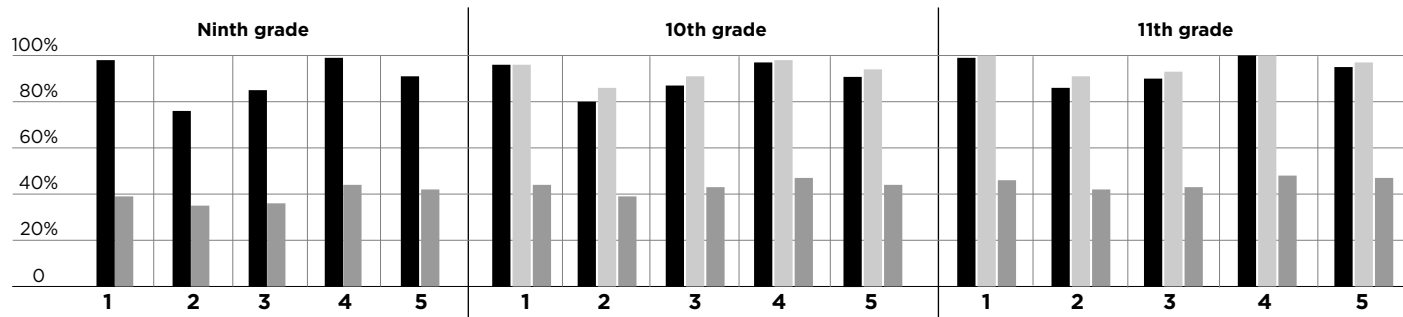


Assessing language arts skills

High school students do well overall on the English language arts TAKS, which is mostly multiple-choice, and the essay portion. But when they're asked to read a short passage and write critically about it, they do much worse. The overall passing rate is calculated from scores on three parts: multiple-choice questions, which carry the most weight, the short-response questions and an essay. The passing rate for an individual section can be higher than the overall rate. Critics argue that the short-answer portions are graded on a tougher scale than the essay portion. Here's a sampling of local district passing rates on the 2008 exam:

1. Carroll 2. Dallas 3. Garland 4. Highland Park 5. Richardson

■ Overall ■ Essay** ■ Short answer*



*Passing rates are based on the average scores of three short-answer questions that are asked.

**Passing rates are based on the percentage of students giving "somewhat," "generally" or "highly" effective answers.

NOTE: The essay portion does not apply to the ninth grade.

SOURCE: *Dallas Morning News* analysis of testing data from Pearson Educational Measurement

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