

Grading Texas Schools: A Preliminary Report on North Texas

Introduction¹

This report measures school performance based on state-of-the-art techniques for calculating the value each school adds to the test scores of its students. The idea behind value-added measurements is that schools should be judged based on what they do, not on the quality of students who happen to be in their classrooms. For example, schools in Highland Park and Plano (two high-income Dallas areas) should not be judged superior simply because their students do well on state achievement exams. The children of high-income, highly educated parents are expected to do well on exams. The question is: What did these schools do to *improve* the scores of the students? Similarly, schools with students from low-income, minority neighborhoods should not be judged inferior simply because their students do not score as well as Plano or Highland Park students. The question, again, is: What did these schools do to *improve* the scores of the students they happened to have?

This report is based on the test scores of students on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). The initial results judge the quality of campuses based on three years of test scores for students who completed the sixth grade in 2000, 2001 and 2002.²

¹ Text prepared by NCPA Policy Analyst Matt Moore, based on data analysis by Lori Taylor, Senior Economist and Policy Advisor for the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas. See also Matt Moore, "NCPA's Value-Added Report Card on Texas Schools: A Model for Meaningful Assessments," National Center for Policy Analysis, Brief Analysis No. 446, July 9, 2003.

² The TAAS test was replaced by the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) in 2003.

In order to make value-added calculations for schools, data based on individual test scores for the students who were actually in the schools over the time period in question is necessary. This means that value-added calculations are based not on the average scores of students who happened to take the test, but on the changes in the scores of specific students.

This distinction is important for two reasons. First, there is a great deal of migration of students in and out of schools from year to year and even within school years. In fact, in some low-income areas the turnover rate approaches 50 percent. Clearly, the test score of a newly arrived student does not reflect the input of the school — it reflects the input of some other school. In order to evaluate schools it is necessary to compare year-to-year changes in the scores of students who were actually in the schools the study evaluates. Second, not all students take the exams every year and schools can (illegally) game the system and make their average look better by encouraging slower students to stay home on the day of the exam. This technique does not work, however, if the focus is on individual student scores rather than amorphous “average” scores.

Texas was one of the first states to begin collecting data that allows value-added measurements. Texas is also a rich source of data because of its diversity: large black and Hispanic populations and considerable variation in urban and rural settings. For these reasons, Texas has been chosen to begin this project. The project may expand to other states in the future.

The calculations for this report were made available to the National Center for Policy Analysis by Dr. Lori Taylor, an economist at the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas. Importantly, the results are not merely of academic interest. They provide a way for parents to answer two very important questions: Which school does the best job educating children who are much like

my child? And, How does my child's school stack up against other schools educating similar children? The data show that there is a wide variation in the results obtained by schools teaching ethnically, economically and academically similar children.

The results are accessible to parents and the public in an easily understandable format at the Web site <http://MyKidsEducation.ncpa.org>, along with a detailed explanation of the methodology used. [See the side bar, "NCPA Texas Report Card Online."]

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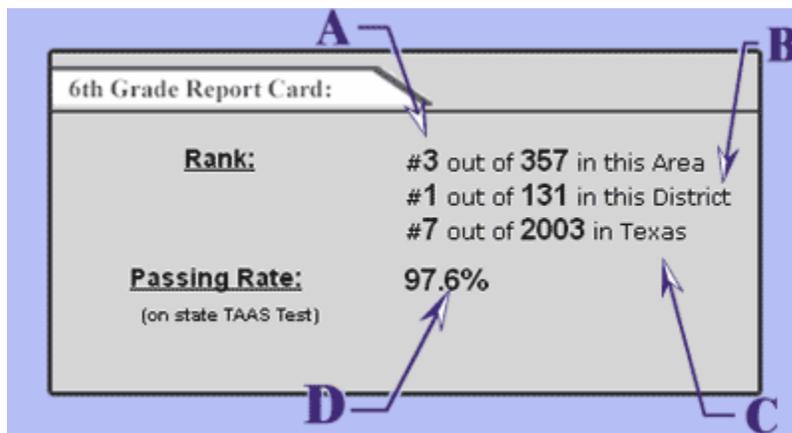
NCPA Texas Report Card Online

The NCPA Texas Report Card is based on the individual test scores of students on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). Using individual student data provided by the state of Texas, the NCPA matched student records, demographics and enrollment information to create a profile of each Texas child over time. (The records are anonymous, so it is unknown who the students are, but it is known which school they attended as well as a number of facts about them, including race/ethnicity, prior test performance, income, and so on.) The initial examination is of sixth grade classes, so student progress was examined from fifth to sixth grade. Subsequent reports will focus on campuses with students completing the seventh and eighth grades.

Each school was measured based on its individual students' progress, and each school was ranked based on the value a school contributes to its students' education. The value-added assessment is a statistical tool that gauges academic progress that is attributable to a given school or teaching team in a given year. It is the value that a school contributes its children's

education, as opposed to the contributions of parents and community. With value-added assessment, schools are not rewarded for simply having high-performing students in their classroom; schools are also not penalized simply for having low-performing students. Therefore, the ranks are not a measure of the passing rate of a particular school; rather they are a measure of how much the school *improved* their students' scores from one year to the next. Each school is ranked in three ways: the school's area, district and state. The lower the rank, the better a school performed.

Figure I



Reading the Report Card. A report card was created for each evaluated school using the following template [see Figure I]:

- **Area rank (A):** Think of the area as the driving region, or the metro area, within which a parent could be reasonably expected to drive their child to school — if they had the option. When an area is not defined, the school's county is substituted as its area.

- ***District rank (B):*** The school is also ranked within its school district. Often, a campus may be the only school with a sixth grade in its district — especially in rural areas. In that case, the school's district rank is #1 out of 1.
- ***State rank (C):*** The school's state rank is simply where the school ranks within the entire state.
- ***Passing rate (D):*** When available, the passing rate notes the percentage of the total student body that achieved a grade of 70 on all sections of the TAAS. This is not a value-added measure — it measures student performance and not student *improvement* — and is included only as a point of comparison.

The NCPA report card also examines the progress of different student populations. The different student population groups available include black, Hispanic, white, economically disadvantaged (as determined by eligibility for free- or reduced-lunch program), low-achieving (students who scored in the bottom 25th percentile on the 5th grade TAAS exam) and high achieving (students in the top 25th percentile on the 5th grade exam).

The total number of campuses in a school's particular area, state and district may vary from student category to student category. In some cases, there may be no rank at all for a particular category, as schools with less than five students in a particular category are not ranked in the analysis.

The NCPA report card is not intended to be the end-all-be-all of a school's performance. It is but one of several tools that can be considered when comparing schools — and one more resource for parents who may be moving to a new city and are looking for which neighborhood offers the best school for their children. [See Figures II, III and IV].

Figure II



Figure III

My Kid's Education.org - Search Results - Windows Internet Explorer

http://search.mykidseducation.ncpa.org/education/results.jsp?CNAME=Travis

File Edit View Favorites Tools Help

Google Search

My Kid's Education.org - Search Results

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 A Report Card on Texas Schools

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Click on the Name of the school that you would like to view

School Name	School District	County Name
LAKE TRAVIS MID	LAKE TRAVIS ISD	TRAVIS
TRAVIS EL	DALLAS ISD	DALLAS
TRAVIS EL	MIDLAND ISD	MIDLAND
TRAVIS EL	MINERAL WELLS I	PALO PINTO
TRAVIS EL	WEATHERFORD ISD	PARKER
TRAVIS EL	SAN ANGELO ISD	TOM GREEN
TRAVIS INTERMED	CONROE ISD	MONTGOMERY
TRAVIS J H	IRVING ISD	DALLAS
TRAVIS MIDDLE	TEMPLE ISD	BELL
TRAVIS MIDDLE	CALHOUN CO ISD	CALHOUN
TRAVIS MIDDLE	MCALLEN ISD	HIDALGO
TRAVIS MIDDLE	AMARILLO ISD	POTTER

Records 1 to 12 of 12

[Click Here](#) if the school you want to see is not included here. Try entering fewer letters in the search box. Make sure that the school you want to review has 6th grade classes.

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Figure IV



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Results for the State

One of the most important discoveries of this study is that there is a major difference between a ranking of schools based on the raw test scores of their students and a ranking based on the schools' value-added contributions to those scores. For example, a comparison of the top

100 schools based on raw scores and the top 100 schools based on value-added reveals that there are only 12 schools on both lists. A comparison of the bottom 100 schools reveals that only one-third of schools on the two lists are the same.

This is not the first study to calculate value-added measures for public schools, but it is believed to be the first study that makes value-added calculations for subgroups of students, including calculations for students of different races and ethnic backgrounds. Whether measured by overall performance or by performance with respect to specific subpopulations of students, there are considerable differences among the schools:

- After adjusting for other factors (race, income and so forth) there is a 2 to 1 difference among where Texas schools rate in their added value.
- Some schools rate two times better than others in teaching black students.
- Some schools rate almost two times better than other schools in teaching Hispanics.
- Some schools rate four times better than others in teaching low-income students.

Clearly, all schools are not the same — it makes a big difference which school a student attends.

Results for the Dallas Metropolitan Statistical Area

Three-hundred-and-sixty-one campuses were evaluated based on three years of test scores for students who completed the sixth grade in 2000, 2001 and 2002. Schools are also ranked based on their value-added contribution for subgroups of students, including economically disadvantaged (students on the school lunch program), blacks, whites and Hispanics. Additionally, there are rankings for low-achievers (defined as students who scored at

the 25th percentile or below on the fifth grade TAAS test) and high-achievers (students at the 75th percentile or above). The results for any particular school are available at <http://MyKidsEducation.ncpa.org>. The following is a brief summary.

Best and Worst. Tables I and II present the rankings for the 10 best and 10 worst schools for sixth graders in the Dallas area. Interestingly, the two best schools in the area are both charter schools — Waxahachie Faith and Focus Learning. But two of the 10 worst schools are also charter schools — Inspired Vision Academy and Rylie Faith Family Academy. Also of interest, eight of the 10 best schools are in the Dallas Independent School District (DISD), whereas none of the 10 worst schools are in DISD.

Table I
Top 10 Dallas Area Schools
Value-Added Rankings by Student Category¹
(No. 1 = Best)

<u>Campus</u>	<u>District</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Economically Disadvantaged²</u>	<u>Hispanics</u>	<u>Blacks</u>	<u>Low-Achievers³</u>	<u>High-Achievers⁴</u>
Waxahachie Faith*	Charter	1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Focus Learning*	Charter	2	N/A	N/A	1	2	N/A
Budd EL	DISD	3	2	5	3	1	10
R.E. Lee EL	DISD	4	4	7	N/A	13	1
Rice EL	DISD	5	3	N/A	6	3	27
Ignacio Zaragos	DISD	6	7	10	N/A	25	N/A
Vickery Meadows*	DISD	7	8	12	N/A	11	N/A
Hawthorne EL	DISD	8	19	11	20	8	34
Donald EL	DISD	9	13	17	N/A	18	5
Darrell EL	DISD	10	15	N/A	10	26	N/A

¹ Based on three years of TAAS scores for students who completed the sixth grade in 2000, 2001 and 2002. Each column represents a different ranking for the student population indicated. Three-hundred-and-sixty-one campuses were evaluated. N/A means the information was not available or the number of students in the category was statistically insignificant.

² Participating in the school lunch program.

³ Defined as students who scored at the 25th percentile or lower on the fifth grade TAAS test.

⁴ Defined as students who scored at the 75th percentile or higher on the fifth grade TAAS test.

*Schools were ranked based on a three year rolling average of value-added scores. However, when prior data was unavailable, only available years were averaged. Only 2002 data was available for Waxahachie and Focus Learning. Only two years of data was available for Vickery Meadows.

Table II
Bottom 10 Dallas Area Schools
Value-Added Rankings by Student Category¹
(No. 1 = Worst)

<u>Campus</u>	<u>District</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Economically</u>	<u>Hispanic</u>	<u>Black</u>	<u>Low-</u>	<u>High-</u>
		<u>1</u>	<u>Disadvantaged</u>	<u>s</u>	<u>s</u>	<u>Achievers</u>	<u>Achievers</u>
			<u>2</u>			<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>
Kennedy-Curry	Wilmer-Hutchins	1	1	1	2	6	1
Celeste Int.	Celeste ISD	2	3	N/A	N/A	71	3
Inspired Vision*	Charter	3	7	6	N/A	1	N/A
O'Banion Middle	Garland ISD	4	6	4	7	7	5
Lyles Middle	Garland ISD	5	8	3	3	2	8
Rylie Faith Family Aca.	Charter	6	2	2	N/A	3	10
Royse City Middle	Royse City ISD	7	4	7	153	16	6
Scurry-Rosser Middle	Scurry-Rosser	8	59	N/A	N/A	9	9
Brandenburg Middle	Garland ISD	9	11	10	6	12	14
Houston Middle	Garland ISD	10	16	12	15	5	22

¹ Based on three years of TAAS scores for students who completed the sixth grade in 2000, 2001 and 2002. Each column represents a different ranking for the student population indicated. Three-hundred-and-sixty-one campuses were evaluated. N/A means the information was not available or the number of students in the category was statistically insignificant.

² Participating in the school lunch program.

³ Defined as students who scored at the 25th percentile or lower on the fifth grade TAAS test.

⁴ Defined as students who scored at the 75th percentile or higher on the fifth grade TAAS test.

*Schools were ranked based on a three year rolling average of value-added scores. However, when prior data was unavailable, only available years were averaged. Only 2002 data was available for Inspired Vision.

Dallas reflects a statewide tendency: schools may do a good job with one group of students and a lousy job with others. However, schools at the top and the bottom of the scale are

exceptions to this rule. These schools tend to be uniformly good or uniformly bad for all types of students. For example:

- Harrell Budd Elementary School (DISD) gets very high marks, regardless of who is sitting in the classroom. This school is rated No. 3 overall, second best for teaching the economically disadvantaged, No. 5 for Hispanics, No. 3 for blacks, No. 1 for low-achievers and No. 10 for high-achievers.
- By contrast, Kennedy-Curry Middle School (Wilmer-Hutchins Independent School District) is ranked dead last among the 361 area schools and seems to do a uniformly poor job, regardless of who is sitting in the classroom. This school is also rated last for teaching the economically disadvantaged, Hispanic students and high-achievers, second to last for teaching black students and sixth from the bottom for teaching low-achievers.

Harrell Budd and Kennedy-Curry are both heavily minority — Budd is 99 percent minority and Kennedy-Curry is 95 percent minority — and both schools are in low-income areas. In fact, they are only a few bus stops away from each other.

Additionally, some of the findings counter conventional wisdom. For example, eight of the top 10 most effective schools overall in the Dallas area are DISD schools, while four of the 10 least effective schools are in the Garland Independent School District. In the Fort Worth area, parents generally have a much greater chance finding an effective school in Arlington:

- Eight of the top 10 most effective schools overall in the Fort Worth area are in Arlington, while seven of the 10 least effective schools are in Fort Worth.

- Top ranked Knox Elementary in Arlington gets very high marks, regardless of who is sitting in the classroom, ranking second for teaching blacks, Hispanics, economically disadvantaged and low-achieving students, and fourth for high-achievers.
- By contrast, Morningside Middle in Fort Worth ranked last among the 161 area schools examined and seems to do a uniformly poor job, regardless of what the student-body makeup is.³

Comparative Advantage. While an overall value-added score may be meaningful, it may not be an accurate measure of how well, or how poorly, a school is doing with respect to particular subgroups of students. For example:

- Edison Medrano Elementary (DISD) ranks No. 2 in the area for teaching high-achievers, but No. 87 overall.
- Nancy Moseley Elementary (DISD) ranks No. 8 in the area for teaching high-achievers, but No. 278 overall.

This means that parents of children who are high test scorers in these two schools may be quite satisfied with the progress their children are making, even though parents of other children may be dissatisfied. There are also other reasons to be cautious about overall value-added rankings:

³ “Dallas Schools' Effectiveness Varies Widely By Race, Aptitude” and “Fort Worth Schools' Effectiveness Varies Widely By Race, Aptitude,” NCPA Press Release, May 8, 2003. Available at: <http://www.ncpa.org/media/dallas-schools-effectiveness-varies-widely-by-race-aptitude> and <http://www.ncpa.org/media/fort-worth-schools-effectiveness-varies-widely-by-race-aptitude>.

- Everett L. Degolyer Elementary (DISD) and Arapaho Elementary (Richardson Independent School District) rank Nos. 4 and 6 respectively for teaching low-achiever students, but their overall value-added ranks are mediocre at No. 97 and No. 71.
- Commerce Middle School and Math, Science, Tech (a magnet school in Richardson Independent School District) rank Nos. 2 and 6 respectively for teaching Hispanic children, but their overall value-added rankings are only No. 118 and No. 104.

High-Achievers Versus Low-Achievers. One of the most valuable uses of value-added rankings is to measure the performance of schools with respect to children who are not average. For example, how well does a school do with children who start out with high scores (children labeled “high-achievers”)? How well does it do with children who start out with low scores (“low-achievers”)? Schools that do well with one group do not necessarily do well with another. For example:

- As noted above, Medrano and Moseley elementary schools do very well with high-achievers, ranking No. 2 and No. 8 in the area respectively. However, for low-achievers, these schools rank No. 103 and No. 109.
- By contrast, W. W. Bushman Elementary and Bowie Elementary schools (both in DISD) are ranked in the bottom 10 schools in the area for teaching high-achievers. Yet, both schools rank in the top quarter of all schools for teaching low-achievers.
- In the Fort Worth area, Souder Elementary in Everman ranks No. 3 for teaching high-achievers, but only No. 88 for low-achievers.⁴

⁴ “Fort Worth Schools’ Effectiveness Varies Widely By Race, Aptitude,” NCPA Press Release, May 8, 2003. Available at: <http://www.ncpa.org/media/fort-worth-schools-effectiveness-varies-widely-by-race-aptitude>.

- Sherrod Elementary in Arlington ranks No. 13 for low-achievers in the Fort Worth area, but only No. 72 for high-achievers.⁵

Racial and Ethnic Differences. Many would like to believe that Dallas schools do an equally good job, regardless of race or ethnic background. Sadly this is not the case. It is unclear why some schools do better than others with different groups, but there are significant differences. For example:

- John W. Carpenter Elementary (DISD) ranks as the No. 1 school in the area for teaching Hispanic children, but ranks No. 89 for teaching black children.
- Commerce Middle School ranks No. 2 for teaching Hispanics, but No. 117 for teaching blacks.
- Tom W. Field Elementary (DISD) is the second best school in Dallas for teaching black children, but is No. 49 for teaching Hispanics.
- West Hurst Elementary is ranked No. 7 in the Fort Worth area for teaching black children, but only ranks No. 57 for teaching Hispanic children.⁶
- Amos Elementary in Arlington ranks No. 5 in the Fort Worth area for teaching Hispanic children, but ranks No. 55 for teaching blacks.⁷
- Royse City Middle School is among the 10 worst schools in the Dallas area for teaching Hispanic children, but ranks in the top third of schools for teaching blacks.

There are also important black/white differences — again, the reason is unclear:

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

- Lakewood Elementary (DISD) is the 10th best school in the area for teaching white children, but ranks No. 141 for teaching black children.
- Tom C. Gooch Elementary School (DISD) rates as the 5th best school in the area for teaching black children, but ranks No. 94 for teaching whites.

Policy Implications

One fascinating implication of this study is that it appears test scores of Dallas-Fort Worth area students could be substantially increased simply by reassigning students among the 361 schools. That is, if subgroups of students could be rearranged — moving them out of schools that are at a comparative *disadvantage* in teaching them and into schools that have a comparative *advantage* — overall test scores should significantly improve.

Economists have long known that there are significant gains from trade when countries have different skills in producing different goods and services (comparative advantage). The same principle may also apply to the public schools. Imagine a “market” in which schools could “trade” students with each other. In such a market, schools could trade away students they are not very good at teaching in return for acquiring more of the kinds of students they are good at teaching. These types of trades would increase the average test scores of all the schools involved. Furthermore, these potential gains from trade will exist whenever schools have different sets of teaching skills. As this analysis has shown, that is very much the case in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex.

We do not recommend the forcible reassignment of students. Nor do we recommend allowing schools to trade students with each other. But there is another way of producing some

of the same results: school choice. Imagine a system in which parents were allowed (and encouraged) to move their child whenever they found an opening at another campus that had superior skills in teaching someone with their child's characteristics. A central administration could actually encourage such movement by alerting parents when opportunities arise.

Remarkably, such a system has the potential to improve results — even with no other changes in the public schools. That is, *school choice and school choice alone has the potential to raise test scores, even if there is no change in teachers, curricula or anything else the schools are doing.*

Ultimately, however, it is necessary to do much more than encourage consumerism on the part of parents. The quality of instruction per se must also be improved. But how should that improvement proceed? Should schools focus on improvement in areas where they are weakest? Or should they accept their weaknesses and focus on ways to get even better in areas where they are strong? The first approach would move schools away from specialization, whereas the second approach would move in the direction of more specialization.

In a normal market, these decisions are made by individual competitors, given the actions of all other competitors. That is, when firms make incremental steps in one direction or another they lose some customers (and the revenue from those customers) but attract others. In such an environment the marketplace determines the degree of specialization. It is difficult to think of a single area of economic life where the degree of specialization has been successfully dictated by a central authority. It is also difficult to think of a single successful enterprise that tries to meet all the needs of all the customers in the marketplace.

Some may object that allowing schools to specialize in meeting the needs of subgroups of students deprives those same students of the benefits of a more diverse student body. But it may well be that less diversity is the price of educational excellence. There is nothing in economic theory, and certainly nothing in the performance of Dallas-Fort Worth area schools to suggest that it is possible to make most schools equally good in meeting the needs of all student markets. Indeed:

- There is only one school in the Dallas area that ranks in the top 10 in serving all its student populations.
- By contrast, 41 schools have been identified that are in the top 10 in serving at least one student population.

In other words, there are quite a few schools that excel at one thing, even though they do not excel at all things.

Because of concerns about racial segregation and other worries there may be reasons to place limits on how much specialization to allow in an education marketplace. But within broad parameters it appears that there is much to be gained by encouraging competition and parental choice.

Although school choice has the potential to improve student performance, uninformed choice is likely to be ineffective choice. Ironically, the most important sources of useful information for parental choice are the schools themselves — which are likely to know more about their strengths and weaknesses than any outsider. And although the educational establishment has traditionally resisted such things, it is actually in the self-interest of teachers, principals and administrations to help students get into the schools that can be the most help.

After all, a better matching of students and teachers doesn't just help students but also helps the schools by making them more productive.