

REPORT FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

Office of Superintendent of Schools
Board of Education Meeting of December 11, 2014

SUBJECT: BOARD MONITORING UPDATE ON EVAAS, TEACHER RETENTION, AND PERCENT OF STUDENTS AT OR ABOVE STANDARD ON THE SAT/ACT READING AND MATH SECTIONS COMBINED

The Houston Independent School District (HISD) exists to strengthen the social and economic foundation of Houston by assuring its youth the highest-quality elementary and secondary education available anywhere. In fulfilling this goal, the HISD Board of Education has designed the framework for the systematic monitoring of the district's goals.

Following are the specific, actionable measures provided to the Board of Education on an annually recurring basis for ongoing monitoring and trend reporting in the areas of rigorous education in reading and math, consistency, and safety with the intent to provide a holistic view of the district. As data is received into the district, data attributes are populated.

Attached to this update is the Executive Summary containing supporting evidence of district progress for the 2013–2014 school year, specifically for:

- Student Achievement: Districtwide Education Value-Added Assessment System (EVAAS) Scores in Reading
- Student Achievement: Districtwide EVAAS Scores in Math
- Percent of Highly Effective Teachers Retained
- Percent of Ineffective Teachers Exited
- Percent of Students At or Above Standard on the SAT/ACT Reading and Math Sections Combined



Board Monitoring Systems (BMS) (Reflects updated results from prior year.)

As-Of Dec 11, 2014

2013-2014 School Year

		2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014
Student Achievement				
Rigorous Education	Percent of Students at Level III - Advanced Academic Performance STAAR Standard (3-8) Reading	15.2	17.4	15.7
	Percent of Students at Level II - Satisfactory Academic Performance STAAR Standard (3-8) Reading	71.2	70.1	68.7
	Percent of Students at Level I - Unsatisfactory Academic Performance STAAR Standard (3-8) Reading	28.8	29.9	31.3
	Percent of Students at Level III - Advanced Academic Performance STAAR Standard (3-8) Math	12.4	12.9	16.0
	Percent of Students at Level II - Satisfactory Academic Performance STAAR Standard (3-8) Math	68.2	67.1	68.6
	Percent of Students at Level I - Unsatisfactory Academic Performance STAAR Standard (3-8) Math	31.8	32.9	31.4
	Percent of Students at Level III - Advanced Academic Performance STAAR EOC (9-12) ELA I & II	N/A	N/A	4.9
	Percent of Students at Level II - Satisfactory Academic Performance STAAR EOC (9-12) ELA I & II	N/A	N/A	53.9
	Percent of Students at Level I - Unsatisfactory Academic Performance STAAR EOC (9-12) ELA I & II	N/A	N/A	46.1
	Percent of Students at Level III - Advanced Academic Performance STAAR EOC (9-12) Algebra I	5.9	5.5	6.6
	Percent of Students at Level II - Satisfactory Academic Performance STAAR EOC (9-12) Algebra I	72.7	67.2	68.1
	Percent of Students at Level I - Unsatisfactory Academic Performance STAAR EOC (9-12) Algebra I	27.3	32.8	31.9
	Percent of Students at Level III - Advanced Academic Performance STAAR EOC (7,8) Algebra I	39.0	44.0	50.1
	Percent of Students at Level II - Satisfactory Academic Performance STAAR EOC (7,8) Algebra I	95.7	97.6	98.6
	Percent of Students at Level I - Unsatisfactory Academic Performance STAAR EOC (7,8) Algebra I	4.3	2.4	1.4
	Percent of Students at or above 50th percentile on Norm Reference Test in Grades 1-5 Reading	54.7	53.5	51.2
	Percent of Students at or above 50th percentile on Norm Reference Test in Grades 1-5 Math	62.7	62.1	60.6
	Percent of Students at or above 50th percentile on Norm Reference Test in Grades 6-8 Reading	39.5	37.1	37.1
	Percent of Students at or above 50th percentile on Norm Reference Test in Grades 6-8 Math	56.2	55.9	53.2
	Districtwide EVAAS Growth Measure Scores in Reading (Grades 3-8)	Reading	0.0	0.2
Districtwide EVAAS Growth Measure Scores in Math (Grades 3-8)	Math	-1.0	0.2	0.2
College and Career Readiness				
Percent of Students Enrolling in Higher Education Within 1 Year of High School Graduation		59.5*	58.0	
Percent of Students at or above standard on the SAT/ACT Reading & Math Sections Combined		14.8	14.5	
Percent of Students at or above benchmark score on the PSAT		13.6	21.4	20.4
Graduation & Dropout				
Four-Year Cohort Graduation Rate		81.7	81.6	
Four-Year Cohort Dropout Rate		11.3	11.1	
Perception Survey - Rigorous Education				
Percent of Parents Satisfied with Rigorous Education		Not Applicable	92	93
Percent of Students Who Feel Challenged with Coursework			70	70
Students				
Percent of Students Satisfied with Teachers Having High Expectations		Not Applicable	88	91
Teachers				
Percent of Highly Effective Teachers Who are Retained (EVAAS \geq 2.0)		87.2	87.6	87.9
Percent of Ineffective Teachers Who are Exited (EVAAS \leq -2.0)		20.3	24.4	25.0
Parents				
Percent of Parents Satisfied with Consistent Education		Not Applicable	86	88
Principals				
Percent of Principals Satisfied with Central Office Services		Not Applicable	64	71
Levels of Offenses				
Number of Level III Offenses-Suspension/Optional Removal to Disciplinary Alternative Education		4,987	5,917	5,800
Number of Level IV Offenses - Required Placement in a Disciplinary Alternative Education Program		1,173	1,109	1,160
Number of Level V Offenses - Expulsion for Serious Offenses		68	53	42
Number of Bullying Incidents		125	139	168
Perception Survey - Safety and Environment				
Percent of Parents Satisfied with Safety		Not Applicable	86	90
Percent of Parents Satisfied with Environment			90	91
Percent of Students Satisfied with Safety			74	76
Percent of Students Satisfied with Environment			72	72
Percent of Teachers Satisfied with Safety			77	80
Percent of Teachers Satisfied with Environment			70	70
Percent of Principals Satisfied with Safety			94	95
Percent of Principals Satisfied with Environment			90	91

* Adjusted to one decimal place to match report.



Board Monitoring System: Student Achievement

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purpose

The Houston Independent School District (HISD) exists to strengthen the social and economic foundation of Houston by assuring its youth the highest-quality elementary and secondary education available anywhere. In fulfilling this goal, HISD's Board of Education has designed a program to systematically monitor the district's goals and core values. The following results inform the progress of the district as it relates to student achievement regarding district-wide Educational Value-Added Assessment System (EVAAS) growth measure scores in Reading and in Math, as defined below.

Board Monitoring Scorecard				
	Student Achievement	2011–2012*	2012–2013*	2013–2014
Rigorous Education	Districtwide EVAAS Growth Measure Scores in Reading (Grades 3–8)	0.0	0.2	-0.1
	Districtwide EVAAS Growth Measure Scores in Math (Grades 3–8)	-1.0	0.2	0.2

* Adjusted using more longitudinal data

Change in Methodology

- In the years prior to STAAR (2006–2011), the model utilized for grades 3–11 end-of-grade exams used a “Base Year” approach with the 2006 State of Texas TAKS distribution as the growth standard and with growth for teachers and schools measured relative to the district average performance. Beginning with the 2012 analyses when the state moved to STAAR testing and continuing annually, the growth standard is calculated as the *annual* distribution of statewide scores. Therefore, every year, as the statewide scores improve/decline, growth is calculated compared to a new growth standard. To show growth as a district, HISD must now show more growth annually than the state in each grade/subject area.
- Value-added calculations for the district use the STAAR test at the grades and subjects where it is administered and the district's norm-referenced test (NRT), Stanford/Aprena, at the grades and subjects where the STAAR is not administered. See **Table 1**.
- For growth measures that use the STAAR EOC exams, the district is part of a consortium of Texas districts which allows us to expand the comparison group. In 2012, the growth measures were generated based on the district distribution. In 2013 and 2014, the consortium distribution was used. This reference group includes multiple Texas districts responsible for roughly 13% of the state's students.
- When analyses were based on a comparison to the average growth of students district-wide, it automatically ensured a distribution of teachers and schools among green, yellow, and red. In order to show growth now, teachers and schools must outpace the state or the consortium of Texas districts every year.

- The advantage is that the district will now have room to show more growth than previously in the coming years, i.e. nothing ensures a distribution by category anymore, so there is potential for every teacher and school to show as much or more growth than the state.

Table 1. Exams Used to Calculate EVAAS by Subject and Grade									
	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Language	NRT	NRT	NRT	NRT	NRT	NRT			
Math	STAAR	STAAR	STAAR	STAAR	STAAR	STAAR	Algebra I EOC		
Reading	STAAR	STAAR	STAAR	STAAR	STAAR	STAAR	English I EOC	English II EOC	
Science		NRT	STAAR	NRT	NRT	STAAR	Biology EOC		
Social Studies		NRT	NRT	NRT	NRT	STAAR			US History EOC

Results

- Overall, the district's Reading growth measure dropped from 0.2 to -0.1 from 2013 to 2014, and the Math growth measure remained flat at 0.2.
- Graphs are presented on page 4 in **Figure 1**, for each of the STAAR 3–8 subjects which represent 2013 and 2014 growth measures by grade level and across grades 3–8. Examining specific subjects and grades for the district reveals that:
 - In grades 3–8, reading growth was lower than that of the state overall, but grades 4, 5, and 7 made more progress than the state did. Only grade 4 showed higher growth over 2013. Reading EVAAS uses the STAAR exam to assess growth.
 - In grades 3–8, language arts improved from a growth measure of -0.4 to 0.2 overall. With the exception of 8th grade, all other grades showed improvement from 2013. In 2013, 8th grade made substantially more progress than the state growth standard in 2013 and still showed higher progress than the state growth standard in 2014. Language Arts EVAAS uses the Stanford/Aprenda exam to assess growth.
 - The district's growth measure in math remained flat at 0.2 in 2013 and 2014. Grades 3–6 all showed improvement in growth from 2013 to 2014. In 2013, 8th grade made substantially more progress than the state growth standard in 2013 and still showed higher progress than the state growth standard in 2014. Math EVAAS uses the STAAR exam to assess growth.
 - In science, the district improved from a growth measure of -1.3 to 0.2 against the state. Grades 4, 6, and 8 performed better than the state did, and all grades showed improvement from 2013 to 2014. Science EVAAS uses the STAAR exam for the grades where it is administered (grades 5 and 8), and the Stanford/Aprenda exam in other grade levels to assess growth.
 - In social studies, the district improved from a growth measure of -0.4 to 0.1 against the state. Grades 4 and 6 performed better than the state did, and grades 4–7 showed improvement from 2013 to 2014. Social Studies EVAAS uses the STAAR exam for the grade where it is administered (grade 8), and the Stanford/Aprenda exam in other grade levels to assess growth.

- **Table 2** represents the STAAR End-of-Course (EOC) 2014 value-added growth measure for each of the five EOC exams. The district has exceeded the Texas consortium's average growth for Algebra I and is not detectably different from the average performance in the Texas consortium for English I, English II, Biology, or U.S. History. Compared to the 2013 EOC value-added results, which can be found in **Table 3**, the district showed improvements in Algebra I, English I, and Biology.

FIGURE 1. STAAR 3-8 and Stanford/Aprenda Value-Added Growth Measure Scores By Subject, 2013 and 2014

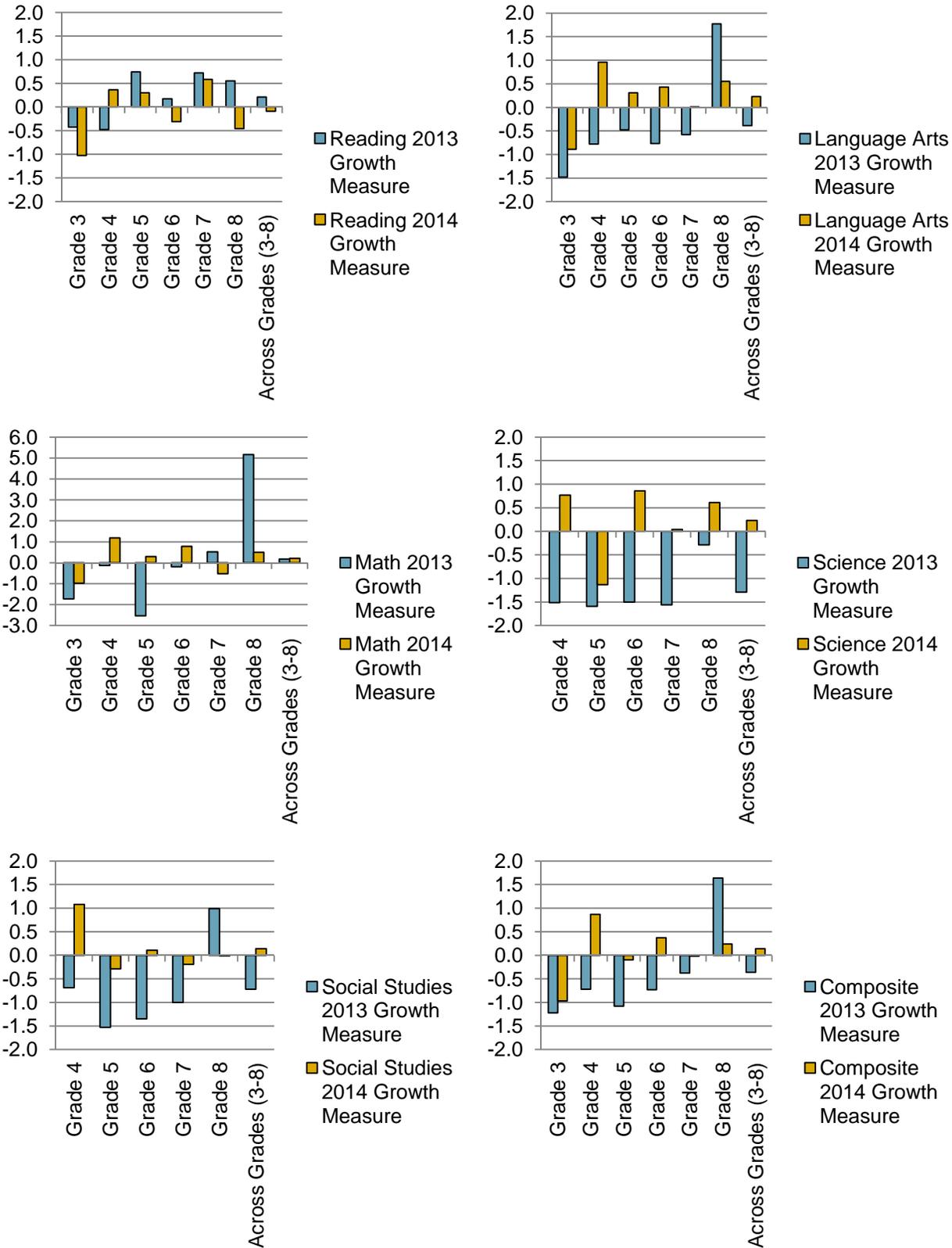


Table 2. STAAR EOC Value-Added By Subject, 2014		
STAAR EOC Exam	Growth Measure	District vs. Reference Group Average
Algebra I	54.4	Well Above
English I	-9.5	No Detectable Difference
English II	5.0	No Detectable Difference
Biology	5.3	No Detectable Difference
U.S. History	-3.9	No Detectable Difference

Table 3. STAAR EOC Value-Added By Subject, 2013		
STAAR EOC Exam	Growth Measure	District vs. Reference Group Average
Algebra I	25.3	Above
English I Reading	-13.1	Well Below
English I Writing	-8.5	Below
English II Reading	5.8	No Detectable Difference
English II Writing	6.7	Above
Biology	-17.6	Below

ADMINISTRATIVE RESPONSE

Elementary Schools Office:

- The Literacy By 3 initiative was needed to move Reading forward this year. Schools are focused on implementing the guided reading in our K-3 classrooms where students have the opportunity to read text at their independent and instructional reading levels. Training for principals and teachers has strengthened the implementation of Literacy By 3 and enabled the school offices as well as PSD to provide focused literacy support.
- We expect to see an improvement in our Grade 3 Reading STAAR scores this year. Common Literacy By 3 Walkthrough Forms and Look Fors have helped the school offices and campuses to calibrate expectations and monitor campus implementation.
- iStation, Snap Shots, HFWE and the DRA help to provide frequent monitoring of student progress in regards to skill development, campus and individual reading progress.
- The use of an external local vendor, Vontoure Learning, has helped us create a systematic approach to supporting our teacher and campuses by providing training focused on how to teach the new Math TEKS. This work is targeted for grades 2–5.

High Schools Office:

The Apollo program, elements of which were expanded this year to four additional high schools, includes intensive small group tutoring in math, and an extended school day. This seems to have contributed to the increase in growth in Algebra 1 at the high school level, especially in comprehensive high schools that were newly included in the Apollo program this year.



Board Monitoring System: Teachers

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purpose

The Houston Independent School District (HISD) exists to strengthen the social and economic foundation of Houston by assuring its youth the highest-quality elementary and secondary education available anywhere. In fulfilling this goal, HISD's Board of Education has designed a program to systematically monitor the district's goals and core values. The following results inform the progress of the district as it relates to retention of highly effective teachers and removal of ineffective teachers, as defined below.

Board Monitoring Scorecard				
Consistency	Teachers	2011–2012	2012–2013	2013–2014
	Percent of Highly Effective Teachers Who are Retained (EVAAS \geq 2.0)	87.2	87.6	87.9
	Percent of Ineffective Teachers Who are Exited (EVAAS \leq -2.0)	20.3	24.4	25.0

Findings

- Highly Effective Teachers are defined as teachers with an EVAAS Cumulative Teacher Gain Index of 2.0 or greater.
 - For the 2013–2014 school year, there were 832 teachers with a Cumulative Teacher Gain Index of 2.0 or higher out of 4,457 teachers with an EVAAS score. Of these, 731 (87.9%) were retained.
 - For the 2012–2013 school year, there were 695 teachers with a Cumulative Teacher Gain Index of 2.0 or higher out of 4,469 teachers with an EVAAS score. Of these, 609 (87.6%) were retained.
 - For the 2011–2012 school year, there were 829 teachers with a Cumulative Teacher Gain Index of 2.0 or higher out of 4,144 teachers with an EVAAS score. Of these, 723 (87.2%) were retained.

School Year	Total # with EVAAS	# Highly Effective	% Highly Effective	% Retained
2011–2012	4,144	829	20.0	87.2
2012–2013	4,469	695	15.6	87.6
2013–2014	4,457	832	18.7	87.9

- Ineffective Teachers are defined as teachers with an EVAAS Cumulative Teacher Gain Index of -2.0 or less.
 - For the 2013–2014 school year, there were 805 teachers with a Cumulative Teacher Gain Index of -2.0 or lower out of the 4,457 teachers with an EVAAS score. Of these, 201 (25.0%) are no longer with the district. Of these 201 teachers with a Cumulative Teacher Gain Index of -2.0 or lower who exited the district, 51 were first-year teachers and 36 were second-year teachers.
 - For the 2012–2013 school year, there were 1,099 teachers with a Cumulative Teacher Gain Index of -2.0 or lower out of the 4,469 teachers with an EVAAS score. Of these, 268 (24.4%) are no longer with the district.
 - For the 2011–2012 school year, there were 755 teachers with a Cumulative Teacher Gain Index of -2.0 or lower out of 4,144 teachers with an EVAAS score. Of these, 153 (20.3%) were no longer with the district.

School Year	Total # with EVAAS	# Ineffective	% Ineffective	% Exited
2011–2012	4,144	755	18.2	20.3
2012–2013	4,469	1,099	24.6	24.4
2013–2014	4,457	805	18.1	25.0

- District-wide, of the 12,374 teachers in the 2013–2014 school year, 10,138 (81.9%) were retained. Of the 11,737 teachers in the 2012–2013 school year, 9,699 (82.6%) were retained. Of the 12,187 teachers in the 2011–2012 school year, 10,169 (83.4%) were retained. Retention rates of highly effective teachers exceeded the district retention rate of all teachers for each of the last three years.

ADMINISTRATIVE RESPONSE

Professional Development:

The Administrative Response to the Board Monitoring Teacher Report focuses on the district’s commitment to 1) retain highly effective teachers, 2) broaden the impact of highly effective teachers and 3) identify, develop and exit, when appropriate, ineffective teachers.

The Houston Independent School District (HISD) is committed to retaining its most effective teachers by recognizing and rewarding their efforts, and leveraging their expertise to develop others. The Board Monitoring System defines highly effective teachers as those with EVAAS ≥ 2.0 . Since 2007, HISD has used the ASPIRE award model to reward teachers for their efforts in improving the academic growth of their students. The district continues to refine the ASPIRE award program by rewarding fewer, more effective teachers with larger payouts. In January 2014, HISD paid \$18.2 million in performance bonuses to qualified teachers, school leaders, and district staff who meet eligibility requirements. For teachers, these requirements are based on demonstrated ability to positively impact student outcomes. In the past several years, HISD has used the ASPIRE award system to reward a targeted subset of particularly effective teachers and school staff with larger bonuses.

Guided by national research showing that teacher recognition activities make an enormous difference in efforts to retain top teachers, HISD also embarked on a teacher recognition campaign to recognize effective and highly effective teachers. The district completed the following activities in 2013–14:

- Distributed certificates of recognition to over 1900 teachers who received a summative appraisal rating of “highly effective”;
- Hosted a “Teacher Recognition Breakfast” in March 2014 for over thirty of the district’s most effective teachers;
- Honored over thirty highly effective teachers at the March 2014 board meeting and principal meeting;
- Profiled top teachers in districtwide communications, including eNews, the State of the Schools address, and teacher newsletters

The district also offers its best teachers additional formal opportunities to refine their own skills and increase their sphere of influence in leadership roles. Roles such as literacy leaders, campus-based mentors, new teacher support contact, and team leads target highly effective teachers and give those teachers more leadership responsibilities, including a stipend. Through these roles, teachers are given the opportunity to share input and advice on campus decisions.

Additionally, HISD has prioritized efforts to retain more top teachers through meaningful career pathways roles. HISD is piloting a Career Pathways program that utilizes a highly selective process for identifying the most effective teachers, including student performance, and offering them leadership roles, all while continuing to impact students as a classroom teacher. These “pathways to leadership” are campus-based roles with specific and detailed job descriptions, significant stipends and opportunities to coach and develop novice and struggling teachers. Previous teacher surveys have shown that high-performing teachers frequently cite the lack of leadership opportunities as a reason for leaving the classroom. In the fall of 2014, the district launched the third year of the Career Pathways pilot program, which provides opportunities for top teachers to share their knowledge and skills with other colleagues and increase effectiveness. Schools can use Career Pathways roles to distribute leadership and create strong teams committed to increasing student achievement. In 2013–14, Career Pathway roles included Instructional Practice Coaches, Intervention Specialists, Instructional Technology Specialists, Campus Induction Coaches, Data Tracking and Analysis Specialists and Assessment Specialists. The Career Pathways team, based on a review of implementation in prior years, has streamlined the number of roles available to teachers to better align with the district’s academic priorities. This year, the program is focused on Instructional Practice Coaching, Data Tracking and Assessment and Instructional Technology. Roles have also been incorporated into larger district initiatives. For example, Instructional Practice Coaches can specialize in STEM or Teach like a Champion strategies, and Instructional Technology Specialists will be supporting PowerUp at participating campuses.

Throughout the pilot period, the Career Pathways program has used a comprehensive program evaluation plan to measure participating teacher leader’s success and effectiveness. This plan includes bi-annual surveys of teacher leaders and principals, end-of-year assessments by supported teachers, time-tracking by teacher leaders, focus groups and interviews, as well as careful attention to appraisal results, retention trends, and student growth. Outcomes from the 2013–14 school year include the following:

- **Teacher Retention:** Participating teacher leaders were retained at a slightly higher rate than teachers overall (85 percent of teacher leaders retained compared to 84 percent of teachers retained district-wide). In order to make a more significant impact on teacher retention trends, the district is seeking funding that will allow for the selection of teacher leaders in the winter months as opposed to the fall. By selecting teachers in the winter months, HISD would be likely to retain selected teacher leaders for the following school year at a higher rate.
- **Campus-Wide Impact:** Teacher leaders and their principals were highly satisfied with the program and its outcomes. Specifically, the majority of teacher leaders (71 percent) hope to fill

their roles again next year, and 79 percent agreed or strongly agreed that the program is a good way for teachers to gain leadership skills.

Further, 88 percent of principals stated that they would want their schools to participate in the program again next year, and upwards of 70 percent of principals indicated that having teacher leaders on their campuses increased the frequency of feedback and coaching their teachers received. 82 percent of participating teachers agreed that the Career Pathways program strengthened their leadership skills and a majority of their colleagues agreed these new roles helped them improve their instruction. HISD will have additional information on the impact of the program when final summative appraisal ratings are ready for the 2013–14 school year.

Leadership Development and other departments around the district are also looking to promote from within, with their administrative pipeline and into meaningful central office positions, like Teacher Development Specialists, that allow our best interest to increase their reach. The district continues to showcase the efforts of our best teachers by creating exemplar videos that capture our own teachers successfully implementing best practices that can be used to develop other teachers in the district. Human Resources is also committed to recruiting top talent to increase our pool of highly effective teachers.

The district is equally committed to developing or exiting its ineffective teachers, defined by the Board Monitoring System as teachers with EVAAS ≤ -2.0 . The Teacher Appraisal and Development System (TADS) begins with an Individualized Professional Development Plan (IPDP) for all teachers, which helps them identify areas for growth and plan steps for development of those areas. TADS has built in multiple observation opportunities for administrators to assess a teacher's practice. Based on these observations administrators are able to direct teachers to more targeted professional development to improve their skills. The TADS system is also used by administrators to document ineffective teachers who are not invested in their own professional growth.

In order to better support the full range of developmental needs of teachers, the Curriculum and Professional Development departments have been combined to create our new Elementary and Secondary Academics department to ensure alignment of teacher support with the HISD curriculum. This gives teachers a process for targeted development as well as powerful tools in the form of curriculum resources. Teacher Development Specialists and teacher leaders offer additional job-embedded support. Administrators are identifying ineffective teachers earlier and creating Prescriptive Plans of Assistance (PPA) to monitor their improvement. To exit a teacher for instructional issues, campus leaders understand that a PPA and documentation of support during the PPA process was given and that the change in behavior needed through the support of the PPA was not recognized by the appraiser. The School Offices, utilizing their Performance and Continuous Improvement Managers (PCIM), keep school leaders informed about ineffective teachers and work with administrators to refine support and document progress. Human resources is also providing support with assistance in the exiting process.



Board Monitoring System: SAT/ACT Benchmarks

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purpose

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Board Monitoring Scorecard				
Rigorous Education	Student Achievement: College and Career Readiness	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013
		% of students at or above standard on the SAT/ACT Reading & Math Sections Combined	*20.0%	14.8%

* The 2010-2011 indicator did not include SAT School-Day Testing and therefore is not comparable with subsequent years that do include SAT School-Day testing.

The percent of students at or above standard on the SAT/ACT reading, and math sections combined is reported by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) in the Texas Academic Performance Report (TAPR) which replaced the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) in 2013. In 2013, the Texas Education Agency changed the SAT indicator to include SAT writing. Therefore, the 2010-2011 SAT indicator is not comparable with the 2011-2012 or 2012-2013 SAT indicator.

Findings

Performance relative to the state and Region 4 is shown in **Figure 1**. In reviewing the data, it is evident that HISD's performance, in part, is lower than the state and the region because the district continues to test significantly more students (see **Figure 2**). Average ACT scores are shown in **Figure 1** and average SAT scores are shown in **Figure 2**.

Figure 1. SAT/ACT Percent at or Above Criterion

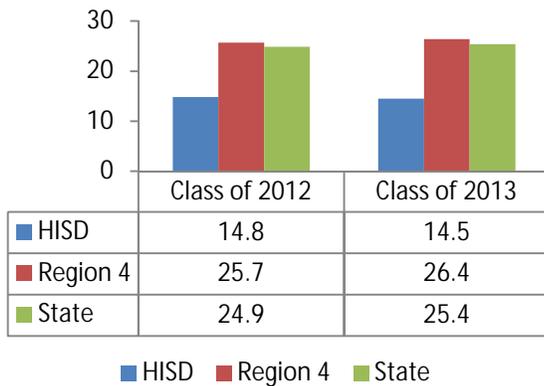


Figure 2. SAT/ACT Percent of Class Tested

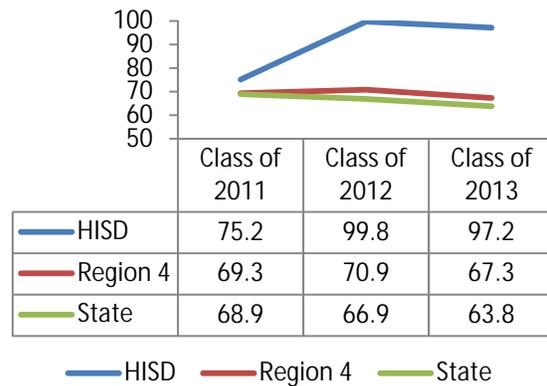


Figure 3. Average ACT Scores

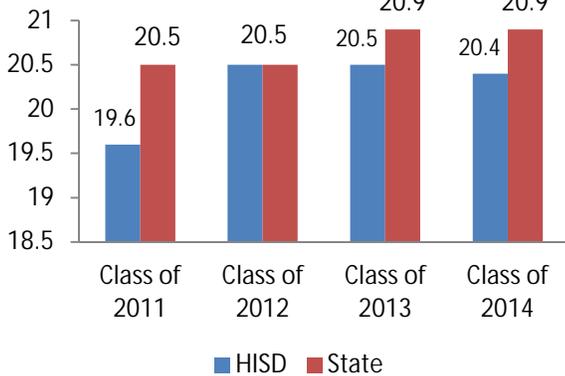
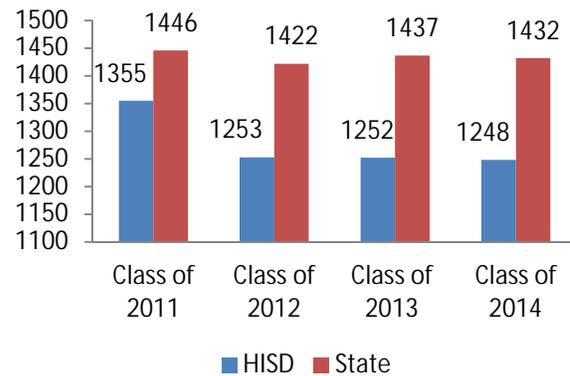


Figure 4. Average SAT Scores



Administrative Response

Comprehensive high schools that showed gains in the composite score from 2013 to 2014 had several things in common:

- They engaged in bi-weekly formative assessments across all subject areas.
- In all but two cases, their principals met weekly to collaborate on best practices and responses to instructional data based on the bi-weekly formative assessments.
- Students systematically participated in specific SAT-prep activities such as the SAT Online Course, resources available through Naviance, and school-wide vocabulary work.
- Several, but not all, of these schools added additional math and reading courses to the schedules of all students (doubling time spent in math and reading).

A majority of the students of the class of 2014 took the SAT as juniors during the 2012-2013 administration. At that time, the district did not offer robust SAT preparation. Since then, the district's College Readiness Department and the Curriculum Department have implemented numerous strategies and initiatives to prepare students for success on the SAT.

- Starting in the 2013-2014 school year, the district's newly formed College Readiness Department began offering an SAT course for juniors at most high school campuses. As a result, the average reading, math and composite scores for the 2014 school-day administration increased. This is expected to result in an increase in SAT scores for the class of 2015.

- During the 2014-2015 school year, the HISD College Readiness Department acquired PrepMe - an adaptive online PSAT and SAT preparation program -for all high school students in the district.
- The HISD Innovative Curriculum Department also created SAT curriculum that is being taught at most high schools.
- Additionally, the College Readiness Department launched an initiative to increase the number of National Merit Scholars in the district.
- HISD ELA Curriculum Department staff created three documents in 2013-2014 to support the development of high school students' writing skills:
 - A STAAR Prep Expository Writing Guide – a 10-day planning guide and calendar that provides daily instructional considerations and resources to assist teachers in preparing students for STAAR expository writing;
 - A STAAR Prep Persuasive Writing Guide – a 10-day planning guide and calendar that provides daily instructional considerations and resources to assist teachers in preparing students for STAAR persuasive writing; and
 - A High School Writing Handbook – an instructional resource and reference guide created by district teachers and staff that includes essential elements for successful writing instruction, suggested activities, and a STAAR EOC specific addendum.