

Three strikes on TAKS isn't an out

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By L. Lamor Williams

ARLINGTON - About 109 Arlington and Mansfield third-graders could be held back from the fourth grade this fall because they didn't pass the reading portion of the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills on their third and final chance.

Preliminary results show that of the 166 third-graders in the Arlington school district who took the test, 69 passed. About 220 students failed the second time, but some have left the district.

In the Mansfield school district, 18 students took the test for a third time -- 26 failed the second time -- and six passed. The Kennedale school district had no students who need to take the test a third time.

Claude Cunningham, the Mansfield district's assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction, said that although it is unfortunate that some students may have to be held back, the rules are clear and students have

one more shot at promotion at a committee hearing.

"The rules say if you're not successful, you must have a formal intervention plan on file," he said. "We will be meeting with the parents to determine their [children's] grade placement for next fall and to develop with the parents the intervention plan."

Cunningham said he is happy but not satisfied with the results.

"I'm never satisfied until 100 percent of the students master 100 percent of the objectives with which they are confronted," he said.

Suzanne Middlebrook, a spokeswoman for the Texas Education Agency, said a committee consisting of a parent, the student's reading teacher and the school principal can decide if the student should be promoted. The decision must be unanimous.

"The committee may feel that the student is not a good test-taker but is reading at grade level," she

said. "This procedure was established as sort of a safeguard."

With the third administration of the exam over, Arlington stands to have a 97.7 percent pass rate, school district spokeswoman Rhonda Aghamalian said Wednesday. Mansfield's pass rate will be close to 99 percent.

If the preliminary data holds true, both the Arlington and Mansfield districts will have higher pass rates than the state average. On Wednesday, the Texas Education Agency released a statement noting that after the third administration of the test, 11,748 students -- out of more than 4 million -- have not passed the exam, putting the state's overall pass rate at 96 percent.

Arlington district Superintendent Mac Bernd said he is pleased. "You don't want to see 97 students who didn't pass, but on the other hand, you look at the vast number of students who did pass, and it's good news," Bernd said.