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STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT



2. The AEC must be identified in AskTED (the Texas School Directory database) as an alternative campus.
3. The AEC must be dedicated to serving “students at risk of dropping out of school” as defined in the Texas Education Code (TEC) §29.081(d).
4. The AEC must operate on its own campus budget.
5. The AEC must offer nontraditional settings and methods of instructional delivery designed to meet the needs of the students served.
6. The AEC must have an appropriately certified, full-time administrator whose primary duty is the administration of the AEC.
7. The AEC must have appropriately certified teachers assigned in all areas including special education, bilingual education, and/or English as a second language (ESL) to serve students eligible for such services.
8. The AEC must provide each student the opportunity to attend a 7-hour school day as defined in TEC §25.082(a), according to the needs of each student.
9. If the campus serves students with disabilities, the students must be placed at the AEC by their Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) committee. This criterion applies to Residential Facilities only if students are placed in the facility by the school district.
10. Students with disabilities must receive all services outlined in their current individualized education programs (IEPs). Limited English proficient (LEP) students must receive all services outlined by the language proficiency assessment committee (LPAC). Students with disabilities and LEP students must be served by appropriately certified teachers.

Special Considerations for AEA Charter Schools

The requirements in criteria numbers 6-10 may not apply to charter campuses, depending on the terms of their charter, or for community-based dropout recovery campuses established in accordance with Texas Education Code §29.081(e). According to the TEA’s *2007 Accountability Manual*, the following policies for charter operators will also take effect this year:

- In order for a charter district that operates both standard campuses and registered AECs to be eligible for evaluation under AEA procedures, at least 50% of the charter’s students must be enrolled at registered AECs. AEC enrollment is verified through current-year PEIMS fall enrollment data.
- A charter operator may be labeled “Not Rated: Other” if it has too little TAKS data on which it can be evaluated.
- Charter operators will not be asked to “pair” any of their campuses for the purposes of accountability ratings.

Accountability Ratings for AEA Campuses

AEA campuses can receive one of three ratings: *Academically Acceptable*, *Academically Unacceptable*, or *Not Rated—Other* (if no data exists that would allow the school to be rated, or if no students are enrolled in the tested grades, such as preschool through second grade). Unlike schools in the standard accountability system, AEA campuses cannot be rated as Recognized or Exemplary, even if they were to meet those ratings' high standards.

Accountability ratings for both traditional schools and charter schools in the AEA system are based on the following measures:

- *The Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) Progress Indicator*, which sums performance results across grades (3-12) and across subjects;
- performance on the *State-Developed Alternative Assessment II (SDAA II)*, for students with disabilities;
- *Completion Rate II* for Grades 9-12 (except for Residential Facilities); and
- *Annual Dropout Rate* for grades 7–12.

In order to be rated Academically Acceptable in 2007, an AEA campus must have a 45% pass rate on the TAKS Progress Indicator, which is calculated as number of TAKS tests (and exit retests) that meet the standard for passing, plus all tests that have a Texas Growth Index (TGI) of at least 0 divided by the total number of tests (and exit retests) taken. For non-AEA campuses, the pass rate to be rated Academically Acceptable was 65% in writing, reading and social studies in two years; 45% in math in two years; and 40% in science, also in two years.

A 45% pass rate on the SDAA II was required for AEA campuses to be rated as Academically Acceptable (compared to 50% for non-AEA campuses) in 2007. This is the last year that SDAA II will be administered before being replaced with a new alternative assessment for students with disabilities.

In addition to test score pass rates, Texas schools must also show satisfactory levels of completion and retention to receive a rating of Academically Acceptable. For either AEA or non-AEA schools to receive an Acceptable rating, 75% of the graduating class must have completed (either through graduation or GED completion) or have been continuing their education in May 2005. The annual dropout rate (for those in grades 7-12) must have been less than 10% for an AEA school to be rated as Academically Acceptable, but must have been less than 1% for non-AEA schools (and only the drop-out rate for grades 9-12 are considered for non-AEA campuses). Finally, if a campus does not meet these standards, it can still receive an Acceptable rating if it has met a required level of improvement on each of the indicators since the previous year (which equates to roughly half the difference between the 2006 standard and the school's performance from 2005).

For 2007 AEA ratings, if the Completion Rate II and/or Annual Dropout Rate indicator(s) are the only cause for an Academically Unacceptable rating, then the AEA or charter is assigned the AEA: Academically Acceptable label. As a safeguard to this provision, districts are subject to identification and intervention by Performance-Based Monitoring (PBM) for dropout rates and leaver reporting. Additionally, AEA campuses that avoid being rated Academically Unacceptable due to this provision will be subject to technical assistance team (TAT) intervention requirements in the 2007-08 school year.

Characteristics of Charters in the AEA v. Standard Accountability System

CSPI has analyzed the school and student characteristics for all charter schools in the Texas' alternative accountability system compared to those in the standard (non-AEA) system in 2005-06 (results for many indicators from the 2006-07 school year are not yet available). In general, CSPI found that AEA charter campuses tend to have smaller student enrollments, staff sizes, and class sizes than non-AEA charters (see Table 1). Although the percentage of beginning (i.e., first year) teachers was not significantly different between AEA and non-AEA charters, the average salary earned by the beginning teachers was: While first year teachers at non-AEA charters earned an average of \$31,963.95 per year, first year teachers for AEA charter schools only earned \$28,096.41 per year—a difference of nearly \$4,000 per year. At the same time, AEA charter schools spend more money on instructional programs than do non-AEA charters (\$4,485.79 vs. \$3,529.72, respectively).

AEA charters also appear to be serving a different subset of the charter school population than are non-AEA charters. During the 2005-06 school year, AEA charters served a higher proportion of Hispanic and white students and a lower proportion of African-American students than did charters in the standard accountability system. Although the average percentage of economically disadvantaged and limited English proficient students did not differ significantly between the two, AEA charters served a much higher percentage of at-risk students (86% vs. 47%) and mobile students (72% vs. 31%). In addition, AEA charters had higher average percentages of students enrolled in vocational and special education programs than did non-AEA charters.

**Table 1: Characteristics of Charters Schools in the Alternative (AEA)
v. Standard Accountability System in 2006**

Characteristics	AEA Charters (N=160)	Standard Accountability (Non-AEA) Charters (N=201)	t-value
Average Student Enrollment	190.53	292.03	-4.533***
Average Student-Teacher Ratio	16.67	16.55	0.117
Average Class Size			
Kindergarten	14.98	17.26	1.348
1 st grade	14.54	17.35	1.401
2 nd grade	14.64	16.93	1.627
3 rd grade	14.86	16.69	1.105
4 th grade	13.09	16.85	2.316*
5 th grade	14.49	17.62	1.785
6 th grade	14.98	18.55	2.027*
Mixed Elementary Grades	9.78	22.48	4.140***
Secondary English	16.03	17.42	0.923
Secondary Math	15.61	17.47	1.362
Secondary Social Studies	14.42	19.50	3.517***
Secondary Science	16.42	18.42	1.375
Secondary Foreign Lang.	16.37	18.17	0.968
% African-American Students	23.65	39.77	-5.042***
% Hispanic Students	50.43	40.58	2.876**
% White Students	24.77	17.59	2.726**
% Economically Disadvantaged	73.87	70.86	1.101
% LEP Students	9.91	11.08	-0.623
% At-Risk Students	86.26	47.35	16.362***
% in Special Education	23.92	9.11	6.771***
% in Vocational Education	22.95	6.90	6.352***
% in Gifted Programs	0.19	2.77	-4.246***
% in Bilingual Education	9.07	10.17	-0.602
% Mobility	72.58	31.42	18.236***
Average # Disciplinary Placements	0.41	1.39	-1.511
% Minorities on Staff	56.40	58.90	-0.727
% Beginning Teachers	24.11	23.72	0.136
Average Salary for Beginning Teachers	\$28,096.41	\$31,963.95	-3.224**
Total Per-Pupil Program Expenditures, General Fund	\$4,485.79	\$3,529.72	-2.004*
Total Per-Pupil Program Expenditures, All Funds	\$6,253.02	\$4,355.36	-1.589

Note: Significance level: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Includes district-authorized "home-rule" charters.

Source: TEA 2005-06 AEIS data download.

Performance Measures for Charters in AEA v. Standard Accountability System

AEA charters do both better and worse than their non-AEA charter counterparts in terms of student retention and completion (Table 2). While student completion rates for the class of 2005 were better (though not significantly) for the AEA charters compared to the non-AEA charters for nearly all the demographic groups, drop-out rates among all groups (except LEP students) were significantly higher in the AEA charters. This latter finding should not be surprising given the risk level of the AEA charter student population.

Also as expected, students in AEA charters passed the TAKS math and reading tests at a significantly lower rate in 2006, with a few exceptions for some demographic groups. Although AEA charters appear to have been just as effective at getting students who failed the TAKS reading component in 2004 to pass it in 2005, this was not the case for the TAKS in math. However, a smaller proportion of AEA charters were rated Academically Unacceptable in 2005 than non-AEA charters, most likely due to the difference in standards.

Table 2: Performance Measures for Charter Schools in the Alternative (AEA) v. Standard Accountability System in 2006

Performance Measures	AEA Charters (N=160)	Standard Accountability (Non-AEA) Charters (N=201)	t-value
Dropout Rate 2005, All Students	2.54	1.10	3.489***
African-American	2.50	0.50	4.164***
Hispanic	2.58	0.90	3.327**
White	2.05	0.47	3.334**
Economically Disadvantaged	2.13	0.99	2.699**
Special Education	2.39	1.11	2.331*
Limited English Proficiency (LEP)	1.58	0.71	1.285
Completion Rate 2005, All Students	84.61	83.14	0.324
African-American	46.80	46.75	0.006
Hispanic	69.16	57.28	1.420
White	63.55	69.32	-0.667
Economically Disadvantaged	77.25	62.57	1.962
Limited English Proficiency (LEP)	45.32	37.70	0.643
% Passing TAKS Math, All Students	29.65	68.11	-16.91***
African-American	8.73	37.20	-9.871***
Hispanic	19.33	45.89	-8.444***
White	18.72	27.49	-2.578**
Economically Disadvantaged	22.07	55.39	-12.00***
Limited English Proficiency (LEP)	6.19	17.52	-4.366***
% Passing TAKS Reading, All Students	65.96	83.12	-10.98***
African-American	26.40	46.41	-5.050***
Hispanic	44.82	51.27	-1.611
White	35.15	25.27	2.280*
Economically Disadvantaged	50.47	67.49	-5.044***
Limited English Proficiency (LEP)	15.78	19.09	-1.011
% of 2005 failures Passing 2006 TAKS Reading, All Students (Grades 4-11)	26.97	27.51	0.177
% of 2005 failures Passing 2006 TAKS Math, All Students (Grades 4-11)	12.38	30.08	7.597***
% Rated Exemplary	n/a	6.97	-
% Rated Recognized	n/a	22.39	-
% Rated Academically Acceptable	94.38	43.28	-
% Rated Academically Unacceptable	5.00	16.41	-

Note: Significance level: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Includes district-authorized "home-rule" charters.

Source: TEA 2005-06 AEIS data download.

Conclusion & Recommendations

Texas' alternative accountability system acknowledges the challenges faced by schools serving a high percentage of at-risk students. AEA schools are not only serving high-risk students, but they receive a new batch of such students every year. Even if these schools are effective at bringing their current students up to par, the new students coming into these schools are often two, three, even four years behind in reading and mathematics.

Therefore, it may be beneficial for the state to develop additional methods of assessing the effectiveness of charters that serve large numbers of highly mobile, at-risk students. For example, a "value-added" accountability system would allow stakeholders to track gains in individual students' academic achievement over time and better assess schools' impact on these students' growth. A few states, such as Tennessee and Colorado, use value-added assessment as part of their accountability system. Other states, such as California, are considering this method as well. To learn more, see CSPI's *Fact Sheet 7, What is Value-Added Measurement?*

References

- Charter School Policy Institute (CSPI). (2007). *2007 Accountability Ratings for Texas Charter Schools*. (Policy Brief No. 5). Austin, TX: CSPI.
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