Chapter 7 - Overview of AEA

ABOUT PART 2 OF THIS *MANUAL*

Part 2 of this *Manual* is a technical resource to explain the criteria and procedures applied by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) in evaluating the performance of alternative education campuses (AECs) including charters and charter campuses that:

- are dedicated to serving students at risk of dropping out of school;
- are eligible to receive an alternative education accountability (AEA) rating; and
- register annually for evaluation under AEA procedures.

Registered AECs and charters rated under AEA procedures are subject to all the terms and provisions of this *Manual*.

EDUCATOR INPUT

While it was the role of the Commissioner of Education to develop AEA procedures, the commissioner relied extensively on the detailed review, study, and advice of staff, educators, and other education stakeholders. The resulting procedures contain appropriate indicators for AECs and charters with increased rigor phased in over time.

HISTORY OF AEA

Enacted by the Texas legislature in 1993, accountability legislation mandated the creation of an accountability system for all Texas schools. This accountability system integrated the statewide curriculum; the state criterion-referenced assessment system; district and campus accountability; district and campus recognition for high performance and significant increases in performance; sanctions for poor performance; and school, district, and state reports.

A set of alternative performance measures for campuses serving at-risk students was developed in late 1994 and implemented in the 1995-96 school year. In order for a campus to qualify as alternative, it was required to serve one or more of the following student populations: students at risk of dropping out; recovered dropouts; pregnant or parenting students; adjudicated students; students with severe discipline problems; or expelled students.

For the 1995-96 school year, alternative accountability ratings were based on state-approved district proposals that included student performance indicators, current-year data, and comparisons of pre- and post-assessment results. Following a review of campus data by the local board of trustees, each district made an initial determination of the campus rating. This initial determination was then forwarded to the TEA where it was reviewed by a panel of peer reviewers who sent a recommendation to the commissioner.

From the 1995-96 to 2001-02 school years, revisions were made to the ratings criteria and procedures determined by an *ad hoc* Alternative Education Advisory Committee:

- Minimum performance levels for an *Acceptable* rating were established in 1996-97.
- Beginning in 1996-97, school districts were required to select campus-based performance indicators from a menu of state-established indicators.
- In 1997-98, TEA staff assumed responsibility for the review and analysis of campus performance data.
- In 1999-00, TEA required that the rating for each AEC be determined on three base indicators: Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) passing rates for reading and mathematics, dropout rates, and attendance rates.
- In 1999-00, disciplinary alternative education programs (DAEPs) and juvenile justice alternative education programs (JJAEPs) were no longer permitted to register for AEA. Instead, the performance of students served in these programs was attributed to the campuses where these students would otherwise have attended.
- In 2000-01, campuses were required to serve "students at risk of dropping out of school" as defined in Texas Education Code (TEC) §29.081 in order to be eligible to receive an accountability rating under AEA procedures.

House Bill 6, enacted by the 77th Texas Legislature, called for a pilot program to examine issues surrounding accountability of alternative education programs. The purposes of this pilot were to analyze the existing status of AECs and to make recommendations regarding the methods of evaluating the performance of these campuses. In order to achieve these purposes, the following activities were undertaken in 2002:

- a set of surveys for principals, teachers/counselors, parents, and students at AECs was administered;
- a more detailed survey was administered and follow-up telephone calls were made to a small sample of AECs;
- an analysis of existing Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) data was undertaken; and
- individual student data from a small sample of AECs was compiled and analyzed.

Results of the pilot program are published in the *Report on the Alternative Education Accountability Pilot* (Texas Education Agency, December 1, 2002).

While these pilot activities were conducted, the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB), Public Law 107-110, was signed into law. This federal legislation was considered as part of the pilot project report. Accountability provisions of NCLB require that all campuses, including AECs, be evaluated annually for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).

The 2003 Educator Focus Group on Accountability made a recommendation to develop new AEA procedures for 2005 and beyond. The new AEA procedures are based on the following guidelines:

- The AEA indicators are based on data submitted through standard data submission processes such as PEIMS or by the state testing contractor.
- The AEA measures are appropriate for alternative education programs offered on AECs rather than just setting lower standards on the same measures used in the standard accountability procedures. Furthermore, these measures ensure that all students demonstrate proficiency on the state assessments in order to graduate.
- The Texas Growth Index (TGI) and other improvement indicators are evaluated as base indicators for AEC ratings.
- Additional AEA criteria are included. For example, AECs must have a minimum percentage of at-risk students (based on PEIMS data reported on current-year fall enrollment records) to be evaluated under AEA procedures.

Also, in 2003, ratings for all campuses were suspended for one year while the new Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) assessments were implemented for the first time and the new state accountability system was developed. In 2004, registered AECs received a rating of *Not Rated: Alternative Education* while new AEA procedures were developed.

In 2005, registered AECs were evaluated for the first time under the newly developed, redesigned AEA procedures.

PHILOSOPHY OF AEA

AEA procedures are based on the following principles:

- Procedures apply to AECs, not programs.
- Procedures apply to AECs and charters dedicated to serving students at risk of dropping out of school.
- Procedures apply only to those AECs that qualify and register for evaluation under AEA procedures.
- Procedures do not apply to DAEPs or JJAEPs. Statute or interpretation of statutory intent requires that DAEP and JJAEP data are attributed to the student's home campus.
- Procedures do not apply to standard campuses, even if the campus primarily serves at-risk students.

The following issues affect many components of the accountability system.

- Small numbers of test results and mobility – AECs are smaller on average than standard campuses and have high mobility rates.
- Attribution of data – High mobility also affects attribution of data and complicates evaluation of AEC data.

- Residential Facilities – Education services are provided to students in residential programs and facilities operated under contract with the Texas Youth Commission (TYC), students in detention centers and correctional facilities that are registered with the Texas Juvenile Probation Commission (TJPC), and students in private residential treatment centers.

OVERALL DESIGN OF AEA PROCEDURES

The overall design of the AEA procedures is an improvement model. In 2005 and beyond, AECs and charters can meet either an absolute performance standard or an improvement standard for each accountability measure.

The AEA procedures include these major components:

- Rating labels – *AEA: Academically Acceptable, AEA: Academically Unacceptable,* and *AEA: Not Rated – Other;*
- AEC registration criteria and requirements;
- Base Indicators – TAKS Progress, State-Developed Alternative Assessment II (SDAA II), Completion Rate II, and Annual Dropout Rate; and
- Additional Features – Required Improvement and use of district at-risk data.