At a Glance

The Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills Test was introduced in 2002-03 by the Texas Education Agency to replace a series of earlier tests designed to measure basic skills. When introduced, the TAKS was touted as measuring much more than basic skills. While this has proved tenuous at best, the TAKS is somewhat more rigorous than the TAAS test (which it directly replaced) and covers more grades and subjects than the TAAS. The TAKS tests reading at grades 3-9, English language arts (including reading and writing) at grades 10 and 11, mathematics at grades 3-11, writing at grades 4 and 7, social studies at grades 8, 10 and 11, and science in grades 5, 8, 10 and 11. All tests at grades 3-6 are given in Spanish as well as English and English and Spanish results are combined in this report. For simplicity, the 2002-03 results will be presented as 2003, 2003-04 as 2004, etc. since TAKS testing occurs in the spring of each school year.

Two types of longitudinal results are presented: cross-sectional and cohort. Cross-sectional analyses report results for the same grades across years with different students. For example, cross-sectional results for third grade report results for all third grade students in 2003, all third grade students in 2004, etc. Cohort analyses report results for the same students as they move from grade to grade. For example, one cohort consists of third grade students in 2003, the same students in grade 4 in 2004, in grade 5 in 2005, etc.

In 2008, the district tested approximately 88,000 students in reading/ELA and math, 21,000 in writing, 23,000 in social studies, and 34,000 in science. These are approximately the numbers tested across the years 2003 to 2008 except in science where grade 8 was added in 2006. Prior to 2006, the district tested approximately 24,000 students in science.

Results are reported for two points in the TAKS distribution: percent of students passing TAKS and percent of students commended on TAKS.

Cross-sectional Results

The following chart shows the percent passing each of the five tests from 2003 to 2008. All tests show steadily increasing results across years except for writing which dropped one percentage point from 2007 to 2008. Students scored the highest in writing and social studies across years moving from 60% and 64% passing to 86% and 89% passing, respectively. Reading moved from 57% to 82%, math from 42% to 69%, and science from 26% to 63% passing across years.

The next chart shows the percent commended for the same tests across years. Percent commended is important because it is a gauge of how well the district does increasing the depth and rigor of teaching of the core subjects.

Again, all results show a generally increasing trend across years. Social studies shows the highest overall results moving from 5% to 26% commended. Reading, math, and writing all move
from near 6% to near 21% commended. Science moves from 1% to 14% commended across years.

**Cohort Results**

Clearly, many cohorts are possible. For example, for the six years of TAKS, reading cohorts starting in grade 3 to 8, in grade 4 to 9, in grade 5 to 10 and grade 6 to 11 are possible. This document shows the cohorts for reading and math starting in grade 6 in 2003 and ending in grade 11 in 2008. Because of grades tested for social studies and science the social studies cohort goes from grade 8 in 2005 to grade 10 in 2007 and grade 11 in 2008. The science cohort goes from grade 10 in 2007 to grade 8 in 2008. Since writing is included in the grade 10 and 11 ELA results, the writing cohort is not presented.

The following chart presents the percent passing in each cohort. The reading cohort generally increases, the math cohort shows the dip in grades 7-9 as the math content and TAKS math reading level increase and social studies and science show increases to grade 11 in 2008. Grade 11 shows the expected increase as student must pass the TAKS for graduation.

The next chart shows the percent commended for the same cohorts. The percent commended in reading and math fluctuate but show an increase in grades 10 to 11. The social studies result show a high percent commended that increases. The science results remain flat under 10%.

**Discussion and Recommendations**

Results on the TAKS test must be considered by the district as minimum achievement indicators. In the year 2011-2012, students will have to pass a series of end-of-course tests to graduate in each of the four core content areas. These are the students in this year’s (2008-09) sixth grade.

These tests will cover English 1, 2, and 3, algebra 1 and 2, geometry, US and world history, world geography, biology, chemistry and physics. Without exception, these tests can be expected to be more rigorous than the TAKS tests in the corresponding areas.

When the district’s end-of-course tests, the Assessment of Course Performance tests, are examined, students do not do as well on these tests as they do on the TAKS test. Further, in the past, the district compared the results of the first semester ACPs with the state’s EOC tests and found the ACPs to be as rigorous as the state tests and to be excellent predictors of EOC results. This implies that current student difficulties passing the ACP tests are likely to accurately predict the coming EOC results.

Examination of the results for Dallas ISD students on reaching the commended level of the TAKS, which is closer to the EOC tests in difficulty, show that students in the upper grades do not score as well as students in the lower grades. This immediately raises concerns about the level of instruction at the secondary level and the preparation of students at the elementary level for more rigorous courses as they move forward.

Finally, recent district research indicates that passing coursework, attendance in courses, and achievement levels are directly tied to graduation. Examination of these data show that students can be identified early before they drop out.

Recommendations are clear. The increasing rigor of coursework at the elementary and secondary level must be monitored. Students must be exposed to more depth and rigor in their coursework and the taught curriculum must be
monitored for this increase in depth and complexity.