

## **List of subpar schools swells Jump of more than 50% blamed on change in reporting system**

By TERRENCE STUTZ – Dallas Morning News – Dec. 13, 2011  
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AUSTIN — The number of campuses on the annual list of worst-performing public schools in Texas jumped more than 50 percent this year after the state ended a two-year experiment that artificially inflated the performance ratings of many schools.

The Texas Education Agency reported that 566 campuses made the list because of low test scores or “unacceptable” ratings, giving their students the right to transfer to other campuses under the state’s Public Education Grant program. The list had 369 schools last year.

Dallas had the largest number of subpar schools at 43, though that was just one more campus than last year. Fort Worth came in second at 29 campuses, and Houston had 26.

Other area districts with schools on the list were Arlington, with seven, and Grand Prairie, with four. Garland, Lancaster, McKinney, Plano and Wylie each had one.

Schools on the list had 50 percent or more of their students fail the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills in any two of the last three years or had an “academically unacceptable” rating in any one of the last three years. A school could show improvement one year but remain on the list because of poor performance in prior years.

A spokesman for the Dallas school district, which represents 8 percent of the schools on the list, said Monday that getting put on the list “does not tell the whole story.”

“There are many excellent teachers, successful students and solid academic programs at the schools identified as PEG schools. One such example is the International Baccalaureate program at Woodrow Wilson High School,” said Jon Dahlander of DISD.

He also argued that the list is often misinterpreted.

“It is simply provided to parents with information so that they can make decisions and explore additional opportunities for their children,” he said. “Only about 170 Dallas ISD students out of an eligible 35,000 students, or roughly less than one-half of 1 percent, are on PEG transfers this year.”

### **Low transfer rate**

Statewide, only a small number of the estimated 395,000 students eligible to transfer from schools on the list — representing about 1 in 14 campuses — are expected to do so because the state provides no funding for transportation. Officials have cited lack of transportation as one of the biggest obstacles for students and parents interested in switching to other schools.

A total of 358 students transferred from one district to another this year state wide. Hundreds more transferred within their districts.

Some lawmakers have said the state should consider transportation assistance to encourage participation, but financing remains unlikely because the Legislature cut funding for schools by \$5.4 billion in the current biennium and future reductions appear likely.

Another factor in the low number who transfer is that students and parents prefer neighborhood schools, even if achievement levels are below average, said Debbie Ratcliffe, a spokeswoman for the TEA.

“Parents I have talked to over the years want their children to remain in the same part of town where they live,” she said. And with no easy transportation options to transfer to another school, they stay put.

Students can transfer to another public school in their own district or in a neighboring district, if that district agrees to accept them. Those that do enroll students under the program receive a financial incentive from the state, an extra 10 percent in funding per pupil.

But many districts refuse to accept students from neighboring districts who qualify under the program, saying they lack adequate classroom space or enough teachers.

The names of schools on the list are being released now because most districts consider transfer requests several months before the start of each school year. Parents must be notified of the option by Feb. 1, with students allowed to enroll at a new school next fall.

The biggest factor in the increased number of campuses on this year’s list, Ratcliffe said, was a change in the way schools were rated by the state this summer.

### **Change in system**

Eliminated from the system was the so-called Texas Projection Measure, which for the previous two years bumped up test scores of failing students under a complex formula that gauged whether they might perform better in future years.

State Education Commissioner Robert Scott dropped the Texas Projection Measure this year after it came under fire from critics and was overwhelmingly rejected by the Texas House in a key vote on a student testing bill. Critics said the measure gave an overly positive view of student achievement.

“That was a big part of it,” Ratcliffe said. But she noted that students at many of the schools are still struggling with math and science questions on the TAKS. “Year-to-year scores on the TAKS have typically shown a jump, but there was not as much improvement this past school year,” she said.

### **STAAR on way**

The state is now switching to a more rigorous exam, the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR), and officials expect to see a further increase in the number of schools on the PEG list next year. Students will take the new exam in the spring.

While most students will be taking the STAAR, there will be no state performance ratings for schools in 2012 while the new exam is phased in. That means that only ratings for 2010 and 2011 will be used in compiling the list next year.

To get an acceptable rating from the state earlier this year — and avoid the PEG list — a school had to have a passing rate of at least 65 percent in math and 60 percent in science on the TAKS, with higher percentages required in English, social studies and writing.

The list of worst-performing schools would be longer if independent charter schools were included, but students attend those campuses voluntarily and may transfer back to their home school district at any time.

### **BY THE NUMBERS**

Campus breakdown 566 Texas schools appearing on this year's list of worst-performing public schools and

369 Texas schools appearing on last year's list.

43 Dallas schools listed.

### **AT A GLANCE Dallas-area schools identified**

Here are local schools that made the TEA's list of the state's poorest-performing schools, based on school ratings and low test scores:

#### **ARLINGTON ISD**

‡ Lamar High ‡ Sam Houston High ‡ Hutcheson Junior High ‡ Nichols Junior High ‡ Shackelford Junior High ‡ Morton Elementary ‡ Roquemore Elementary

#### **DALLAS ISD HIGH SCHOOLS**

‡ A. Maceo Smith ‡ Bryan Adams ‡ Carter ‡ Conrad ‡ Hillcrest ‡ Kimball ‡ Lincoln Humanities/Communications Magnet ‡ Madison ‡ North Dallas ‡ Pinkston ‡ Roosevelt ‡ Samuell ‡ Seagoville ‡ Spruce ‡ Woodrow Wilson

#### **DALLAS ISD MIDDLE SCHOOLS**

‡ Browne ‡ Comstock ‡ Cary ‡ Franklin ‡ Florence ‡ Hill ‡ Hulcy ‡ Hood ‡ Holmes Humanities/Communications Academy ‡ Long ‡ Medrano ‡ Seagoville ‡ Storey ‡ Tasby

#### **DALLAS ISD ELEMENTARIES**

‡ Blanton ‡ Conner ‡ Douglass ‡ Ervin ‡ Frazier ‡ Holland ‡ Kiest ‡ Lowe ‡ Marsalis ‡ McShan ‡ Mills ‡ Ray ‡ Runyon ‡ Titche

#### **GARLAND**

‡ South Garland High

**GRAND PRAIRIE ISD**

| Grand Prairie High | Grand Prairie High 9th Grade Center | Arnold Middle | Kennedy Middle

**LANCASTER ISD**

| Lancaster Middle

**MCKINNEY ISD**

| McKinney High

**PLANO ISD**

| Armstrong Middle

**WYLIE ISD**

| Burnett Junior High