any racial ethnic group.

Since 2011, Texas has seen a 22.8 percent increase in ACT test-taking graduates among all student groups.

2015 Graduation Class ACT Testing by Group

Year	Total	Hispanic	White	African-American	Asian
2015	124,764	48,934	46,564	13,792	6,698
2014	116,547	45,717	44,418	12,947	5,785
2013	109,841	41,877	43,299	12,695	4,871
2012	110,180	40,827	44,502	13,290	4,746
2011	101,569	35,093	42,685	12,874	4,556

"As our state's student demographics have changed, the expectations we have for each of our students in the public education system remain high," said Commissioner of Education Michael Williams. "Over the past several years, increased ACT participation in our state has taken place across the board, which reflects student aspirations well beyond high school that strengthens the Texas of tomorrow."

ACT tests are administered for a number of subject areas including English, math, reading, science and writing (optional). Texas scores (excluding the optional writing test) in 2015 are:

ACT Tests by Subject (Year)

Subject	2015	2014
English	19.8	19.8
Math	21.1	21.4
Reading	21.1	21.1
Science	21.0	21.0
Composite	20.9	20.9

In addition, the 2015 average ACT scores for Texas students surpassed the national averages in mathematics and science.

ACT Tests by Subject (State vs National)

Subject	Texas	National
Mathematics	21.1	20.8
Science	21.0	20.9
Reading	21.1	21.4
English	19.8	20.4
Composite	20.9	21.0

Additional highlights of the Texas ACT results for the Class of 2015 include:

- The 2015 composite score of 23.3 for white students in Texas is .9 points higher than their national counterparts (22.4).
- The 2015 composite score of 17.6 for African-American students in Texas is .5 points higher than their national counterparts (17.1).
- The 2015 composite score of 25.1 for Asian students in Texas is 1.2 points higher than their national counterparts (23.9).
- In 2015, ACT scores for African-American, Asian and white students in Texas were higher than the national scores in English, mathematics, reading and science.

♦ See ACT, page 10



TEA

TEA email lists available

With the new school year under way, now is a good time to sign up for email notifications from the Texas Education Agency. More than 60 specialized email lists are available. Those cover topics such as correspondence from the agency, press releases and student assessment updates. The email notifications are often the primary method used by the agency to inform school officials of new information.

To subscribe:

1. Go to <https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/TXTEA/subscriber/new>.
2. Type in your email and click "submit."
3. Click on the box beside email list(s) you would like to subscribe to and click "submit."

A message appears showing successful subscription to the list(s). The message will also offer the option of subscribing to other state and federal agencies.

ACT continued

- The 2015 composite score of 18.7 for Hispanic/Latino students in Texas was .2 points lower than their national counterparts (18.9). However, the 2015 ACT scores for Hispanic students in Texas were higher than national scores in mathematics and science.
- For the 2015 graduating class taking the ACT college admission test, 44 percent met the college readiness benchmark for mathematics (higher than the 42 percent national rate), and 38 percent met the college readiness benchmark in science (equaling the national rate).

The top 10 Texas universities receiving scores from Texas ACT test-takers (in descending order) were:

- Texas A&M University
- University of Texas at Austin
- Texas Tech University
- Texas State University
- Baylor University
- University of Texas at San Antonio
- University of North Texas
- Sam Houston State University
- University of Texas – Pan American
- University of Houston.



The entire ACT report – complete with national and state-by-state results – can be viewed at www.act.org/readiness/2015.



A quick overview of the state accountability system and what goes into the annual ratings of schools, districts and charters is presented in an informational animation video at <http://youtu.be/cbEgrdijuc8>.



To view the 2015 state accountability ratings for districts, charters and campuses (plus distinction designations earned at the campus and district level), visit the Texas Education Agency website at ritter.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/account/2015/index.html.

Accountability continued

"Earning any type of distinction under the state accountability system is commendable and should be a source of pride in that community," said Commissioner Williams. "Achieving all seven distinctions on a campus or a district-level postsecondary readiness distinction reflects extraordinary work while affirming a strong commitment to students."

Independent of the state's accountability system, all school districts are required to evaluate the district's performance and the performance of each campus in regard to community and student engagement. Although these locally-assigned ratings must be posted on district websites by Aug. 8, they are separate from the state accountability ratings. TEA will post the locally-determined community and student engagement ratings on the agency's website by Oct. 1.

Appeals of any ratings were due to TEA by Sept. 8. The agency will release the final 2015 ratings based on the outcomes of the appeals in late October or early November.



SBOE

2014-2015 FIRST preliminary financial ratings released

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) released preliminary financial accountability ratings for more than 1,200 school districts and charters across the state, with almost 98 percent of all Texas school districts and charters earning a successful preliminary rating for 2014-2015.

Created by the 77th Texas Legislature in 2001, the School Financial Integrity Rating System of Texas (FIRST) is designed to encourage public schools to better manage their financial resources in order to provide the maximum allocation possible for direct instructional purposes.

“FIRST ratings provide parents and community members an annual glimpse at the financial health and stability of every school district and charter,” said Commissioner of Education Michael Williams. “Taxpayers should be pleased to see an overwhelming number of districts and charters successfully achieving a passing rating.”

The 2014-2015 ratings are based on annual financial reports provided to TEA by districts and charters from the 2014 fiscal year. The financial accountability system requires TEA to review the audited financial reports from all districts and charters.

All school districts and charters are required to report information and financial accountability ratings to parents and taxpayers. In addition, school districts and charters must hold a public discussion or hearing regarding its financial report.

TEA formally notified school districts and charters of their preliminary FIRST rating earlier this month. Any district and charter wishing to appeal its rating must submit a written appeal, with supporting evidence, to TEA by Sept. 8.

Following a review of all the submitted appeals, final 2014-2015 school FIRST ratings are expected to be released in October.



This year, the FIRST ratings are based on seven financial indicators, such as administrative cost expenditures; the accuracy of a district or charter’s financial information submitted to TEA; and any financial vulnerabilities or material weaknesses in internal controls as determined by an external auditor. Based on the submitted information, one of two financial management ratings – Pass or Substandard Achievement – is then assigned. The 2014-2015 preliminary FIRST ratings follow in chart below.

2014-2015 School Financial Integrity Rating System of Texas Ratings (preliminary)

Preliminary Rating	Districts	%	Charters	%	Total	%
Pass	1,012	98.83%	167	91.76%	1,179	97.76%
Substandard Achievement	12	1.17%	15	8.24%	27	2.24%
Total	1,024	100.00%	182	100.00%	1,206	100.00%



To review the preliminary 2014-2015 FIRST ratings for all districts and charters (plus view final FIRST ratings from previous years), visit the TEA website at tea.texas.gov/index4.aspx?id=3864.

TEA

SAT, AP exam participation rates continue to climb

Continuing a successful trend seen throughout this decade, the 2014-2015 SAT and Advanced Placement (AP) exam participation rates for Texas public school students increased again over the previous school year, according to the latest numbers released by the College Board.

2014-2015 SAT and AP Participation Rates

Class Year	SAT	AP
2014-2015	179,131	255,250
2013-2014	163,996	225,381
2012-2013	157,125	206,445
2011-2012	156,776	195,894
2010-2011	148,424	187,658

The 179,131 Texas public school students who took the SAT in 2014-2015 reflects an increase of 9.2 percent from 2013-2014. For the third consecutive year, more Hispanic students (73,635) than white students (59,921) took the SAT in Texas public schools.

In addition, the 255,250 Texas public school students who took AP exams in 2014-2015 represents an increase of 13.3 percent from 2013-2014. That percentage increase is more than double the national growth of six percent.

"The demographics of students electing to take SAT and AP exams mirrors the demographics we now see in Texas classrooms, and that is good," said Commissioner of Education Michael Williams. "The economic future of our state rests on students with aspirations beyond high school to strengthen and build the Texas of tomorrow."

In 2014-2015, Texas students took 479,476 AP exams, an increase of 16.9 percent over the previous school year. That figure is also more than double the 7.2 percent increase nationally. Performance (students with scores of 3 or higher out of a possible score of 0-5) increased for all groups, with African-American students increasing by 12.4 percent and Hispanic students increasing by 10.3 percent.

While student participation numbers continue to increase, overall Texas SAT mean scores for

public school students showed a decline in 2014-2015, somewhat mirroring declines in scores seen nationally. Texas public school students in 2014-2015 posted scores of 482 in Mathematics (compared to 498 nationally), 464 in Critical Reading (compared to 489 nationally) and 448 in Writing (compared to 475 nationally). The drop has come as districts across the state continue to encourage more students to take college entrance exams.

Additional Texas items of note from the 2014-2015 College Board report include:

- SAT takers represent 62.3 percent of the state's public high school Class of 2015 graduates.
- 25,570 of the public school students taking the SAT were African-American, which represents an all-time high for the state.
- More than half (53.7 percent) of the public school students who took the SAT were female (96,239).
- 53,400 (or 29.8 percent) public school SAT takers in the Class of 2015 met the SAT College and Career Readiness Benchmark.
- Students whose parents hold a college degree are far more likely to meet the College and Career Readiness Benchmark than are those whose parents don't have a college degree. (51 percent to 18 percent)
- 212,940 AP exams in Texas earned a score of 3 or higher, an increase of 9.5 percent over 2013-2014 and higher than the increase of 4.9 nationally.
- Public school students from the Texas Class of 2015 who took the SAT and/or SAT Subject Tests designated their score reports to be sent to a total of 2,772 institutions of higher education. The top ten (in descending order) were: Texas A&M University; University of Texas at Austin; Texas State University; Texas Tech University; University of Texas at San Antonio; Baylor University; University of Houston; University of North Texas; Sam Houston State University; and University of Texas at Arlington.



SBOE

Ten Texans named finalists for 2015 presidential award

Ten teachers from across Texas have been named finalists for the 2015 Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching (PAEMST).

The 2015 PAEMST recognizes seventh through twelfth grade mathematics and science teachers whose innovative methods bring teaching to life in the classroom. It is the highest recognition a mathematics or science teacher may receive for exemplary teaching in the United States. The National Science Foundation administers PAEMST on the behalf of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy.

“These 10 finalists represent the very best of Texas public education,” said Commissioner of Education Michael Williams. “The work of these educators helps to spotlight on a national level the outstanding work taking place in math and science classrooms across our state every school day.”

To achieve recognition through this program, a teacher first must be

nominated for the award. A state panel of master teachers, specialists, and administrators reviewed the applications and chose the most outstanding mathematics and science teachers for the National Science Foundation to consider for national awardee status.

After the initial selection process at the state or territorial level, a panel of distinguished scientists, mathematicians, and educators may select up to two teachers from each state and U.S. jurisdiction for the national award.

PAEMST winners receive \$10,000, a citation signed by the President of the United States, and a paid trip for two to Washington, D.C. to attend recognition events and professional development opportunities. In addition, all of the 2015 finalists for Texas will also be recognized by the State Board of Education. For additional information about the PAEMST program, visit www.paemst.org.

The Texas finalists are listed below.



Mathematics

Jonathan Claydon

Spring Branch ISD
Northbrook Senior High School
Precalculus and Calculus AB

Darla Emerson

Lovejoy ISD
Lovejoy High School
Statistics

Rebecca Cordell Grant

Plano ISD
Haggard Middle School
Math 8-Honors

Patty C. Hill

Austin ISD
Kealing Middle School
Algebra I and Algebra II

Penny Smeltzer

Round Rock ISD
Westwood High School
AP Statistics

Science

Carol B. Brown

St. Mary's Hall in San Antonio
AP/Pre-AP Chemistry

Sheri Cole

Clear Creek ISD
Seabrook Intermediate School
Seventh grade science

Cara Johnson

Allen ISD
Allen High School
Anatomy & Physiology

Mark Misage

Eanes ISD
Westlake High School
AP Physics

Ferleshare S. Starks

Houston ISD
Phillis Wheatley High School
Biology



SBOE

Summaries of SBOE actions can be found online

The State Board of Education met Sept. 9 – 11, 2015. Summaries of actions taken by the SBOE can be found on the Texas Education Agency's website at tea.texas.gov/sboe/actions/.

SBOE

Student Performance

The Communications Arts High School Ballet Folklorico and Stevens High School Ballet Folklorico (Northside ISD), and the Brackenridge High School Mariachi Aguila (San Antonio ISD) under the directions of Carlos Piliado, Cecilia Fierro, and John Nieto, performed at the Sept. SBOE meeting. See more photos at: www.flickr.com/photos/txedu/albums/72157656446133714



Texas Education Today may be found online at tea.texas.gov/communications/tet.aspx.

State Board of Education

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