



# PRESS RELEASE

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HISD Media Relations Department

[www.houstonisd.org/HISDmedia](http://www.houstonisd.org/HISDmedia) 713-556-6393

## HISD Students Post Strong Math and Science TAKS Scores

### *Flat Reading Scores Show Need for More Robust Curriculum*

May 26, 2011 – HISD students this year made significant gains on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) math and science exams, two subjects that have long proven to be the most difficult to master.

The boost in achievement happened both in terms of better passing rates and a higher percentage of students reaching the tougher “commended” level that shows whether students are learning at a pace that will prepare them for college and meaningful careers.

**Overall, the percentage of HISD students passing all subjects tested by the TAKS grew by a whopping 9 percentage points to 72 percent. The percentage of students scoring at the “commended” level in all subjects on the TAKS or TAKS-Accommodated exams now stands at 15 percent, a 5-point increase from a year ago.**

In **math**, the percentage of HISD students passing increased by 2 percentage points to 81 percent. The percentage of students reaching the “commended” level in math also climbed 2 percentage points to reach 29 percent.

In **science**, HISD students raised their passing rate by 2 percentage points to 81 percent and their “commended” rate by an especially impressive **4 percentage points** to 29 percent.

On the **social studies** exam, the overall passing rate increased 1 percentage point to 95 percent, and the “commended” rate increased 2 percentage points to 42 percent.

Superintendent Terry Grier said the progress made by HISD students is a credit to the district’s strong teachers and principals.

“Nothing has a bigger impact on student academic performance than great teaching,” Grier said. “When our students excel, it is a direct reflection on the work of Houston’s professional educators.”

The district’s overall **reading** passing rate remained unchanged at 85 percent, while the “commended” rate grew 2 percentage points to 30 percent. On the **writing** exam, HISD’s passing rate now stands at 91 percent, 2 points lower than last year. The writing “commended” rate was unchanged at 30 percent.

Superintendent Grier in January announced his intention to overhaul HISD’s approach to reading instruction, which has become unwieldy as schools employ dozens of different reading programs. Grier has tasked newly hired Deputy Chief Academic Officer Alicia Hill Thomas with

leading the implementation of a districtwide reading curriculum while also allowing schools with a track record of reading success to continue their current practices.

## **Math Tutoring Pays Off for Apollo 20 Students**

Nowhere was the improvement in HISD student achievement more pronounced than in the nine schools that just concluded year one of the three-year Apollo 20 school turnaround program that seeks to provide every child great teachers and principals, more class time, data-driven instruction, and a school culture of high expectations without excuses.

Sixth- and ninth-grade students at Apollo 20 schools received intensive daily math tutoring from a cadre of college-educated math fellows who signed on to do the work for \$20,000 a year. The numbers show that their work paid off.

Sixth-grade students who were enrolled at Apollo 20 schools for the entire school year posted an 85 percent passing rate on the TAKS math exam, **22 points higher** than sixth graders at those schools in 2010. Their “commended” rate is now 30 percent, an **18-point jump** from last year.

Apollo 20 ninth graders enrolled the entire school year also made great strides with the help of the math fellows. These freshmen produced a 72 percent passing rate in math, which is **16 points better** than last year’s freshman class. Their “commended” rate is now 20 percent, an **8-point increase** from 2010.

All Apollo 20 students who did not receive math tutoring received “double-dose” class time in either math or reading, if they entered the school year below grade level in either subject.

Among those Apollo 20 students who have been enrolled in HISD for at least two years, the impact of an extra period of math instruction was significant. That group of middle school students improved their math TAKS passing rates by **17 percentage points** and their “commended” rates by 2 percentage points.

The math performance improvement was also great among Apollo 20 high school students who received extra math class time and have been enrolled in HISD for at least two years. For these students the passing rate improved **21 percentage points** and the “commended” rate grew by 3 percentage points.

Apollo 20 students also showed significant progress in science and social studies.

Apollo 20 students who received an extra hour of daily reading instruction, however, did not demonstrate significantly greater mastery of the subject. As a result, HISD will re-evaluate the reading curriculum used in the Apollo 20 schools and instructional practices to determine how to improve performance in the years to come.

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The **Houston Independent School District** is the largest school district in Texas and the seventh-largest in the United States with 298 schools and more than 200,000 students. The 301-square-mile district is one of the largest employers in the Houston metropolitan area with nearly 30,000 employees.

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