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Independent Evaluation of the  
Report to the Superintendent  
on the Commitments and Covenants:  
Academic Programs

2006-07

EA07-164-2

Prepared by

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**INTRODUCTION**

The report which follows represents the latest of my independent professional evaluations of the Dallas Independent School District's internal evaluation of its Declarations of Commitments and Covenants for academic year 2006-07. As in prior years, the district's internal evaluation describes progress made in upholding five key programs originally enumerated in the Declaration of Commitments and Covenants, which resulted from the district's 2003 release from the *Tasby* court decision:

- Early Childhood Education (Commitment #3)
- Magnet Schools (Commitment #5)
- Talented and Gifted (Commitment #6)
- Learning Centers (Commitment #7)
- Bilingual/ESL (Commitment #9)

Over the past several years, I have submitted several reports intended to offer independent evaluations of the district's progress toward upholding the Declaration of Commitments and Covenants, drawing upon my long history of work examining the academic achievement of students in major urban districts around the country. Achievement levels in major urban districts such as Dallas, as well as persistent gaps between the achievement of low-income and students of color and their peers, continue to represent critical policy topics in the era of increased accountability ushered in by the federal No Child Left Behind act (NCLB), as well as by various state and district-level accountability initiatives. Much of the work conducted by major urban districts such as Dallas – including the programs identified in the Declaration of Commitments and Covenants – in fact is driven by the desire to eliminate these achievement gaps, and to ensure that all students are prepared to function as contributing members of the workforce and the larger society.

In February 2008, I received the Report to the Superintendent on the Declaration of Commitments and Covenants on Academic Programs 2006-07 (EA07-164-2) from Dr. Cecilia Oakeley, Executive Director of the Dallas ISD Department of Evaluation and Accountability, and Dr. Robert Mount, Manager of the Dallas ISD Department of Program Evaluation. My independent evaluation of each of the five programs from the district's report appears below, following a description of each program, the language pertaining to the program from the Declaration of Commitments and Covenants, and the research questions associated with each program. After receiving the report, I met on Feb. 18-19 with Dr. Oakeley, Dr. Mount, and Dr.

Michael Hinojosa, Superintendent of Schools. In addition, I met with the following Dallas ISD personnel to discuss their reports: Beth Steerman, Director, Early Childhood Education; Erlene Williams, Coordinator, Learning Centers; Faustina Gallagher, Magnet Schools Program Coordinator; Cecilia Anzaldúa, Director, Gifted and Talented; and Gilda Evans, Executive Director, Bilingual Education.

## **EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

### ***Program Description***

The Early Childhood Education (ECE) Department provides a comprehensive program of instruction for children ages zero (birth) to five. With a goal of preparing children in the Dallas community to enter kindergarten with school readiness skills necessary for a successful academic career while building the foundation for college and workforce readiness, the district Early Childhood Department established a strong collaboration between profit, nonprofit, and faith based childcare agencies in the Dallas early childhood community. These agencies included Head Start of Greater Dallas, ChildCareGroup, and others. Internally, the department implemented programs such as Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY), Parent and Family Literacy, and School Readiness Integration to increase parental involvement and literacy among both parents and children such that all students will acquire school readiness skills by the end of the third grade as required by the *No Child Left Behind* act.

### ***Commitment 3***

The Dallas Independent School District shall maintain a strong Early Childhood Program at each campus that includes PK-3 students. This program shall be based on current educational best practices, including but not limited to a diagnostic and prescriptive approach, a program facilitator at each campus which includes PK-3 students, emphasis on small group and individualized instruction, a comprehensive program that includes curriculum guides and supporting materials, appropriate staffing, increased parent involvement and training, and a strong emphasis on mastery of essential skills by the end of the third grade level.

### ***Research Questions/Issues***

1. Document the existence of an Early Childhood program at all schools that include PK-3 students.
2. Identify student demographics and staffing ratios at grades PK-3 in all schools with Early Childhood programs.
3. Identify all schools with and without program facilitators.
4. What programs and/or best practices were used to deliver program services?
5. What activities did the Early Childhood Education Department and the individual campuses do to increase parental involvement and training?
6. Document the existence of written curricula along with supporting curriculum guides and materials at each campus.

7. Did students acquire mastery of essential skills on the *Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS)* and what measures were used to identify student needs?
8. Identify program changes implemented after fulfilling the three-year Commitments and Covenants.

### ***Independent Evaluation***

An Early Childhood Education program was in operation at 139 elementary Dallas ISD sites during the 2006-07 academic year. Collectively, the ECE sites served 70,496 students with a student/teacher ratio of 20:1. Of the total served, 96% were non-white (70% Hispanic, 25% African American, and 1% Other). The program's focus shifted from grades PK-3 to ages 0 to 5 and service delivery was coordinated with community-based childcare agencies. Therefore, the student/teacher ratio only reflects the district's enrollment characteristics at grades PK-3. Best practices utilized by the ECE program contribute to the success of the program including curriculum planning guides for every content area, a combination of small/whole group and individualized instruction, and a vertically-aligned curriculum that is rigorous and coherent.

The district's efforts to increase parental involvement within the ECE program continue to evolve, and have shown good results. Parental involvement strategies include the AVANCE and HIPPIY programs, for children 0-3 and 3-4 and their families, respectively, parent and family literacy programs for children 8 months to 4 years, and a "Virtual PreK" program in every PK classroom.

In addition to serving children from birth to age 5, the district made a number of program changes to the ECE initiative upon fulfilling its three-year obligations set forth under the Commitments and Covenants. These included the following:

- Increased collaboration between the district's Early Childhood program, Head Start of Greater Dallas, ChildCareGroup, and profit, nonprofit, and faith based childcare agencies. This collaboration, designed to improve school readiness for young children, includes representatives from across the city;
- Establishment of a Professional PK Learning Community, consisting of 32 teachers (8 from each Learning Community);
- Development of a centralized waiting list of children to be served in PK;
- Elimination of program facilitators (renders Research Question #3 moot);
- Establishment of a new position entitled Parental Involvement and Outreach Specialist.

The district's efforts to increase collaboration with community agencies around the area of early childhood programming are commendable, as is the establishment of a Professional Learning Community for district staff who work with early childhood and the new position dealing with parental involvement and outreach.

Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) results show that 2006-07 passing rates for grade 3 students in Reading were 83% for African American students, 85% for Hispanic students, 93% for White students, and 92% for Other students, for an overall passing rate of 85% (see Figure 1). This appears to be down slightly from 2005-06 data (not shown in the district's report for 2006-07), although it is in line with the four-year performance trend. Mathematics

passing rates on the 2006-07 TAKS (Figure 2) were down slightly for African American and Hispanic students from 2005-06, although were again consistent with the district's four-year trend. Performance for Limited English Proficient (LEP), disadvantaged students, and special education students in both Reading (Figure 3) and Mathematics (Figure 4) in 2006-07 were slightly lower in most cases than in 2005-06, but were consistent with the four-year performance trend.

Figure 1  
DISD Grade 3 Passing Rates on the *TAKS* Reading Test by Ethnicity  
2006-07

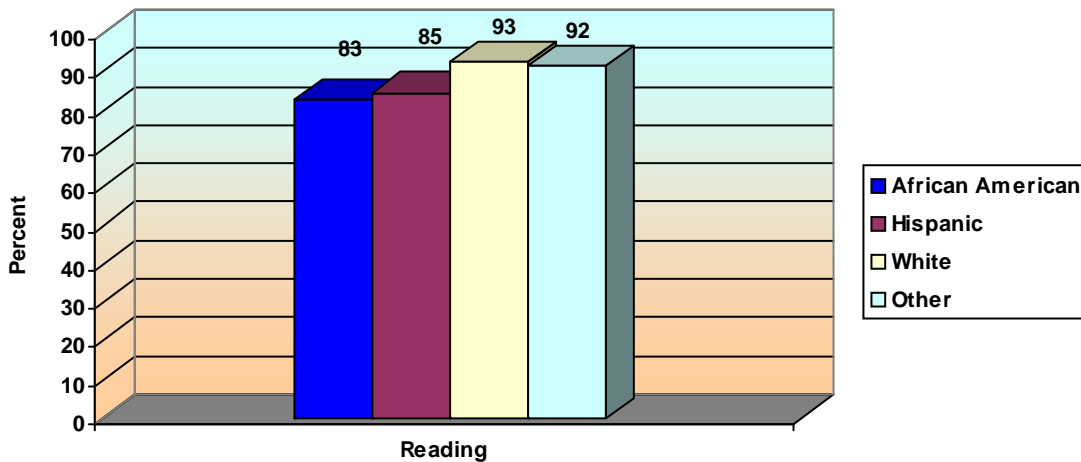


Figure 2  
DISD Grade 3 Passing Rates on the *TAKS* Mathematics Test by Ethnicity  
2006-07

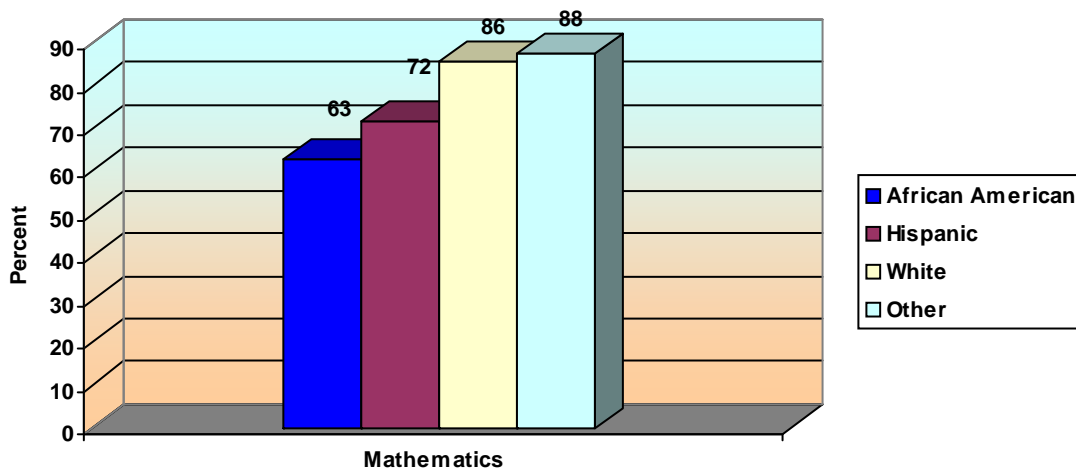


Figure 3  
DISD Grade 3 Passing Rates on the *TAKS* Reading Test  
for Selected Student Subgroups  
2006-07

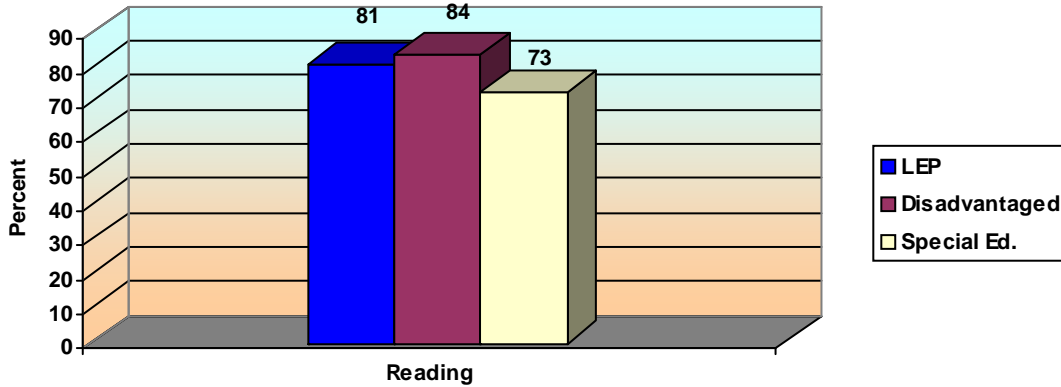
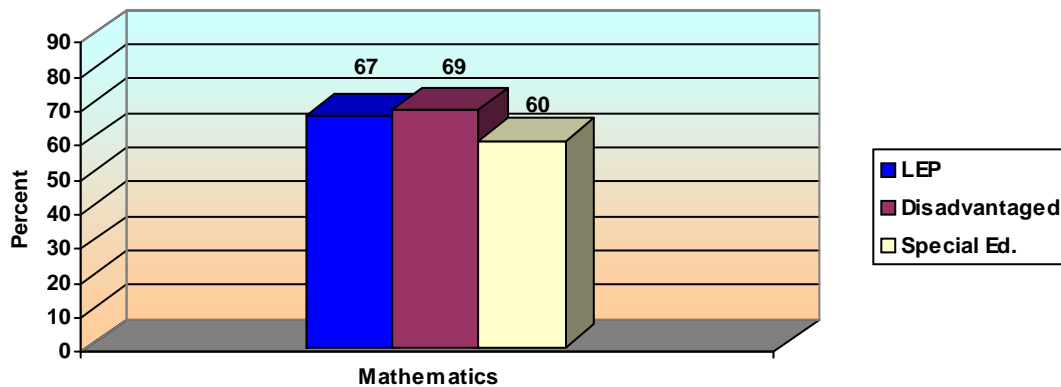


Figure 4  
DISD Grade 3 Passing Rates on the *TAKS* Mathematics Test  
for Selected Student Subgroups  
2006-07



***Points of Concern***

Ensure the availability of Early Childhood services at Dallas ISD facilities for children who may not receive services through local community- and faith-based organizations, especially in areas where these organizations are limited.

## **MAGNET SCHOOLS**

### ***Program Description***

The Magnet Schools Program originated as a part of the 1976 Desegregation Court Order of the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Texas. The Court Order called for the implementation of magnet schools in grades nine through 12 (academies in grades 6-8, vanguards in grades 4-5, and two Montessori schools in grade PK-8). The magnet schools were expected to promote voluntary desegregation by offering unique educational opportunities through specialty curricula which could not be found within the district's traditionally configured neighborhood schools. Upon release from the Court Order (June 5, 2003), the district adopted a Declaration of Commitments and Covenants which stated the district's pledge to maintain certain programs and policies formerly mandated by the Court. The Magnet Schools Program was one of those programs.

### ***Commitment 5***

The Dallas Independent School District shall maintain a program of magnet schools, including Montessori schools. The program shall offer unique educational opportunities through specialty curricula that cannot be found within the neighborhood schools. The program shall include the vanguards, academies, and high schools designated as magnet schools or Montessori schools at the date the district is released from supervision of the Court. The district shall maintain the Yvonne A. Ewell Townview Center as a center for high school magnet programs. The district shall be diligent in its efforts to identify all eligible or qualified students, and to encourage parents and students to participate in the programs. It shall be the policy of the district that properly identified students shall be served without regard to race, ethnicity, national origin, gender or religion. The district shall carefully monitor the selection process so that no student or ethnic group is unfairly excluded. The district shall no less frequently than every three years evaluate all magnet and Montessori programs to determine appropriateness of the program, potential need for additional programs, and the degree to which the programs are ethnically diverse. Nothing herein shall limit the ability of the Board of Trustees to add additional programs or to modify or eliminate existing programs in accordance with the recommendations of the district's evaluation. Criteria for determining whether programs should be added, modified or eliminated shall be included in the initial Special External Magnet Evaluation. The district shall maintain an advisory committee for each magnet high school that will include specialists in the particular focus of the individual magnet school.

### ***Research Questions/Issues***

1. Document the existence of a magnet program including Montessori schools.
2. Identify unique educational opportunities offered through specialty curricula that cannot be found in neighborhood schools.
3. What procedure(s) was used to carefully monitor the selection process so that no student or ethnic group was unfairly excluded?
4. How often has the district evaluated all magnet and Montessori programs to determine appropriateness of the program, potential need for modification, and ethnic diversity?

5. Document the existence of an advisory committee at each magnet high school.
6. Identify program funding levels.
7. Identify changes implemented in the Magnet Schools program after fulfilling the three-year Commitments and Covenants.
8. Identify the achievement levels of students enrolled in the magnet program.

### ***Independent Evaluation***

The Dallas ISD operated 10 magnet schools at the high school level during the 2006-07 academic year, along with 9 academy middle schools, 7 vanguard elementary schools, and the Skyline Career Development Center. One vanguard elementary school (M. Jackson) was transformed from a vanguard school into a regular middle school following the 2005-06 year and the vanguard students were moved to Darrell Elementary School (vanguard elementary within the school). Total enrollment in Dallas ISD magnet programs during 2006-07 was 9,018 students, which is up from 8,545 the prior year. Magnet school students were similar to the district overall, with 52% Hispanic, 33% Black, 12% White and 3% Asian and Native American students. Limited English Proficient (LEP) students continued to represent a very small share (1%) of magnet school enrollment; as in previous years' reports, this remains an area of concern. Magnet schools continued to offer a variety of unique educational opportunities, from a Young Women's Leadership School to Fine Arts, Humanities, and Environmental Sciences.

The district evaluates its magnet program on an annual basis, and, during recent evaluations (from 2004-05 and 2005-06), new curricula were written for nine magnet schools. All magnet high schools had advisory committees comprised of professionals in the noted discipline. Space in magnet programs continues to be allocated by a 30/70 split between district-wide seats and seats within the areas in which the schools are located. Out-of-district students are eligible to attend Dallas magnet programs, but their enrollment opportunities are, quite appropriately, limited while eligible district students are on a waiting list. The district budget for magnet programs in 2006-07 was just over \$40 million, representing a slight decrease from 2005-06. Several administrative changes were made to the magnet program for 2006-07, including the decentralization of administrative oversight, making magnet principals accountable to area superintendents, and closing/opening several magnet programs.

Academic achievement continues to be high in Dallas ISD magnet programs, as one would hope. Magnet students had higher passing rates than the district average on TAKS achievement tests – particularly in Mathematics – as well as much higher rates of students achieving at the “commended” level. Among high school students, for example, 87% of 9<sup>th</sup> grade magnet students received passing scores on the TAKS Mathematics test (compared to a district passing rate of 41%), as shown in Figure 5, and 29% received “commended” performance (compared to just 6% for district 9<sup>th</sup> graders as a whole), as shown in Figure 6. It is also good to note that all magnets received Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) ratings, including 7 that received “Exemplary” ratings and another 12 receiving “Recognized” designation. Several magnets improved their AEIS rating from 2005-06, including the Health Magnet and Young Women's Leadership School among magnet high schools, Dealey Montessori Academy and Holmes Academy at the middle school (academy) level, and Polk Vanguard at the elementary

level. These increases were in spite of the change in the passing standards which increased by five percent.

Figure 5  
DISD Passing Rates on the *TAKS* Mathematics Test  
for District and Magnet High School Students  
2006-07

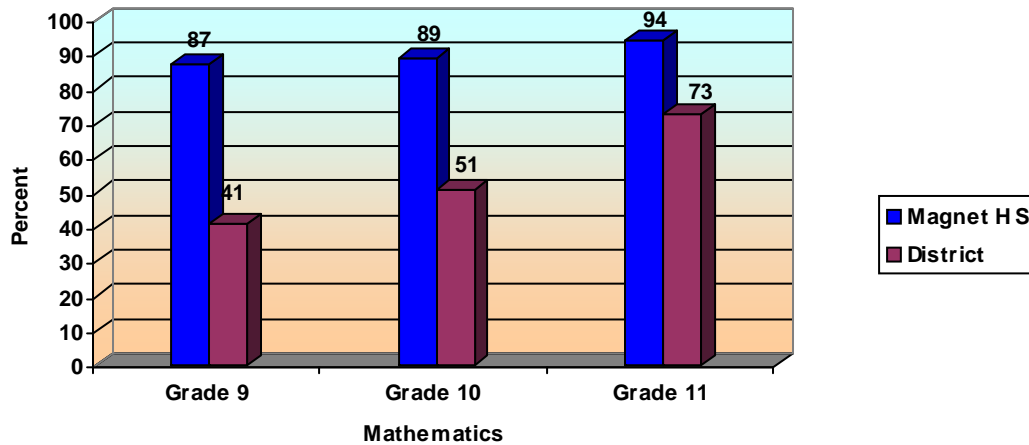
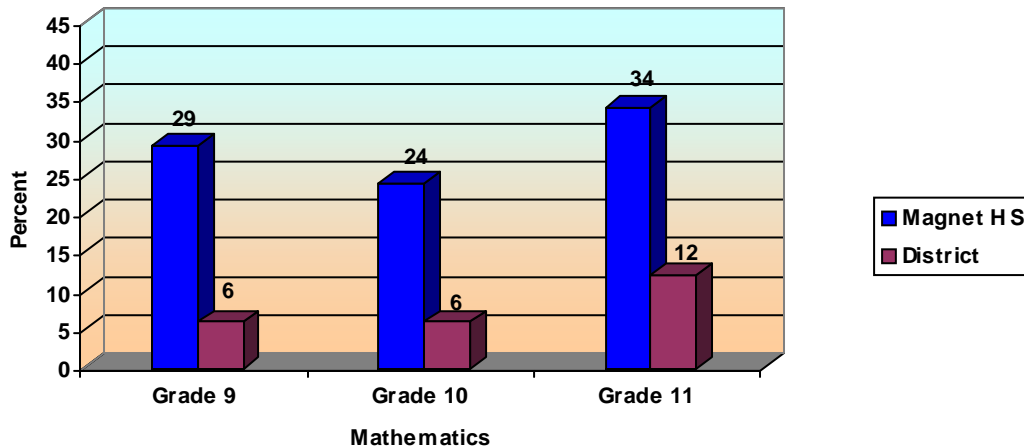


Figure 6  
DISD “Commended Passing” Rates on the *TAKS* Mathematics Test  
for District and Magnet High School Students  
2006-07



### *Points of Concern*

The district’s internal evaluation notes the magnet selection process continues to represent an area of great concern, as it has in the past. In particular, LEP students represent only 1% of

magnet enrollment, and students with disabilities are also underrepresented. The report notes that the selection process may be modified so that admission to certain magnet programs can be less dependent on achievement levels that are based on language ability, and more on other skills and aptitudes associated with success. By definition, of course, magnet opportunities are designed to provide unique and challenging opportunities for high-achieving students, but the district continues to leave itself open to legitimate criticism that these programs are effectively “off-limits” to traditionally underserved students, such as LEP students, on the basis of linguistic ability rather than overall academic ability.

A revision of the selection process for magnet schools is especially important at the high school level where immigrant or migrant students may want to enter the program at grade 9 (dependent on space). However, simply providing access is not the total solution. Once students gain access to the program, it will be necessary to provide additional support in the form of bilingual teachers for transition until language proficiency can be achieved. At that time, they can move into mainstream education. With a total of 29 academic/vocational clusters, Skyline High School represents a bastion of opportunity for students with other aptitudes and abilities without proficiency in English. A review of certain vocations in the Dictionary of Occupational Titles found many jobs that require largely on the job training (OJT). For example, occupations in culinary arts, horticulture, sheet metal work, air conditioning and refrigeration, auto body repair, child care and cosmetology require primarily OJT. If the district’s mission is to graduate students who are workforce ready, then why not investigate the feasibility of revising the admission criteria for various programs at Skyline High School. Clearly, there are no easy answers to this issue it may be worth reviewing magnet selection procedures in other districts with demographics similar to Dallas.

## **TALENTED AND GIFTED (ADVANCED ACADEMIC SERVICES)**

### ***Program Description***

In November 1996, the *Texas State Plan for the Education of Gifted/Talented Students* was adopted by the State Board of Education to create a model for designing quality program services that meet the needs of advanced and gifted learners. In the Dallas Independent School District, these services consist of three programs which serve academically talented students: (1) the Gifted and Talented Program (G/T) for grades K-6; (2) the G/T Seminar (grades 7-8) and a G/T elective class for grade 6 students in middle schools or pre-Advanced Placement classes (grades 6-8); and (3) Advanced Placement courses for grades 7-12. The G/T and Advanced Placement programs differ in that G/T instruction is typically interdisciplinary, while Advanced Placement coursework is content-specific. Each school was encouraged to use the state’s guidelines of 8-12% of its population to be identified as gifted and talented, while ensuring access and equity to all students in the school. There was no set percentage of students who could enroll for Pre-AP and AP courses, and these courses were not limited to students who were identified as gifted and talented.

The elementary G/T component serves identified gifted students who are nominated, screened, and selected by an Admission, Review and Exit (ARE) committee for an interdisciplinary, “pull-in” program. Identified students were to be served for a minimum of two hours each week, and schools were strongly encouraged to schedule between two and four hours per week for G/T instruction. In middle schools, the G/T Interdisciplinary Seminar was usually offered as an

elective course. Secondary students took Advanced Placement coursework by enrolling in Pre-Advanced Placement (Pre-AP) courses at the middle school or high school level or Advanced Placement (AP) courses at the high school level. In addition, four magnet schools (Polk Vanguard, Spence Academy, Travis Vanguard and Academy, and the TAG Magnet High School) serve identified gifted students from across the district.

### ***Commitment 6***

The Dallas Independent School District shall maintain programs for talented and gifted students in all elementary, middle, and high schools in accordance with the requirements of State law. The district shall be diligent in its efforts to identify all eligible or qualified students, and to encourage parents and students to participate in the programs. It shall be the policy of the district that properly identified students shall be served without regard to race, ethnicity, national origin, gender or religion. The district affirms the importance of encouraging and including ethnic minority students in high academic programs and courses. The district shall carefully monitor the selection process so that no student or ethnic group is unfairly excluded.

### ***Research Questions/Issues***

1. Document the existence of programs for talented and gifted students in accordance with State law.
2. Describe the level of compliance of district schools with state and local program criteria for identification and placement of students in the G/T program, and identify measures used to monitor the identification and placement process.
3. What actions has the program undertaken to encourage parental participation?
4. Identify the achievement levels of students enrolled in the G/T (Advanced Academic Services) program.

### ***Independent Evaluation***

The G/T program at the elementary level (K-6) served 9,533 students in 2006-07, with enrollment by racial/ethnic groups that very closely matched the district's overall racial/ethnic composition. Almost one-third of the district's elementary schools, however, exceeded state guidelines by having G/T enrollment higher than the recommended 8-12% of the student population. The district should continue to monitor for potential "over-enrollment" in G/T programs, which would dilute the intent and impact of these courses. It is perhaps understandable that certain schools, such as those with magnet programs, would have a higher proportion of students who qualify for G/T programs; but the fact that warrants at least some review of the selection process and criteria is that one-third of all elementary sites in the district exceeded the state guidelines.

At the middle school level, a total of 1,832 students were enrolled in G/T classes, with participation by racial/ethnic groups that again closely approximated the district average. More than one-fourth (27%) of middle school students were enrolled in Pre-AP courses, representing 5,594 students.

At the high school level, 13,239 students were enrolled in Pre-AP or AP courses in spring 2007, representing 36% of all students in grades 9-12. It is particularly encouraging to note that AP enrollment among high school students has increased among all racial/ethnic groups over the past five years. It is also encouraging to read that the district has donors who provide stipends for students who pass AP exams, and for their teachers. This represents an important augmentation of the \$2.2 million budget for the Advanced Academic Services department, and demonstrates commitment on the part of the greater Dallas community to making available opportunities for high-achieving students. Also worth noting is the positive direction of the number of AP exams taken across the district (10,077 in 2007, up from 9,801 in 2006 and 8,514 in 2005); this increase in participation may help explain why the district's passing rate (e.g., students receiving a score of 3 or higher) declined slightly, from 31% to 29%.

Academic achievement among students enrolled in G/T courses, as is hopefully the case, continued to be higher than for other district students. Both passing rates and "commended performance" ratings on all TAKS assessments were notably higher for G/T students compared to district averages; noteworthy examples here included the "commended performance" rating for grade 6 TAKS Reading (72% for G/T students compared to just 31% district wide, as shown in Figure 7), the grade 9 TAKS passing rate for Mathematics (88% among G/T students compared to just 33% district wide, as shown in Figure 8), and "commended performance" in grade 7 Writing (55% for G/T students compared to 15% district wide, as shown in Figure 9). Again, it would be highly surprising and disappointing if G/T students *did not* outperform the district average, but it is encouraging to note that achievement levels remain high among this student population.

Figure 7  
DISD "Commended Passing" Rates  
on the 1<sup>st</sup> Administration of the Spring 2007 English TAKS Reading Test by Grade  
for Gifted & Talented and District Students

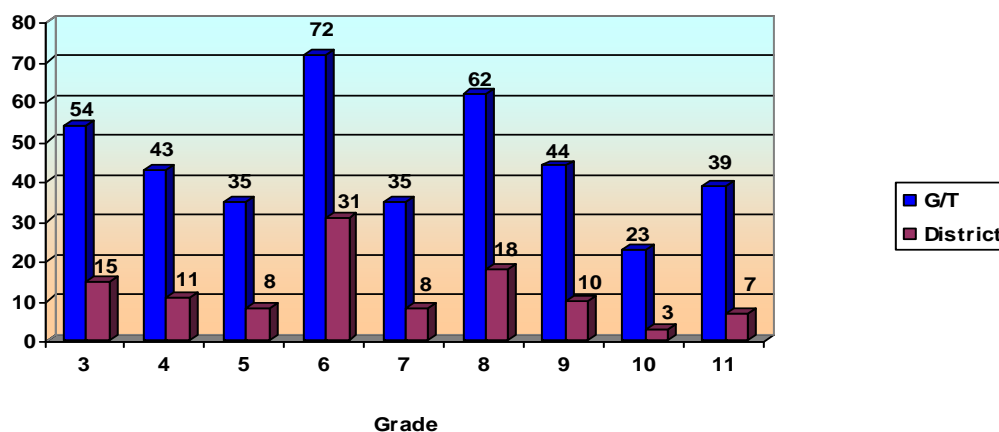


Figure 8  
DISD Passing Rates  
on the 1<sup>st</sup> Administration of the Spring 2007 English TAKS Mathematics Test by Grade  
for Gifted & Talented and District Students

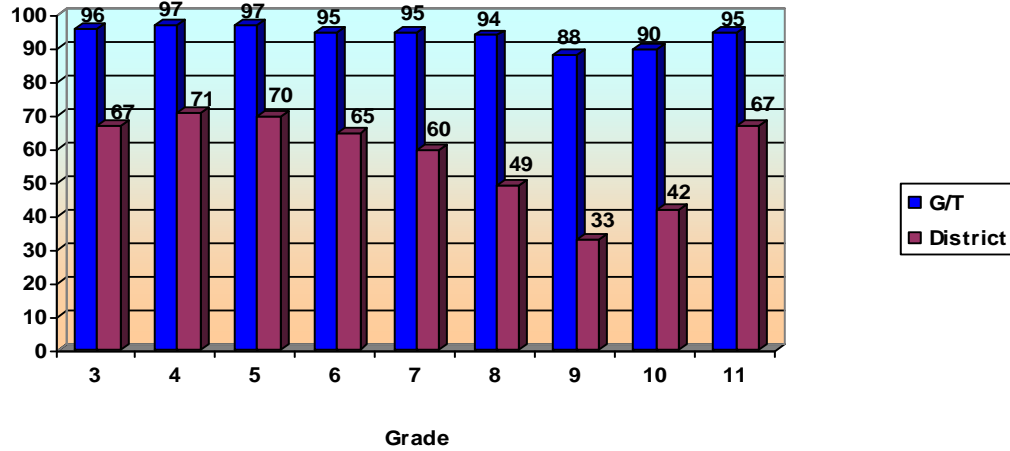
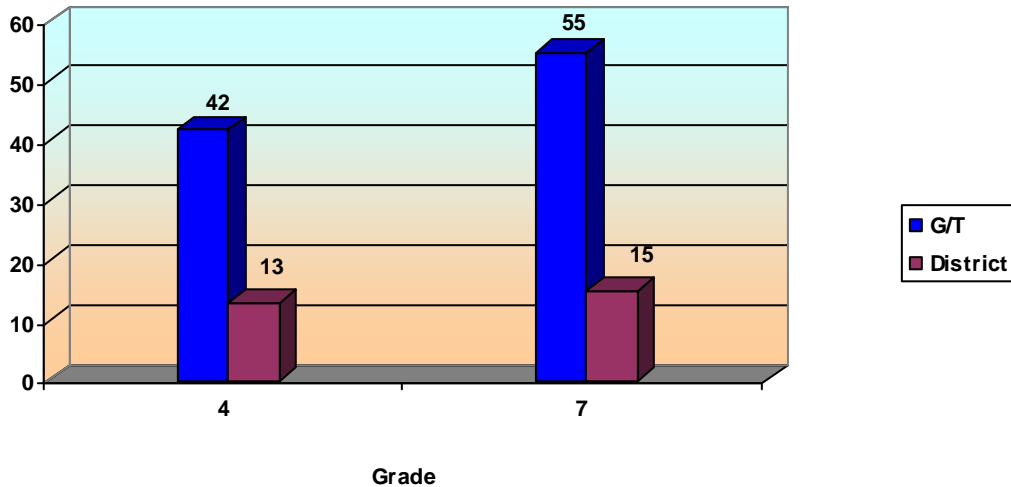


Figure 9  
DISD “Commended Performance”  
for the Spring 2007 English TAKS Writing Test  
for Gifted & Talented and District Students



***Points of Concern***

It was noted that one-third of all elementary sites exceeded state enrollment guidelines. However, during an interview with the program manager, it was discovered that a Spanish equivalent of the English assessment measure had been incorporated into the selection process. It is most likely that this addition may account for the increased enrollment. It was also indicated

that this constituted an increase in the enrollment of LEP students and increased the need for bilingual teachers in the G/T program. An assessment of this need will be necessary to meet the changing needs in multilingual classrooms.

## **LEARNING CENTERS**

### ***Program Description***

The Learning Centers were originally court-ordered efforts to provide quality educational programs in neighborhood schools for disadvantaged children in order to narrow the achievement difference between majority and minority students. The Centers were established in the 1980s as an alternative to busing students from South and West Dallas to schools in other parts of the district. The concept of the Learning Center is based upon the philosophy that a history of educational deprivation under conditions of poverty can be overcome. Sixteen Learning Centers have been established since 1984-85, including 12 elementary (grades 4 and 5) and four middle Learning Centers (grades 6-8).

The Centers offer a unique combination of programs and staffing, including an extended school day, a mathematics improvement plan, parent involvement programs, and additional administrative and support staff.

### ***Commitment 7***

The Dallas Independent School District shall maintain the South Dallas, West Dallas, and East Dallas Learning Centers. The district shall provide a Learning Center Management Plan to address administrative, staffing, evaluation, instruction and other issues important to the mission of these centers to support and further the achievement of the students. The district recognizes that these Learning Centers may develop exemplary practices that may be utilized in other district schools whose students are similar to those enrolled in the Learning Centers. The district may make revisions to the Learning Center Management Plan to focus funding, personnel, and programs on the specific needs of the students enrolled at a particular campus. These Centers shall continue to develop educational programs and practices to promote the long-term eradication of the under-education of this identified population.

### ***Research Questions/Issues***

1. Document the existence of East, South and West Dallas Learning Centers.
2. Document the existence of a Learning Center Management Plan.
3. Did the Management Plan address administrative, staffing, evaluation, instruction and other issues important to the mission of the Learning Centers and further the achievement of Learning Center Students?
4. What exemplary programs and practices developed and implemented in the Learning Centers to promote the long-term eradication of the under-education of Learning Center students that may be utilized in other district schools whose student population is similar to that of the Learning Centers?
5. Identify Learning Centers funding levels.

6. Identify administrative changes to the Learning Centers structure since the conclusion of the Commitments and Covenants.
7. Identify the achievement levels of students enrolled in the Learning Centers program.

### ***Independent Evaluation***

Sixteen Learning Center sites continued to be operated by the Dallas ISD during the 2006-07 academic year, including four in East Dallas, seven in South Dallas, and five in West Dallas. Four Learning Centers serve middle school students in grades 6-8, while the remaining 12 centers serve elementary students in grades 4-5. Collectively, the Learning Center sites enrolled 5,044 students in 2006-07, with the vast majority either African American (46%) or Hispanic (52%). African American students are a disproportionately high share of enrollment in Learning Centers relative to their share of the district's total enrollment. Enrollment at individual Learning Center sites by race/ethnicity varied considerably, with some centers serving predominantly African American students, others serving mostly Hispanic students, and some serving a mix. Learning Centers continued to employ a variety of exemplary programs and policies to promote high levels of student achievement in 2006-07. These included reduced teacher/student ratios and extensive before- and after-school programs. It should also be noted that 91% of the Learning Center students are basically disadvantaged.

In general, the academic performance of Learning Center students at both the elementary and middle school levels was comparable to district averages as measured by 2006-07 TAKS passing rates, particularly in Mathematics. Figure 10 below shows that in Reading, 72% of Learning Center elementary students (grades 4-5) obtained passing scores (compared to 74% for all district students), and that 80% of all Learning Center middle school students (grades 6-8) obtained passing scores (compared to 82% for all district students). Looking at individual grade levels within each school span (elementary and middle), Learning Center students performed slightly below the district average in grades 4, 6, and 8, and slightly above the district average in grades 5 and 7. The performance of Learning Center students on 2006-07 TAKS Mathematics tests was very close to the district average (within 1 percentage point) for both the elementary and middle school spans overall (Figure 11), with slightly better performance in grades 4, 7, and 8 and slightly lower performance in grades 5 and 6. Learning Center students also performed very close to the district average on the TAKS Writing assessment in grades 4 and 7, the Science assessment at grade 8, and the Social Studies assessment at grade 8. Learning Center students scored somewhat higher on the grade 5 TAKS Science assessment than did district 5<sup>th</sup> graders overall (66% passing vs. 62%). The district's internal evaluation report notes the declines in TAKS performance and recommends that the minimal solution for restoring the key element of the LC concept would be to offer incentives for attracting effective teachers (CEIs  $\geq 50$ ) with a history of success with minority students. Nationally, the movement from the comfort of elementary school to middle school can sometimes bring about a temporary decline in academic achievement. Traditionally, elementary Learning Center students' performance on TAKS Reading and Math Tests generally exceeded that of other district schools, while middle Learning Center students' performance was comparable to other district schools.

Figure 10  
 2006-07 TAKS Reading Passing Rates  
 for Learning Center and District Students by School Level  
 (4-8 district students did not include 4-8 Learning Center students)

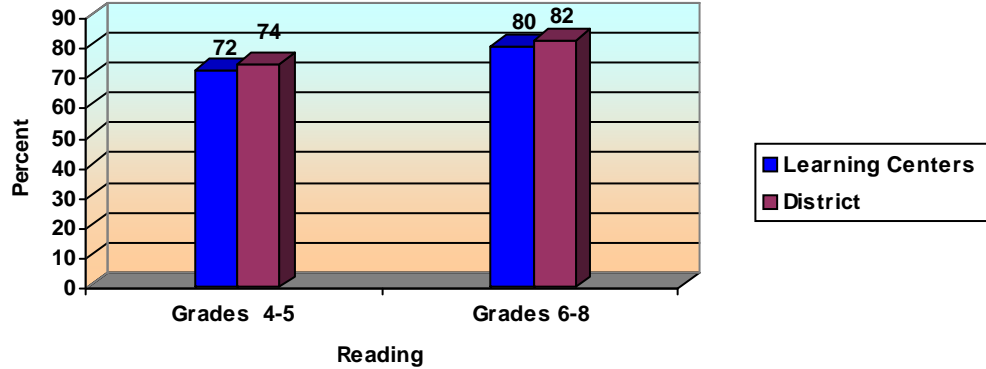
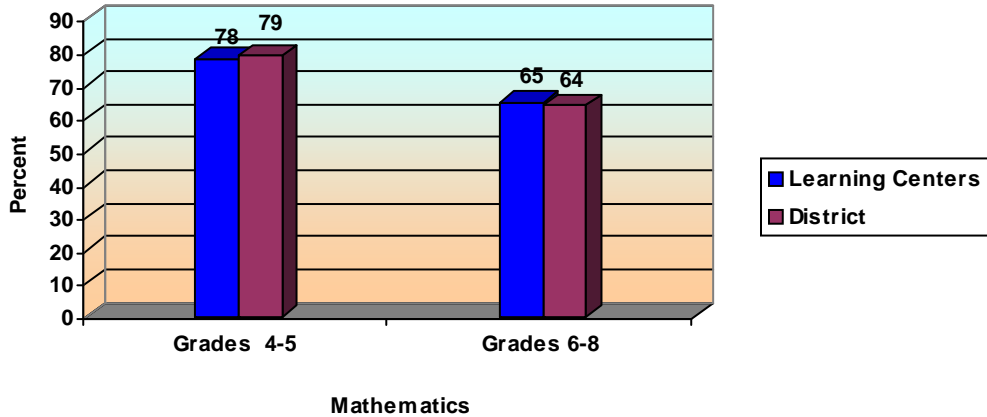


Figure 11  
 2006-07 TAKS Mathematics Passing Rates  
 for Learning Center and District Students by School Level  
 (4-8 district students did not include 4-8 Learning Center students)



***Points of Concern***

A number of noteworthy administrative changes occurred in the program. The changes were a result of recommendations from the Area Superintendent for the Learning Centers and the result of structural changes, such as grade configurations (elementary became either PreK-5 or 4-5 and middle became 6-8) and attendance zones changes due to opening of new schools. This resulted in a \$5.8 million reduction in the Learning Centers' budget. Specifically, the district's internal evaluation notes that the reduced budget was due to having fewer teachers, removal of Learning Center staff from the Area 3 office, and the restructuring of administrative staff at several

Learning Center sites. Also, professional and support staff, as well as administrators, were reduced in Learning Center sites, and both salary incentives as well as selective hiring practices in Learning Centers were discontinued. The district's own evaluation concludes that these changes "...altered the implementation of the original Learning Centers concept," and that "What remains differs from the original concept." The district should compare and contrast the original Learning Centers concept approved by the Court with the changes currently implemented. If the district's intent is to retain the Learning Centers in name only, then it should redefine the original concept and publish a new contextual framework that reflects the district's current philosophy toward serving Learning Center students. Given the historical importance of the Learning Centers as an initiative for improving the education of disadvantaged student populations in Dallas, it is hopeful that changes do not impact achievement.

Over the last several years, the Learning Centers' enrollment has moved from a majority African American enrollment to a majority Hispanic enrollment. The district should consider reinstating incentives to attract highly effective teachers (CEIs  $\geq 50$ ) with a history of success with African American and Hispanic students and to attract Bilingual/ESL teachers to the program.

Changes in Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) ratings for Learning Center sites in 2006-07 is an area of some concern, as 7 of the 8 sites that had "Recognized" ratings in 2005-06 declined to "Acceptable" for 2006-07. The 8<sup>th</sup> site, Dade, was changed from an elementary Learning Center to a middle Learning Center. Thompson was rated "Exemplary" in 2005-06 but declined to "Recognized" for 2006-07. One Learning Center site (Ray) went from "Acceptable" to "Recognized." It is of some concern that so many sites showed declines while one Learning Center showed improvement under the same constraints. The district's internal report indicates that declines in AEIS ratings for the Learning Centers was most likely due to changes in the TAKS passing rates in the state's accountability system. A review of district data indicated that this decline was not limited to the Learning Centers but was observed in other similar Dallas ISD schools and state wide.

## **BILINGUAL/ESL PROGRAMS**

### ***Program Description***

According to the Texas Education Commissioner's Rules, Title 19 TAC section 89, Subchapter BB, states that each school district which has an enrollment of 20 or more limited English proficient (LEP) students in any language classification in the same grade level shall offer a Bilingual Education (BE) program in pre-kindergarten through the elementary grades (PK-6). All LEP students for whom the district is not required to offer a BE program shall be provided an English as a Second Language (ESL) program regardless of the students' grade level, home language, or number of such students as stated in the Texas Administrative Code (TAC), Chapter 89, 1996.

Title III of the No Child Left Behind act (NCLB, 2001) ensures the civil rights of LEP students regarding access to the school's curriculum while learning English. Supporting a comprehensive approach to meeting the needs of LEP students, it holds campuses, districts, and states accountable for the achievement of LEP students. It requires all LEP students to participate

annually in the state's academic skills and English language proficiency assessments, which are aligned with the state's academic standards.

Following federal, state, and local policies and mandates concerning the education of LEP students, the Dallas Independent School District's Multi-Language Enrichment Program (M-LEP) provided various BE/ESL programs in grades PK-12 to meet the affective, linguistic, and academic needs of LEP students. The goal of the BE/ESL program is to help LEP students acquire English proficiency and facilitate their timely integration into the mainstream curriculum to ensure equal educational opportunity.

Instructional models implemented at elementary schools included BE (grades PK-4), the Newcomer program (grades 4-6), and ESL (grades PK-6). The Two-Way Immersion (TWI) program was implemented in six elementary schools in grade PK. Similarly, the One-Way Immersion program, which is similar to the TWI but with a different classroom composition, was implemented in grades PK-1. The district implemented a pilot Dual Language program at Walnut Hill Elementary during the 2004-06 school years, and extended the program to the six elementary schools in 2006-07.

### ***Commitment 9***

The district shall maintain bilingual and English as a Second Language programs in grades PK-12 in a comprehensive effort to meet the affective, linguistic, and academic needs of LEP students. In elementary schools, the program shall focus on teaching English and subject matter through developmental bilingual classrooms, shared teaching, ESL self-contained classes, and send-in ESL teachers. In secondary schools, the ESL program shall provide LEP students with sequential instruction in ESL, sheltered English, and other sheltered content courses in mathematics, science, and social studies. The programs shall be based upon current best practices and shall be designed to help LEP students acquire English proficiency and facilitate their integration into the mainstream curriculum to ensure equal educational opportunity. The district shall encourage teachers to seek ESL certification and will provide professional development opportunities for the same.

### ***Research Questions/Issues***

1. Did the district maintain bilingual and English as a Second Language programs in grades PK-12 to meet the affective, linguistic and academic needs of LEP students?
2. At the elementary level, to what extent did the program focus on teaching English and subject matter through developmental bilingual classrooms?
3. At the elementary and secondary levels, what instructional models (best practices) were used to help LEP students acquire English proficiency and facilitate their integration into the general education program?
4. Identify incentives used to encourage teachers to seek ESL certification and professional development opportunities for the same.
5. What was the program funding level?

6. Identify the achievement levels of students enrolled in the Bilingual/ESL program.

### ***Independent Evaluation***

The Dallas ISD continues to demonstrate a strong commitment to meeting the needs of students with linguistic needs through its Bilingual (BE) and English as a Second Language (ESL) programs in grades PK-12. This commitment is of great importance to the district, as nearly one-third (30.8%) of the 2006-07 enrollment of 158,919 students was classified as LEP – and this does not include an additional 17.9% who were exited LEP students. District data on English proficiency levels and grade levels show that in the early elementary grades (2 and 3), students were approximately equally divided between beginning levels of English proficiency (levels 1-3 on the WMLS) and more advanced English proficiency (WMLS levels 4-6). Beginning around grade 6, however, a far greater share of students was at levels 1-3, reflecting students with comparatively low English ability are entering Dallas middle and high schools. District data also show that the majority of LEP students met the exit criterion (WMLS level  $\geq 4$ ) by the end of grade 6.

The district offers an impressive array of programs to help LEP students acquire full English proficiency and become integrated within the general curriculum, including Newcomer Instruction, One-Way and Two-Way Immersion programs, Dual Language pilot initiative, and both sheltered English and ESL instruction. Additionally, the district provides a \$4,000 annual bilingual stipend to attract and retain qualified teachers, and to encourage both certified Dallas teachers as well as qualified bilingual individuals from outside the district to seek certification as bilingual teachers.

TAKS data comparing the performance of LEP, non-LEP, and exited LEP students against district averages show that exited LEP students outperformed all other groups at all grade levels in both Reading (Figure 12) and Mathematics (Figure 13). Performance discrepancies were especially noteworthy between exited LEP and current LEP students beginning around grade 7 and continuing into the high school grades. Exited LEP students also out-performed all comparison groups on the TAKS Writing assessment at grades 4 and 7, with 94% of exited LEP students receiving passing scores. In addition to showing this type of comparison between exited LEP students and various comparison groups, it would also be useful to show how TAKS passing rates for each group compare on a longitudinal basis. Additionally, the district has presumably conducted research into which approaches toward educating LEP students seem to deliver the best results – and under which conditions – in terms of helping students move toward full English proficiency in the most timely manner; it might be useful in future reports to reference and/or summarize this research.

Figure 12  
 Passing Rates for the English Version of the 2006-07 TAKS Reading Test  
 for all Students, Non-LEP, Exited LEP, and LEP Students by Grade

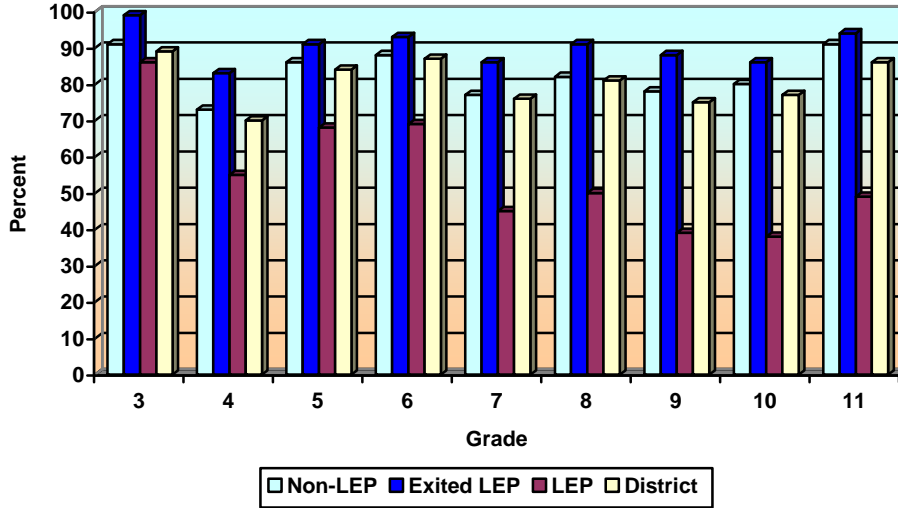
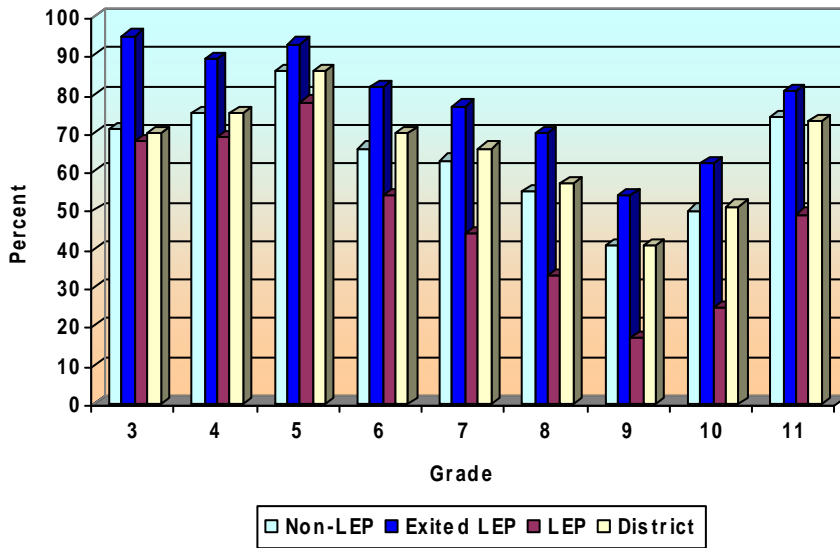


Figure 13  
 Passing Rates for the English Version of the 2006-07 TAKS Mathematics Test  
 for all Students, Non-LEP, Exited LEP, and LEP Students by Grade



**Points of Concern**

The district provides a \$4,000 annual bilingual stipend to attract and retain bilingual certified teachers. With the growing number of LEP students qualified for G/T services, the district should encourage highly effective bilingual teachers (CEIs  $\geq 50$ ) to teach in the G/T program and retain their stipend.

## SUMMARY

The preceding pages describe my independent professional judgment of progress made by the Dallas Independent School District (Dallas ISD) in adhering to the principles set forth in the Commitments and Covenants for the 2006-07 academic year. My independent evaluation is in reaction to the Report to the Superintendent on the Declaration of Commitments and Covenants on Academic Programs 2006-07 (EA07-164-2), which I received in February 2008. The report represents the district's efforts to continue offering and monitoring five programmatic areas: Early Childhood Education, Magnet Schools, Gifted and Talented (Advanced Academic Services), Learning Centers, and Bilingual Education/English as a Second Language. These programs were required under the *Tasby* court order, which was lifted in 2003, and have been continued by the district since that time as a part of its commitment to provide high quality education to all students.

In general, my professional judgment is that the Dallas Independent School District continues to uphold these five commitments, thereby promoting high levels of academic achievement among students who participate in each programmatic area. The 2006-07 report, as is true for prior years' reports, contains much "good news" for the district in the five program areas reviewed. Highlights include the following:

- A variety of innovative approaches toward cultivating and sustaining parental involvement in Early Childhood Education (ECE) programs, such as the establishment of a new Parental Involvement and Outreach Specialist position, as well as participation from key non-district partners such as Head Start of Greater Dallas, ChildCareGroup, and for-profit, non-profit, and faith-based childcare agencies
- A diverse array of programming is offered through magnet schools, ranging from a Young Women's Leadership School to Montessori programs and fine arts.
- An annual evaluation of its magnet school program, an advisory committee of relevant professionals in all magnet high schools, and the magnet school program enrollment very closely approximates district averages in terms of racial/ethnic balance.
- Improved AEIS ratings for five magnet schools from 2005-06 to 2006-07 (compared to only 2 magnet schools whose AEIS rating declined).
- Increased participation in Pre-Advanced Placement (Pre-AP) and Advanced Placement (AP) courses among students in grades 7-12, along with stipends provided by donors for students passing AP exams and their teachers.
- Varied programming for responding to the specific linguistic needs of LEP students, and continued high levels of performance among exited LEP students relative to current LEP students and non-LEP students.
- Stipends for teachers in Bilingual Education and English as a Second Language programs.

Also emerging from the district's internal evaluation are several areas of concern that merit attention within a context of ongoing efforts to improve:

- Budgetary cutbacks in key areas, including the elimination of Early Childhood program facilitator positions, supplemental pay incentives for Learning Center teachers, and both teaching and administrative staff for Learning Centers.
- Continued under-representation of LEP students in magnet school programs: the fact that only 1% of magnet enrollment is LEP students (a figure largely unchanged from previous years) indicates that continued review of outreach efforts, as well as the selection process, is warranted.
- Declining AEIS ratings at numerous Learning Center sites for 2006-07 compared to previous years indicate a declining trend in Learning Centers' student performance: additional monitoring is warranted here to determine whether this represents a continuing trend, a one-year aberration or an artifact of program changes.
- A \$4,000 annual stipend should be instituted to attract and retain highly effective teachers (CEIs  $\geq 50$ ) to the Learning Centers.
- Encourage highly effective bilingual teachers (CEIs  $\geq 50$ ) to teach in the G/T program and allow them to retain their stipend since the number of elementary G/T students have increased.

Additional recommendations that I offer in the spirit of promoting optimal outcomes in the five programmatic areas include the following:

- Given the importance of efforts to reduce achievement gaps, calculate and show any relevant achievement gaps at the local, state, and national levels in order to identify any areas of concern.
- Where appropriate and possible, explain the district's perspective on *whether* and *how* programmatic changes such as the elimination of program facilitators at ECE programs impact the children served by the program.
- In reporting outcomes for students served by Bilingual Education/English as a Second Language programs, show, where possible and appropriate, how the different programs compare in terms of students' progress toward full English proficiency.
- The cornerstone of the original Learning Centers concept was attracting teachers with a history of success with disadvantaged students. The district should revise the Learning Centers management plan to reflect new staffing criteria for high need schools and assign teachers with both high CEIs and a proven track record of success with disadvantaged or high need students.

In conclusion, I offer an additional recommendation that the district continue to monitor, through the use of an independent professional opinion, the status of the five programmatic areas covered in this report. The district's own internal evaluation is critical to maintaining the quality and integrity of these programs, of course, but an unbiased, "outside" perspective is also invaluable in identifying both what is working as well as what needs improvement.