

# Evaluation of the School Improvement Initiative: 2005-06

EA06-189-4

## At a Glance

The Dallas Independent School District's school improvement initiative is a districtwide effort to increase student achievement at all campuses, especially those with a record of chronic underperformance. The district classified each campus into a five-tier system, with Tier 1 schools considered high priorities for improvement. Tier 5 campuses had the best records of performance. Tier 1 included 20 campuses that were in federally mandated Stage 1 or Stage 2 improvement under the *No Child Left Behind* law (NCLB). Schools enter federal improvement stages when they miss Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) targets for two consecutive years. These targets included performance criteria in reading and mathematics, as measured by the *Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills* (TAKS).

### Program Description

AYP standards for 2005-2006 included student passing rates of 53% in reading and 42% in mathematics for all students tested in grades 3-8 and 10, as well as the following student groups: white, Hispanic, African-American, economically disadvantaged, limited English proficient (LEP), and special education. Other indicators, including testing participation, attendance (elementary and middle schools), and graduation (high schools), also help determine AYP.

Campuses that do not meet AYP for the same indicator for two or more consecutive years are subject to NCLB's Title I school improvement requirements, such as offering school choice and supplemental education services. Title I requires districts and campuses to implement these improvement provisions in progressive stages, based on the number of years a campus does not meet AYP for the same indicator. Improvement campuses must draft a revised campus improvement plan that includes measurable goals. They also must receive technical assistance and institute a program of professional development. They also must offer students the opportunity to

transfer to a higher performing campus in the district.

The district's Tier 1 schools included 11 Stage 2 campuses (schools that missed AYP for three consecutive years) and 9 Stage 1 campuses. All of the improvement stage schools were secondary campuses. Other Tier 1 campuses included schools that missed AYP in 2004-2005. The district classified such schools as Year 1. Year 1 schools that miss AYP in 2005-2006 would enter Stage 1 in 2006-2007.

The district split Tier 1 into two groups: Tier 1A and Tier 1B. Four school improvement team leaders, appointed by and accountable directly to the general superintendent, worked with Tier 1A campuses. Area offices worked with their respective Tier 1B schools.

### Campus Improvement Plans

The evaluation team reviewed the campus improvement plans (CIPs) of all schools in Tier 1, including the 20 Stage 1 and 2 campuses. A review of the CIPs revealed that most of the schools did not identify the academic areas that caused them to miss AYP and did not specify measurable goals. In addition, many instructional strategies appeared general in nature, rather than focused on academic areas of concern. School improvement team leaders also were critical of CIPs, describing them as compliance documents rather than plans for improvement efforts.

### School Improvement Team Leaders

The team leaders brought a combination of teaching and administrative experience to their jobs. They worked with Tier 1A campuses, which included all Stage 2 schools and four of the nine Stage 1 schools. Team leaders provided a range of services and assistance. They visited their assigned schools regularly, observed classrooms, met with principals, attended department meetings, helped set up tutoring sessions, assisted with professional development, and worked with

teachers on classroom management. Team leaders identified teacher capacity and campus leadership as two issues of concern. Many schools had too many inexperienced teachers and principals that acted more as building managers than instructional leaders. Team leaders also expressed concern about schools with large numbers of alternatively certified teachers.

### Principal Survey

Principals whose schools received assistance from school improvement team leaders rated the team leaders favorably. From team leaders and area specialists to technical assistance providers and instructional coaches, principals had a wide range of assistance available to them. Most of them rated technical assistance providers (TAPs) and instructional specialists as the most helpful. They complained, however, that numerous off-campus meetings hampered their ability to guide their campuses' improvement efforts.

### School Choice and Supplemental Services

All schools in improvement stages must offer their students the opportunity to transfer to another district campus. In addition, Stage 2 schools must offer supplemental educational services (SES) to low-income students. SES includes tutoring and other instruction that supplements the regular school day. Only about 1% of eligible students transferred to other schools. The SES program also had low participation, with less than 1% of eligible students participating.

### Technical Assistance Providers (TAPs)

Stage 1 and Stage 2 schools received assistance from technical assistance providers (TAPs). The School Improvement Resource Center in Austin, Texas certified the TAPs, who provided a wide range of services. These included data analysis, facilitating tutoring sessions, and training teachers. In many ways, technical assistance and professional development overlapped. The TAPs described themselves as extra eyes and ears for campus principals. Most principals rated their TAPs favorably. A cumbersome district contracting process, however, delayed some TAPs beginning work with their campuses.

### Outcomes

The 2005-2006 evaluation focused mainly on implementation. An addendum completed in late August 2006 after the release of AYP decisions by the state included more detailed outcome information. Preliminary TAKS results for Stage 1 and Stage 2 schools indicated that most of the campuses made gains in both reading and mathematics, but that passing rates in mathematics were much lower.

The Texas Education Agency released 2006 AYP decisions on August 17. According to those results, two Stage 1 schools (Hillcrest High School and Pearl C. Anderson Learning Center) met AYP for the second consecutive year and exited improvement for 2006-2007. Another Stage 1 school – Florence Middle School – met AYP and will be in Stage 1 for its second year in 2006-2007. The other six Stage 1 campuses failed to meet AYP and entered Stage 2 in 2006-2007. Among the 11 Stage 2 schools, 2 campuses – Sunset and Madison high schools – met AYP and will be in Stage 2 for their second year in 2006-2007. The other nine Stage 2 schools missed AYP again and entered Stage 3 improvement. Stage 3 schools must continue to offer school choice options and supplemental services, as well as receive technical assistance. However, they are subject to other corrective actions, as well. Overall, DISD has 29 improvement campuses for 2006-2007 (9 Stage 3, 7 Stage 2, and 13 Stage 1).

Note that the AYP decisions released by the state were preliminary and that some campuses may appeal their status.

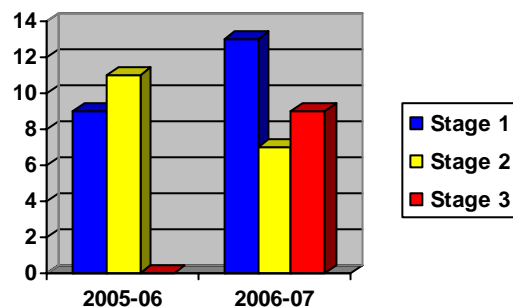


Figure 1: Number of NCLB Improvement Campuses for 2005-06 and 2006-07