Section IX —System Safeguards

The Texas Education Agency has initiated procedures to ensure that student performance on the TAAS is properly measured and that dropouts are accurately counted. Data used to accredit districts and rate campuses will undergo routine screening before and after the release of the accountability ratings. These safeguards have been designed to validate data integrity.

Ratings Impact

Serious Data Problems

If data problems of sufficient magnitude to question the validity of any accountability ratings are uncovered, then the agency will take one or more of the following steps after consulting with the district:

- Attempts will be made to rectify the data problems within the accountability calendar.
- If the problem cannot be resolved by the rating release date, then:
  - a *Delayed* rating may be issued; OR
  - ratings may be determined using TAAS results for all students not in special education, instead of the October subset results.

Rating Changes

TEA reserves the right to change ratings issued on August 1 (or September 1) if problems in the data used to determine accountability ratings are subsequently discovered. The need for the agency to make such changes is expected to be rare.

Analyses Undertaken Prior to Release of Accountability Ratings

Analyses to examine data reasonableness will be undertaken prior to applying accountability system criteria. The Texas Education Agency will analyze current year information reported on PEIMS Submission 1 for internal consistency. Secondly, the test contractor for the student assessment program will notify TEA of potential data problems for a school district. The school district will be contacted by the agency and will have an opportunity to correct the information.

PEIMS Internal Consistency

In early spring, the agency will conduct analyses to assure internal consistency in PEIMS Submission 1 reporting. An example of inconsistent data is 8th grade students reported on a campus serving grades K-5. Problems identified from these analyses will be pursued prior to the accountability evaluation in order to reduce the likelihood of issuing *Delayed* ratings for this type of data problem.

TAAS / PEIMS Consistency

Prior to reporting TAAS results in late May, the test contractor for the student assessment program will conduct analyses to detect discrepancies between PEIMS and TAAS data submitted by districts. Districts with significant discrepancies will be contacted by TEA; they will have a specified amount of time to correct any problems through the test contractor.

For the spring test administration, after TAAS answer sheets are processed, the test contractor will determine whether:

- There were students reported in PEIMS in the tested grades, but no answer sheets were received for those grades.
- There were answer documents submitted for a grade / campus, but no enrollment data were reported in PEIMS.

Slight differences in enrollment and answer sheets will not result in notification.

Incomplete Results

TAAS results will be examined by TEA to determine that mathematics and reading results are reported for each grade tested and that writing results are provided for grades 4, 8, and 10. Missing or unexpected results will be investigated.

Dropout Analysis

Dropout data will be examined to ensure that reasonable information is being used in the accountability system. Grade 7-12 withdrawals as a percentage of Grade 7-12 cumulative enrollment for 1995-96 will be determined. Withdrawals are those non-migrant students who were in attendance at any time in 1995-96, but who do not appear in any of the following data files:

- 1995-96 graduates,
- 1995-96 reported dropouts before the state recovery process has been applied,
- 1996-97 enrollment, or
- GED recipients.

Although withdrawals which are appropriately documented are not considered dropouts, a large percentage of unlocated withdrawals may be indicative of under-reported dropouts. Those campuses and districts with significantly high rates of these unlocated withdrawals will be identified for data inquiry. Data problems will be pursued with the district. TEA reserves the right to adjust accountability ratings based on its findings.

Analyses Undertaken After Release of Accountability Ratings

Audits of Non-Tested Students

As a complement to the determination of the percentage of students tested on TAAS, the number and type of non-scored answer sheets will be analyzed further after the release of the ratings. Excessive absences or exemptions can compromise assessment results for accountability purposes.

Excessive Absences

This process will compare the percent of students coded as “absent” on each of the TAAS tests to the annual attendance rate for that campus during the school year in which the assessment was conducted. Schools with excessively high absenteeism during the testing may be identified for an accountability inquiry.

Excessive LEP Exemptions

This process will compare the number of students coded as LEP-exempt from the TAAS to the number of students actually receiving bilingual or ESL services. If the number exempted for any of the TAAS tests administered is greater than the number of students served in bilingual or ESL programs, the campus may be identified for an accountability inquiry.

Excessive ARD Exemptions

This process will compare the number of special education students exempted from the TAAS administration by the local ARD committee to the number of students receiving special education services. If the number exempted for any of the TAAS tests administered is greater than the number of students served in special education programs, the campus may be identified for an accountability inquiry.

Excessive Coding as "other"

"Other" is a "do not score" code used for highly unusual circumstances such as illness during the testing or test administration irregularities. This process will examine the percent of students coded as "other" during the administration of any of the TAAS tests. Campuses which have an unusually high percentage of eligible test takers with test documents coded as "other" may be identified for an accountability inquiry.

TAAS / Membership Consistency

Once 1996-97 attendance data for all campuses and districts, reported on PEIMS Submission 3, are available in an automated data file, further analysis will be undertaken. Students tested at each grade as a percentage of six-week membership will be calculated and discrepancies not previously identified in the TAAS / enrollment comparison will be investigated. The appropriate six-week period of membership for the test date will be selected.

PID Audits

The information used in the accountability system, such as district and campus of enrollment, ethnicity, economically disadvantaged codes, TAAS results, college admissions results, attendance, and dropout information are reported at the student level. The Person Identification (PID) number, a unique student identifier, links all of this information. When a significant level of non-matches occurs, an inquiry into the cause will be initiated with that district.

Dropout Audits

Dropout data will be further examined after the release of the ratings. A three-part analysis will be undertaken to verify the accuracy of:

(1) zero dropouts reported for a district or campus;

(2) 1 - 9 dropouts reported for a district or campus; and

Dropout Audits ***(cont.)***

(3) dropouts reported with reason codes that eliminate them from the calculation of the accountability dropout rate, *i.e.,* foreign students returning to their home country; students expelled for criminal behavior; and students meeting all graduation requirements but not passing the exit-level TAAS.

The dropout audits will examine the dropout data for all students and each student group (African American, Hispanic, White, and Economically Disadvantaged). If significant discrepancies are identified, an inquiry will be initiated with the reporting district.

Audit Procedures

For all the audits undertaken after the release of the accountability ratings, the following will apply:

- The parameters which trigger an inquiry will be set after examining statewide distributions of the data, if possible. They will be set at levels that only identify districts or campuses that are significantly "out of range" compared to other districts or campuses in the state.
- The criteria will be adjusted as needed for alternative education school settings.
- If an audit raises cause for concern, it will be communicated quickly to the school district.

For accountability purposes, the following procedures will be followed to determine whether those districts or campuses with unusual audit results have a valid and appropriate reason for the anomalies evident from the auditing process.

Inquiry Level 1

A telephone inquiry from the Office of Accountability will be placed, and the results of the phone conference will be documented and filed in the district accreditation file.

Inquiry Level 2

If the results of the telephone inquiry are insufficient to indicate a clear and valid reason for the audit exception, a letter of notification to the principal of the campus, with a copy to the superintendent (for a campus inquiry), or to the superintendent (for a district inquiry), will be issued requesting a written explanation of the irregularities that have been observed. A copy of the letter of notification will be filed in the district accreditation file in the Office of Accountability. If resolution is reached at this level, a letter from the agency will be provided to the principal with a copy to the superintendent stating that the inquiry was satisfactorily resolved.

Inquiry Level 3

When a telephone conference and a letter of inquiry are not sufficient to resolve the questions pertaining to the audit results, a team of professional staff members of the Office of Accountability will conduct an on-site review and make recommendations for corrective actions and / or sanctions. A written summary of the findings of the on-site review and recommendations from the agency will be provided to the appropriate school administrator(s), and will be filed in the district accreditation file.

Questions

Inquiries concerning the analyses conducted after release of the ratings should be directed to the Texas Education Agency Office of Accountability and School Accreditation.