

Middle School Level Performance Report

Executive Summary

The AISD Board of Trustees and District administration recently engaged in a process to review and revise the approach of monitoring student achievement. One of the outcomes of this process is a new reporting format and schedule that allows the Board of Trustees to review student performance more cohesively by school level; elementary, middle, and high, rather than by subject area.

This pilot Middle School Level Performance Report presents student performance data using a framework recommended by the Gibson Consulting Group to provide AISD Board members with concise, user-friendly information in a format highlighting elements related to student achievement. The following information represents a high level summary of the report.

Middle School Performance

Intellectual Development and Achievement

TAKS Performance. This section shows passing rates for of all middle school students on the 2007 TAKS tests in reading, math, writing, science and social studies. In reading, TAKS passing rates range between 63 percent at Pearce to 97 percent at Bailey. In mathematics, all but one campus exceeded the 2007 passing standard and 12 of 17 met or exceeded the passing standard for 2008.

In both reading and mathematics, Pearce, Webb, Dobie, Mendez and Burnet have consistently lower passing rates. Two campuses, Bailey and Small, had mathematics passing rates for all students at or above 90 percent and were rated as *Recognized* under the state accountability system.

In 7th grade writing, every middle school exceeded the 70 percent TAKS passing standard in the “all students” category and all campuses surpassed the 2007 and 2008 passing rates. Nine of 17 campuses had passing rates above the 90 percent standard needed to achieve *Exemplary* status, and six had passing rates of between 80 and 90 percent.

A much wider range of scores emerged in science and social studies than in writing. In science, TAKS passing rates ranged from 22 percent to 85 percent, and, in social studies, passing rates ranged from 61 percent to 98 percent. Of the 17 AISD middle school campuses, five would not have met the 2007 panel recommended passing standard in science, and in social studies, three campuses did not meet either the 2007 or 2008 passing standard. All other campuses exceeded both 2007 and 2008 standards and all students at four campuses met or exceeded the 90 percent passing rate need for Exemplary status.

Overall, TAKS passing rates for grades 6-8 in 2007-08 surpassed state accountability standards for 2006-07, and all students, considered collectively, satisfied 2007 and 2008 accountability standards in all content areas.

Over the past two years, TAKS results for all students and all but one of the student groups have generally improved, and the achievement gap between white students and all other student groups closed by two to five percentage points in most content areas.

In state accountability ratings at the middle school level, Bailey and Small were rated as Recognized, 11 schools were rated as Academically Acceptable, and four were rated Academically Unacceptable. Three campuses raised their ratings between 2006 and 2007, and ratings were lower in 2007 than in 2006 for three campuses.

In the 2007 determination of adequate yearly progress under the federal accountability system, Dobie was identified as “Needs Improvement” for the third consecutive year (stage 3), Mendez for the second consecutive year (stage 2), and Burnet and Fulmore were identified as “Needs Improvement” for the first time (stage 1). While Paredes and Webb both made adequate yearly progress, these two schools remained in “Needs Improvement” status (stage 1) because the standards must be met for two consecutive years before the sanctioned status is removed by TEA.

NAEP scores. In 2005, Austin 8th graders in most groups performed as well as or better than their counterparts. Austin students as a whole scored just below the national average and better than others in large central cities in reading and better than their peers in Mathematics. White students outperformed all other groups. More than half of AISD’s White eighth grade students scored “at or above proficient,” as compared to 10 to 17 percent of African American, Hispanic and economically disadvantaged students.

ELL proficiency. The Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment (TELPAS) is an assessment program for English language learners in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The TELPAS test results provide a measure of progress, indicating annually where each ELL student is on a continuum of English language development.

Evaluations of test results from one year to the next indicate that a large percentage of middle school students progress in the first two years, but the percentage of students whose proficiency improves by at least one level decreases beyond that point.

Technology literacy. The percentage of eighth graders showing proficiency in technology skills and knowledge increased from 49 percent in 2006 to 59 percent in 2007. The number of campuses where the school average met the standard increased from four in 2006 to ten in 2007. In all seven areas tested, the AISD district average was very close to the national average. White students continue to pass the test at a higher rate than other student groups, although significant gains are noted for African-American, Hispanic and Economically Disadvantaged.

Failure rates by grade. In 2006-07, failure rates for students in grades 7 and 8 were seven percent in English/Language Arts and nine percent in Mathematics. In each of these areas, failure rates decreased by one percent between 2005-06 and 2006-07. Failure rates tend to rise as students move from sixth to eighth grade.

In English/Language Arts, failure rates by campus vary widely, from three percent to 17 percent. Mathematics failure rates are higher overall, and only three middle schools have a mathematics failure rate of less than five percent. In 2006-07, six middle schools had ten percent or more of their students experiencing course failures, and at one middle school, nearly one in five students experienced failure in mathematics.

Grade-level advancement. Retention rates, meaning the percentage of students enrolled in the same grade as their grade the last six weeks of the previous year, remained low and stable in the 2004-05 and 2005-06 school years for non-special education students. Rates for special education students have varied slightly, increasing in grade 7 and 8 and decreasing in grade 6. In grade 8, the retention rate for special education students is more than double that of non-special education students.

Personal, Social, Cultural, and Physical Development

Attendance. Attendance rates at the middle school level are strongest for 6th grade students and lowest for 8th grade students. For grades 7 and 8, attendance rates were slightly higher in 2006-07 than in 2005-06. White students have the highest attendance rates and African American students the lowest, although average attendance rates in middle school are relatively high at 94 percent for both years reported.

Three Title I schools had the lowest attendance rates (Martin, Burnet, and Pearce) while three non-Title I schools (Bailey, Small and Murchison) had the highest rates of attendance. However, some Title I schools (Bedichek and Kealing) demonstrated relatively high rates of attendance.

TAKS performance and attendance. An examination of the data shows that student attendance is strongly and positively related to middle school TAKS passing rates in both reading and mathematics. However, among non-Title I schools, attendance is statistically related only to TAKS passing rates in reading.

TAKS performance and economic status. Middle school students at schools with a large percentage of economically disadvantaged students pass TAKS assessments at significantly lower rates than do students at campuses with lesser concentrations of economically disadvantaged students. The data indicate that 90 percent of the variance in reading and 97 percent of the variance in mathematics TAKS performance is related to the number of economically disadvantaged students. There are exceptions, however: four Title I campuses had passing rates that exceeded 80 percent on the reading TAKS and three had mathematics passing rates that exceeded 60 percent.

These results are quite different from elementary school results, in which there was a broad range of TAKS performance among high poverty schools.

Discipline. Between 2005-06 and 2006-07, the number of African-American students involved in disciplinary actions decreased overall, but referral rates continue to be disproportionately high for African-American students for each type of disciplinary

action. Five middle schools had suspension rates for African-American students of more than one in three.

The number of Hispanic and Anglo students in home or in-school suspension increased, but the number removed for mandatory and discretionary reasons decreased or remained the same. The total number of middle school students suspended to home increased, but the number referred to in-school suspension or removed for mandatory or discretionary purposes decreased.

School climate. Middle school students at all campuses were fairly positive about their campus environment. In a somewhat atypical pattern, students at three schools consistently rated climate less positively than did students at all other middle schools.

Dropout rates. Between 2004-05 and 2005-06, the annual dropout rate for middle school students more than doubled for all groups, but overall, dropout rates remained very low, at or below 0.6 percent of all student groups. The increase in dropout rates during this period may be attributed at least partially to significant changes in the TEA dropout definition and student leaver reporting requirements that were implemented in 2005-06.

Hispanic students had the highest dropout rates in both years, and White students had the lowest. In 2005-06, the dropout rate for African Americans was equal to that of Hispanics.

Equitable Opportunities and Outcomes

Teacher experience. In 2007-08, AISD increased by 2.8 percent the number of middle school teachers employed, while also decreasing by six percent the number of teachers with no previous experience. Only one middle school began the 2007-08 school year with more than 20 percent of its teachers being new to the profession, compared to five schools in 2006-07. Overall, campuses showed a five percentage point gain in teachers with between one and five years of experience, a three percentage point gain in teachers with six to ten years of experience, and no change in the percentage of teachers with 11 to 20 years of experience.

Although there is a slight difference in the percentage of beginning teachers at Title I and Non-Title I schools (13 percent and 7 percent respectively), schools with very large percentages of economically disadvantaged students had higher percentages of teachers with from one to five years of experience and lower percentages of teachers with 11-20 years of experience.

Teacher retention. Teacher retention rates between the 2005-06 and 2006-07 school years were moderately high at nearly 78 percent for the 17 middle schools included in the analysis, but there is considerable variation in retention across individual campuses. Eight campuses had retention rates of 70-80 percent, and six campuses had retention rates of over 80 percent. All of the campuses with low retention rates are categorized as Title I schools, and all but two of the campuses with higher retention rates are categorized as non-Title I schools.

Teacher retention and TAKS performance. Students in schools with higher teacher retention rates tend to pass TAKS reading and mathematics at higher rates than do students in schools with lower rates of teacher retention. This relationship is stronger

for mathematics than it is for reading TAKS performance. Teacher retention explains about 39 percent of the variation in TAKS mathematics passing rates and about 35 percent of the variation in reading passing rates. The relationship is stronger at middle school than it is at the elementary level. Schools with a large percentage of economically disadvantaged students tend to have lower rates of teacher retention and lower TAKS scores.

Principal turnover. Middle school principal turnover has increased from 6 percent in 2003-04 to 38 percent in 2007-08. The five-year turnover rate for middle school principals is 20 percent for the 17 middle schools included in this calculation. For the 16 middle schools with five years of data, seven have had no principal turnover in the past five years, four have had two different principals, three have had three different principals, and two have had four principals.

Key Challenges

The Middle School Level Performance Report points to a number of challenges at the middle school level in Austin ISD.

- **Achievement gaps persist between student groups** on an array of objective measures, including the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), and the Technology Literacy assessment.
- **TAKS results for science and social studies vary widely.** Of the 17 middle school campuses in AISD, five (Pearce, Martin, Webb, Dobie and Burnet) would not have met the 2007 panel recommended passing standard in science. In social studies, four campuses (O. Henry, Bailey, Murchison and Small) met or exceeded the 90 percent passing rate necessary for exemplary status, while three campuses (Martin, Pearce and Burnet) did not meet either the 2007 or 2008 standard. With 8th grade science to be used in determining ratings in summer 2008, this is an area where close monitoring and support will be essential to the success of all middle schools relative to next year's state accountability ratings.
- There are several instances where **student performance seems to plateau or decline when further improvement is both possible and desirable.** For example, while 7th and 8th grade performance on certain subjects in TAKS showed improvement, other measures show a noticeable lack of incremental improvement (particularly English proficiency among English Language Learners after their third year in U.S. schools).
- **There are inconsistencies in student performance across subject areas.** Middle school mathematics appears to be a particular area of focus for improvement in terms of student passing rates as well as TAKS scores. The data illustrate wide variability within schools as well as between them, which, in turn, appears to be associated with schools missing Exemplary or Recognized state accountability system ratings.
- **There are inequities in discipline rates among student groups.** Higher proportions of African American students are referred for discretionary removals than white students.
- **Complex relationships exist** between such factors as (a) student and staff perceptions of climate and student performance on state tests, (b) teacher experience or turnover and student performance on state tests, and/or (c) principal turnover and student achievement.

- **Turnover among middle school principals is both high and unstable.** From year to year over the last five years, the number of principals who have left their positions varied remarkably. Overall, just under half of all middle schools experienced no turnover during the last five years, and almost a third of all middle schools had three or more different principals assigned over the five-year period.

Strategic Response

From the middle school data presented in this report, specific challenges emerge that point to a need for better support mechanisms and systems. The AISD has undertaken a variety of initiatives to provide this support. *Detailed descriptions* of these initiatives are included in the Strategic Response section of this report.

Intellectual Development and Achievement

- Identify and implement academic best practices
- Administer six weeks tests
- Identify best practices of English Language Learners
- Strengthen the ELLA (English Language Learners Academy) at Webb Middle School
- Regularly review performance of *Academically Unacceptable* Campuses
- Conduct curriculum team meetings
- Continue to develop vertical team strategies

Personal, Social and Cultural Development

- Establish sixth grade clusters
- Provide additional Dropout Prevention Specialists
- Create additional Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) Classes
- Introduce Where Everybody Belongs (WEB)
- Conduct leadership conferences for African-American and Hispanic youth
- Increase Positive Behavior Support (PBS)
- Encourage parent engagement

Equitable Opportunities and Outcomes

- Hire Executive Principals at campuses that need additional support and assistance
- Provide professional development for new teachers
- Continue to hold sessions with campus principals
- Provide stipends and other incentives for staff
- Offer professional development for assistant principals
- Enhance middle school staff recruitment and retention efforts