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ABSTRACT

This perspective on how testing and evaluation data are used and could be used for school improvement is based partly on the experience of the Austin (Texas) Public Schools and partly on their goals. Four conditions are necessary for the effective use of evaluation information: (1) real need; (2) trust in the evaluators and in the information provided; (3) understanding of the information; and (4) practice in using such information. In considering the use of testing and evaluation information, the level of preparation of the data and the ultimate use of the information must be determined. Examples of evaluation information as used are appended, including a discussion of the "Report on School Effectiveness" of the Austin Independent School District, three school profiles on context variables related to general outcome variables, and an outline of effective school standards. It is concluded that, as the trend for summarization of evaluation information continues, the user must not lose sight of the details necessary in dealing with complex information. (SLD)

Use of Testing/Evaluation Information for School Improvement

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Austin, Texas

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of the American Educational Research Association

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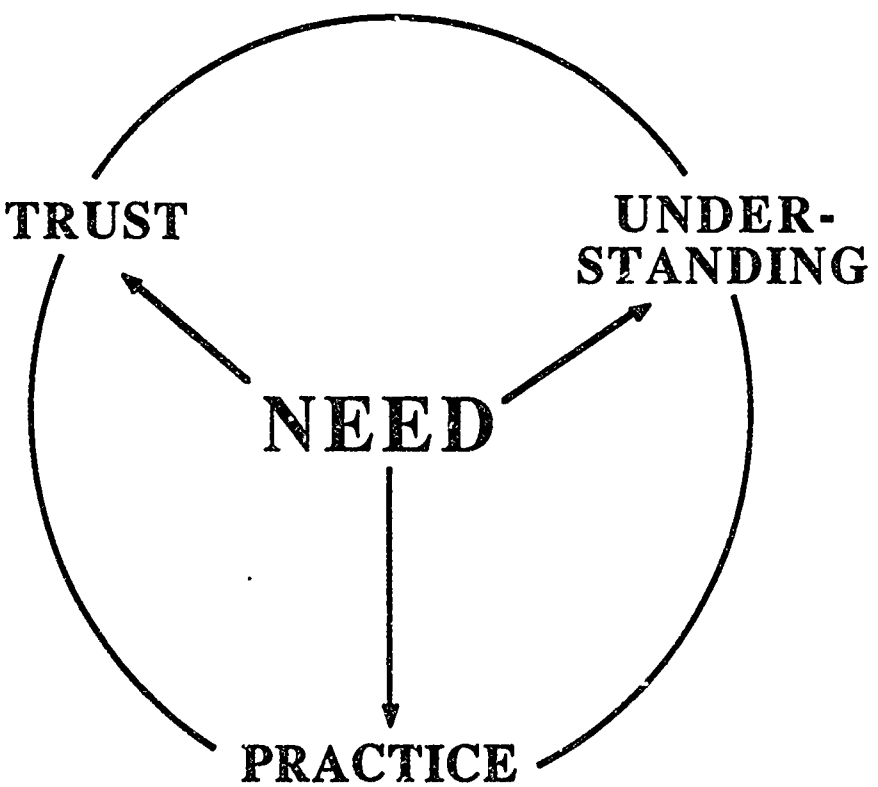
Use of Testing/Evaluation Information for School Improvement

Glynn Ligon, Austin (TX) Public schools

This perspective of how testing and evaluation information is used and could be used for school improvement is based partly upon what we have managed to accomplish within the Austin Public Schools over the past decade and a half and partly upon what we desire to accomplish. Theoretically, there are four conditions that are seen as necessary for effective use of evaluative information by school administrators. Beyond these four conditions, this paper describes two dimensions that influence how evaluators approach the reporting of information. Finally, a few examples are provided of how we report outcomes to schools within the context of the factors that typically influence achievement.

Conditions That Encourage the Use of Testing/Evaluation Information for School Improvement. The diagram below shows that the first key to utilization is the existence of a real need for information. In addition, there must exist a degree of trust of the evaluator by the school administration. The school administration must understand the information they are being provided in order to apply it. Finally, there must develop a practice of using the information.



1. Need. We have tried several times over the years to provide information that was clearly useful to schools and found that the information is greatly underutilized or ignored. Often this is not a reflection upon the potential for use of the information or even upon the acceptance by the school administration of the information. For example, the school goal-setting process at times has been approached by principals as a necessary hurdle that can be overcome with a quick and shallow statement that can be placed on file and never brought out for accountability use. This is an example of a requirement that calls for information, but with such a low level of need for timely, useful information that the principals' other priorities win out.

2. Trust. When our Office of Research and Evaluation began in 1973, there was not just an absence of trust, but a real distrust of the evaluators and their information. This distrust was somewhat justified by the lack of experience and track record of the evaluators, and by the fact that how evaluation and expanded testing information was to be used was a mystery. For school improvement to result from evaluation information, school administration must have a high level of trust not only in the information that is provided, but also in the providers of that information.

3. Understanding. Related closely to trust, is the need for the school administration to understand the testing/evaluation information with which they are working. Beyond the uncomfortable feeling one has when working with numbers that are not fully understood, there is the real issue of potential misuse of the information in goal setting or accountability. Principals must understand the data in order to accept the conclusions of the evaluator or to form independent judgements. Principals must understand the data in order to set realistic goals, targeted at real areas of need, and measurable by appropriate statistics.

4. Practice. Theories are fine, but practice is what makes a difference. In school improvement, getting the use of evaluation/testing information into the mainstream of decision making is a key. Obviously, principals can run schools without testing/evaluation information. Successful practice of using information within a school's planning process perpetuates use.

The interesting thing about our history in Austin is that the above order has not been followed. In fact breakouts of each of these conditions have occurred over the years, but a systemwide embracing of the use of testing/evaluation information for school improvement had to wait for the pressures of education reform, tight budgets, and the challenge to make the return to neighborhood schools work. The conditions of trust and understanding have developed over the years--with more improvement greatly needed. The condition of need has come and gone, but had never come as seriously as in the past year or so. Now we are moving to fine tune our practice to achieve a better match between the volumes of reports that schools receive and the practical use to which they can put the information contained in those reports.

The two dimensions which are important to understand when considering the use of testing/evaluation information for school improvement are discussed below.

1. Level of Preparation of the Data. This dimension ranges from pure raw data, such as individual student test scores, to formularized school goals that are predetermined by the computer and fed into a word processing document for the principal to sign. A fascinating internal debate that continues is whether a principal must struggle with some relatively raw data, summarize it, graph it, basically personally squeeze out the trends in order to understand the information; or whether it is better to save the nonevaluators the agony, and quite frankly to avoid the errors, and to hand the principals neatly packaged summary reports that have done all the work of organizing the data and present a simplistic bottom line that the principal can see immediately. The scarcity of principals' time has tended to move us toward the latter, and our attempts at the former have emphasized how time consuming it is to take nontechnical managers through a semitechnical exercise.

   Obviously, the technology is here that can hand a principal a final set of school goals, accurately Targeted at the school's needs and accurately stated in the correct terms--but will the principal accept ownership of the goals and express gratitude for the savings of time; or will the principal resist the goals, regardless of their appropriateness. This relates back to two elements of our conditions for utilization. With adequate trust and understanding, the principals and the evaluators can negotiate the proper position along this dimension from raw data to formula goals.

2. Ultimate Use. Setting a school goal or improving instruction within a school are seldom the ultimate uses for testing/evaluation information. This second dimension of ultimate use ranges from personal/private introspection on the part of the principal, past public discussion and accountability, to the evaluation of the job status of the principal. This is an incredibly important dimension to understand. How a system for utilization is designed and how the information is reported should be determined by this dimension. For example, before we moved closer to public accountability and evaluation of the principal, there was little need for every school to follow certain standards for their school goals. Every principal could select goal areas, measures of success, and reporting formats. Now the accountability reality forces us to standardize goals, measures, and reports.

From this second dimension of use, comes the reality that as accountability increases, so does the responsibility for the accountability measures to be real indicators of a school's success. We have all talked for years of the inequities of comparing mean test scores for two schools with different income levels in their student populations. However, now we must become even more sophisticated in treatment of these context variables. Our district developed the Report on School Effectiveness (ROSE) in response to this admonition. Attachment A describes ROSE and our attempt to compare a school's actual test scores with a prediction of that school's scores based upon key context variables. This trend is now evident in both Texas' statewide testing program and in the National Assessment of Educational Progress' expansion to state-by-state comparisons. Both testing programs are working with ways to present average test scores along with the context variables that are known to influence those scores.

Context. Attachment B includes three school profiles we produce in an attempt to give principals and others an overview of the context variables associated with some very general outcome variables. This profile purposely commits the sin of oversimplification, because its intent is to produce some general rankings that can be examined for patterns. The saving grace for this profile is that the range of variables shown is wide, thus avoiding contributing to simplistic judgements about a school's effectiveness based upon a single piece of information.

As we continue to refine this type of reporting, drafts have been drawn of a school profile that focuses on the correlates of an "effective school." This profile will give the principals of our 16 priority elementary schools with special resources for minority students direct measures of those correlates. See Attachment C for the latest draft.

Details. Details details, details, and more details can be found in the hundreds of testing and evaluation printouts that are produced for schools. These range from alphabetic and rank order listings of students by test score to classroom summaries by skill areas. Our school system provides to principals and teachers an incredible array of computer output that they can use for planning, grouping, and assessing. However, details tend to be used less than the summary reports of means, medians, and percentages within ranges for school goal setting; and the trend appears to be toward even more summarization of information. A caution that we must heed locally is to avoid losing sight of the complexity of the context within which these test scores and evaluation findings emerge. We must continue to report and discuss the details not only as an acknowledgement of the complexity of the educational arena, but also as a control against making narrow-minded decisions about the relative success of different instructional programs and even different educators.

THE ROSE--THE REPORT ON SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS

What is ROSE?

ROSE, the Report on School Effectiveness, provides information about AISD schools that is more than just descriptive. It is the result of a series of statistical analyses which answer the question, "How do the achievement gains of a school's students compare with those of other AISD students of the same previous achievement levels and background characteristics?" Regression analysis is used to produce predicted achievement levels in reading and mathematics for each student based on the following characteristics:

- Previous achievement level,
- Sex,
- Ethnicity,
- Family income (whether or not the student or a sibling received a free or reduced-price lunch),
- Whether or not the student's school was impacted by desegregation,
- Whether or not the student was reassigned by the desegregation plan,
- Whether or not the student was a transfer student, and
- The average pupil/teacher ratio for the student's grade at his/her school (elementary only).

The predicted scores are then compared with the students' actual scores. The numbers in parentheses give the average difference between the predicted and actual scores in grade equivalents. For example, a value of +.10 would mean that the students at that grade scored one month higher on the average than similar students districtwide. The verbal descriptors, "Exceeded Predicted Gain," "Achieved Predicted Gain," and "Below Predicted Gain" are assigned according to the statistical significance of the results. If the obtained average is far enough above or below the expected value of zero so that it would have occurred only 5% of the time or less by chance, then the "Exceeded" or "Below" is assigned.

What is the purpose of ROSE?

The purpose of ROSE is to improve student achievement in reading and mathematics through the identification of groups of students who are experiencing exceptional success or failure. The identification of these students creates an opportunity for improvement in the overall program if practices or conditions associated with the success or failure of these students can be identified.

If a school has some students who are scoring above the predicted levels in reading and mathematics, an examination of the practices of their teachers may reveal information which will be useful in improving performance for students in other groups or subject areas. Cases where the students are scoring below the predicted level also require close attention so that practices or conditions which are retarding student growth can be identified and altered.

Some Cautions!

In using ROSE, keep the following points in mind:

a. ROSE has its greatest value when the results do not entirely match your informal assessment; i.e., when it is providing you with new information. If the results are the complete opposite of your experience, however, then the analyses should be viewed with caution.

b. Test results have been considered only for reading and mathematics. Exemplary or poor performance in other areas has not been examined.

c. ROSE attempts to adjust for as many factors outside the school's control as possible. When above- or below-average performance is found, additional factors outside the school's control may still be operating. Knowledge of the situation at the school is important to a full understanding of the report.

d. ROSE should be used constructively. The emphasis should be on initiating and reinforcing good practices and identifying problems. Remember, the purpose is to improve the education of our students.

e. Given that ROSE controls for certain background characteristics, some schools with high concentrations of low-income, low-achieving students will be found to exceed predicted achievement at some grades, even though their average achievement level is low. It is a strength of ROSE that it recognizes the effectiveness of the teachers of these students; however, nothing in the ROSE report should be taken as an indication that the District is satisfied with the achievement of our low-achieving students. Indeed, it is a priority goal of the District that low student achievement be improved at all grade levels. We expect over time that the effect of certain factors now explaining low achievement will have less effect on predicted achievement. ROSE may contribute to the success of that goal by reinforcing the efforts of effective teachers and by highlighting effective practices for others to follow.

f. The statistical significance of the results is influenced by the number of students tested; i.e., any given value is more likely to represent a real difference from the expected value if it is obtained from 100 students rather than 50. Therefore, in some cases results that are significant may appear to be less extreme than other results that are nonsignificant if the sizes of the groups differ greatly.

School Characteristics Information

The values for the school characteristics listed on the ROSE may differ from those listed in your school achievement profiles or elsewhere. The ROSE values are based on the population used in doing the analyses and therefore may not exactly reflect the total school population.

AUSTIN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT
OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

REPORT ON SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS (ROSE) FOR 1986-87

SCHOOL: LEE

GRADE	PERFORMANCE IN... READING	MATH
K	ACHIEVED PREDICTED GAIN (+0.07, N= 39)	ACHIEVED PREDICTED GAIN (+0.06, N= 41)
1	ACHIEVED PREDICTED GAIN (+0.15, N= 27)	ACHIEVED PREDICTED GAIN (-0.02, N= 28)
2	ACHIEVED PREDICTED GAIN (+0.18, N= 32)	ACHIEVED PREDICTED GAIN (+0.06, N= 32)
3	ACHIEVED PREDICTED GAIN (+0.16, N= 37)	ACHIEVED PREDICTED GAIN (-0.00, N= 37)
4	EXCEEDED PREDICTED GAIN (+0.32, N= 27)	ACHIEVED PREDICTED GAIN (+0.23, N= 27)
5	EXCEEDED PREDICTED GAIN (+0.28, N= 29)	EXCEEDED PREDICTED GAIN (+0.28, N= 30)
6	ACHIEVED PREDICTED GAIN (-0.12, N= 35)	BELOW PREDICTED GAIN (-0.21, N= 35)

SCHOOL CHARACTERISTIC	VALUE
SEX	
MALE	51%
FEMALE	49%
ETHNICITY	
BLACK	11%
HISPANIC	8%
OTHER	80%
WAS SCHOOL IMPACTED BY DESEGREGATION?	NO
PERCENT REASSIGNED STUDENTS	0%
PERCENT TRANSFER STUDENTS	28%
PERCENT LOW-INCOME STUDENTS	15%
AVERAGE PUPIL/TEACHER RATIO	22-TO-1

AUSTIN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT
Department of Management Information
Office of Research and Evaluation

87.30

REPORT ON SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS (ROSE), 1982-1987

SCHOOL: Lee (K-6)

	READING						MATHEMATICS					
	82	83	84	85	86	87	82	83	84	85	86	87
GRADE K	0	+ (+0.31)	+ (+0.28)	0 (+0.11)	0 (+0.01)	0 (+0.07)	+	+ (+0.46)	+ (+0.22)	0 (+0.17)	0 (+0.18)	0 (+0.06)
1	0	0 (+0.16)	0 (+0.20)	0 (+0.20)	0 (-0.01)	0 (+0.15)	+	0 (+0.10)	0 (-0.08)	+ (+0.26)	0 (+0.11)	0 (-0.02)
2	0	+ (+0.50)	+ (+0.29)	0 (+0.03)	0 (+0.13)	0 (+0.18)	+	0 (+0.10)	0 (+0.12)	0 (+0.13)	+ (+0.29)	0 (+0.06)
3	0	0 (+0.11)	0 (-0.14)	0 (+0.05)	0 (-0.15)	0 (+0.16)	0	0 (+0.04)	0 (-0.05)	0 (+0.10)	0 (-0.02)	0 (-0.06)
4	0	0 (+0.13)	+ (+0.42)	0 (+0.16)	0 (+0.15)	+ (+0.32)	0	0 (+0.15)	0 (-0.03)	+ (+0.43)	0 (+0.20)	0 (+0.23)
5	+	* (+0.21)	+ (+0.47)	0 (-0.01)	0 (+0.00)	+ (+0.28)	+	* (+0.50)	+ (+0.61)	0 (+0.12)	- (-0.34)	+ (+0.28)
6	0	0 (+0.00)	* (+0.19)	0 (-0.07)	0 (-0.02)	0 (-0.12)	0	0 (+0.15)	* (+0.07)	- (-0.37)	0 (-0.19)	- (-0.21)

+ = Exceeded Predicted Gain

0 = Achieved Predicted Gain

- = Below Predicted Gain

Numbers in parentheses give the average difference between the predicted and actual scores in grade equivalents.

* Number of students at this grade is too small for analysis.

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ATTACHMENT A
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AUSTIN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT
OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEM - SCREEN 1

(002) AUSTIN HIGH

	RANK OUT OF 9	SCHOOL %	SRHI %
STUDENTS AT OR ABOVE GRADE LEVEL, SPRING 1987	1	75.1	59.5
STUDENTS GAINING ONE OR MORE YEARS IN 1986-87	1	67.2	56.8
MEETING/EXCEEDING ROSE PREDICTIONS IN 1986-87 - MATH	3	52.4	50.6
MEETING/EXCEEDING ROSE PREDICTIONS IN 1986-87 - READING	1	53.6	49.3
MASTERING TEAMS, SPRING 1987 - MATH	2	87.9	82.9
MASTERING TEAMS, SPRING 1987 - READING	1	90.1	78.5
MASTERING EXIT-LEVEL TEAMS, 1987-88 - MATH	1	89.2	81.8
MASTERING EXIT-LEVEL TEAMS, 1987-88 - LA ARTS	1	95.5	91.2
NONMINORITY STUDENTS, OCTOBER 1987	2	60.6	54.0
AVERAGE DAILY ATTENDANCE IN 1986-87	1	94.2	92.8
STUDENTS NOT DISCIPLINED IN 1986-87	2	96.8	93.5
NOT ELIG FREE/REDUCED-PRICE MEAL IN 1986-87	3	85.7	82.0
STUDENTS NOT LEP, OCTOBER 1987	4	96.5	95.9
STUDENTS NOT IN SPECIAL EDUCATION IN 1986-87		94.9	93.6
NOT IN A COMPENSATORY ED. PROGRAM IN 1986-87	1	65.9	51.7
STUDENTS NOT REASSIGNED IN 1986-87	2	99.0	83.5
ENROLLED FOR ENTIRE SCHOOL YEAR IN 1986-87	1	92.0	88.1
PUPILS PER TEACHER IN 1987-88	6	20.0	19.6
STUDENTS NOT FAILING ANY COURSE IN 1986-87	1	57.9	54.4
NOT FAILING ANY COURSE, MOST RECENT SIX WEEKS	3	67.2	62.7
1986-87 GRADUATES ATTENDING COLLEGE	1	85.6	68.4
1986-87 STUDENTS PROMOTED	1	89.8	86.4
NOT DROPPING OUT, 1985-86	3	92.6	89.3

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AUSTIN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT
OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEM - SCREEN 1

(057) COVINGTON JR.HI

	RANK OUT OF 13	SCHOOL %	JRHI %
STUDENTS AT OR ABOVE GRADE LEVEL, SPRING 1987	1	82.5	65.7
STUDENTS GAINING ONE OR MORE YEARS IN 1986-87	1	70.0	62.6
MEETING/EXCEEDING ROSE PREDICTIONS IN 1986-87 - MATH	4	54.9	51.0
MEETING/EXCEEDING ROSE PREDICTIONS IN 1986-87 - READING	3	53.7	50.5
MASTERING TEAMS, SPRING 1987 - MATH	1	89.5	78.0
MASTERING TEAMS, SPRING 1987 - READING	1	93.3	80.5
NONMINORITY STUDENTS, OCTOBER 1987	1	67.0	45.8
AVERAGE DAILY ATTENDANCE IN 1986-87	2	95.4	93.6
STUDENTS NOT DISCIPLINED IN 1986-87	2	93.8	83.3
NOT ELIG FREE/REDUCED-PRICE MEAL IN 1986-87	1	90.9	66.4
STUDENTS NOT LEP, OCTOBER 1987	1	98.3	93.9
STUDENTS NOT IN SPECIAL EDUCATION IN 1986-87	2	92.9	90.2
NOT IN A COMPENSATORY ED. PROGRAM IN 1986-87	3	86.3	75.6
STUDENTS NOT REASSIGNED IN 1986-87	1	100.0	78.2
ENROLLED FOR ENTIRE SCHOOL YEAR IN 1986-87	2	88.5	86.0
PUPILS PER TEACHER IN 1987-88	9	21.7	20.5
STUDENTS NOT FAILING ANY COURSE IN 1986-87	1	75.2	64.8
NOT FAILING ANY COURSE, MOST RECENT SIX WEEKS	1	75.4	67.7
1986-87 STUDENTS PROMOTED	2	93.0	90.5

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PROG: OW$IN31

AUSTIN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT
OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEM - SCREEN 1

(155) HILL

	RANK OUT OF 63	SCHOOL %	ELEM %
STUDENTS AT OR ABOVE GRADE LEVEL, SPRING 1987	2	90.3	60.9
STUDENTS GAINING ONE OR MORE YEARS IN 1986-87	12	63.6	55.5
MEETING/EXCEEDING ROSE PREDICTIONS IN 1986-87 - MATH	10	55.6	49.4
MEETING/EXCEEDING ROSE PREDICTIONS IN 1986-87 - READING	29	49.2	48.2
MASTERING TEAMS, SPRING 1987 - MATH	2	98.3	83.5
MASTERING TEAMS, SPRING 1987 - READING	1	98.3	78.1
MASTERING SPANISH TEAMS, SPRING 1987 - MATH	--	--	87.1
MASTERING SPANISH TEAMS, SPRING 1987 - READING	--	--	89.5
NONMINORITY STUDENTS, OCTOBER 1987	2	91.3	46.1
AVERAGE DAILY ATTENDANCE IN 1986-87	7	96.3	95.3
STUDENTS NOT DISCIPLINED IN 1986-87	1	100.0	98.8
NOT ELIG FREE/REDUCED-PRICE MEAL IN 1986-87	2	96.9	58.3
STUDENTS NOT LEP, OCTOBER 1987	17	97.2	90.2
STUDENTS NOT IN SPECIAL EDUCATION IN 1986-87	7	95.0	91.9
NOT IN A COMPENSATORY ED. PROGRAM IN 1986-87	12	98.3	81.2
STUDENTS NOT REASSIGNED IN 1986-87	1	100.0	86.4
ENROLLED FOR ENTIRE SCHOOL YEAR IN 1986-87	3	90.8	82.6
PUPILS PER TEACHER IN 1987-88	51	22.3	19.9
1986-87 STUDENTS PROMOTED	3	98.3	91.9

AUSTIN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

EFFECTIVE SCHOOL STANDARDS

To be identified as an effective school, a Priority School must meet each of the following standards for two consecutive years.

Student Attendance

An effective school is one with an average daily attendance (ADA) of 95% or more.

Staff Attendance

Each teacher at an effective school has an absence rate of 5 or fewer days of sick and personal leave each year. Teachers who take maternity leave or have catastrophic illnesses may be excluded.

TEAMS Performance

On the TEAMS, effective schools have 85% or more of their students mastering all tests.

For the purpose of evaluating this standard, scores will be combined by test area across grades. To meet the standard, 85% of the students taking each test (mathematics, reading, and writing) for a valid score must meet mastery. Therefore, if 85% or more of the students reached mastery in reading and mathematics, but only 83% met mastery in writing, the school would not be classified as effective. In addition, any school having 20 or more students taking the Spanish TEAMS will be required to reach the 85% mastery level on each Spanish test. While this TEAMS standard does not address performance comparisons by sex, ethnicity, or income, comparisons will be available from a new report being sent by TEA to all schools.

ITBS Performance

For grades 1-5, the median schoolwide ITBS Composite score should be at least the 50th percentile, and there should be fewer than 10% of the students in the bottom quartile. The data must be disaggregated by sex, ethnicity, and income. An effective school is equally effective for all groups. For groups with 20 or more students, there should be no more than a 7 percentile point difference between groups--males and females, etc.

The rules applied to the selection of students for the achievement profiles will be used to select students for evaluating this standard also.

Parent Evaluation

Based on a parent questionnaire, seventy-five percent or more of the parents think an effective school is effective.

AUSTIN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

STANDARD FOR IMPROVING SCHOOLS

The effective school standards are long-range objectives for the Priority Schools. Until a school meets the standards for an effective school, it may be designated as an improving school if it meets the standard below.

An improving school is one for which the percentage of students mastering each TEAMS test area (mathematics, reading, and writing) meets or exceeds the percentages listed below:

YEAR	TEAMS PERFORMANCE STANDARD
'88	70% Mastery
'89	75% Mastery
'90	80% Mastery
'91	85% Mastery

The percentage is to be calculated in the same way as for the effective school TEAMS standard. Also, schools with 20 or more students tested in Spanish must meet the standard in each language.

AUSTIN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

PERIODIC INFORMATION FOR MONITORING PROGRESS

Two of the five standards can be monitored on an ongoing basis during the school year. The following describes the committee's recommendations for information for ongoing monitoring.

Student Attendance

Each six weeks. Printout will provide the average percentage of the days enrolled that students were in attendance. Averages will be provided by teacher and by sex and ethnicity for each grade and the school as a whole.

Staff Attendance

At the end of October, January, March, and for the entire year. The number of hours of sick and personal leave (and total) will be reported by employee. The average number of hours of each type of leave and the total for teachers will also be presented for the school and the District.