

# CHAPTER 8: STUDENT SUCCESS INITIATIVE (SSI)

## Background

The Student Success Initiative includes three initiatives that together provide a system of academic support to help ensure achievement on grade level in reading and mathematics so that every student can succeed throughout his or her school career. The SSI incorporates a grade advancement component adopted by the Texas Legislature in 1999, which is being implemented on a phase-in schedule. The law ties promotion to performance on state-mandated assessments in reading at Grade 3, reading and mathematics at Grade 5, and reading and mathematics at Grade 8 (beginning in 2007–2008). The law applies to students who take the TAKS tests in English, the TAKS tests in Spanish, or SDAA II.

Students must be allowed at least three opportunities to pass a test under the SSI grade advancement requirements. A student may advance to the next grade level only by passing these tests. If a student has not passed after three opportunities and a parent appeals, the student may be promoted by unanimous decision of a grade placement committee (GPC) consisting of the principal or the principal's designee, the student's parent or guardian, and the student's teacher for the subject area tested. The GPC may advance a student only if they determine that he or she is likely to perform at grade level after accelerated instruction.

The academic support provided under the Student Success Initiative takes many forms. Students who are identified as being at risk of failing an SSI assessment must be provided extra instruction prior to the first test administration. Students who do not pass an SSI assessment must be provided additional instruction before each subsequent testing opportunity. In addition, a copy of a TAKS study guide is provided by the state to any student who does not meet the standard on a TAKS assessment. Funding and instructional support for the Student Success Initiative are also provided through the Texas Reading Initiative and Texas Mathematics Initiative.

## The Grade Placement Committee

The *Grade Placement Committee Manual for Grade Advancement Requirements of the Student Success Initiative* provides detailed information about the grade advancement and accelerated instruction requirements of the law. The manual is designed to guide GPCs through the process of evaluating student performance, determining accelerated instruction, and, when applicable, making promotion decisions. The manual also provides districts with detailed instructions for implementing all the requirements of the SSI and includes time lines and flow charts as well as sample forms and letters to aid districts with parental notification and documentation of activities. The grade placement committee manual and other information related to SSI requirements are located on the Student Success Initiative section of the Student Assessment Division website. This section also includes links to other agency websites, such as the Reading Initiative and Mathematics Initiative.

## Students Receiving Special Education Services

The Student Success Initiative regulations also apply to students who are receiving special education services, whether they take TAKS or SDAA II. The grade advancement requirements differ depending on the assessment in which the student participates. The admission, review, and dismissal (ARD) committee makes all assessment decisions for students served by special education. The ARD committee also serves as the GPC for students receiving special education services who fail to perform satisfactorily on any SSI assessment. ARD committee members are responsible for making all decisions about accelerated instruction and grade advancement.

In 2005 the SSI grade advancement requirements applied to all enrolled Grade 3 students receiving special education services who took the Grade 3 TAKS reading test or an SDAA II reading test and to all enrolled Grade 5 students receiving special education services who took the Grade 5 TAKS reading or mathematics test or an SDAA II test in reading or mathematics. Because there is only one test administration for each SDAA II instructional level and content area annually, districts may administer TEKS-based formal or informal assessments to students for whom SDAA II is deemed appropriate so that those students may have multiple testing opportunities to meet SSI requirements.

The *ARD Committee Decision-Making Process for the Texas Assessment Program* training manual and the grade placement committee manual include sections on SSI requirements for students who receive special education services. Both manuals are available on the Student Assessment Division website.

## Alternate Assessment Option

State law allows districts to administer an alternate assessment approved by TEA in lieu of TAKS to students who have failed an SSI assessment on the previous two testing opportunities. The grade placement committee is responsible for deciding whether a student will take an alternate test. However, the local school district must first determine whether this option will be made available to students in the district.

The Student Assessment Division allowed districts to administer the alternate test on June 29, 2005. The Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) Level 9 was the only alternate assessment approved for use in 2004 and 2005. Using data from a study conducted by Riverside Publishing in 2003 that links TAKS and ITBS, the Student Assessment Division determined a comparable scale score passing standard for the ITBS that reflects the 2005 TAKS Grade 3 reading scale score passing standard.