Texas Public School Rankings Methodology
SPECIAL PANDEMIC EDITION II

I. Introduction

ABOUT CHILDREN AT RISK

CHILDREN AT RISK (C@R) is a 501(c)3 non-profit, non-partisan research and advocacy organization dedicated to addressing the root causes of social problems impacting Texas children through research, collaboration advocacy, and public policy. The organization began in the fall of 1989 when a group of Houston child advocates met to discuss the lack of documentation on the status of children and the absence of strong public policy support for youth. Today, C@R works to improve the quality of life for children across Texas.

ABOUT CHILDREN AT RISK'S SCHOOL RANKINGS

The school ranking system, first developed by C@R in 2006, highlights the successes as well as need for improvement of Texas' public schools. As a research and advocacy organization, the purpose of the rankings is not only to provide a tool for parents and students, but also to provide information for campuses and districts on how they perform relative to their peers, comparing them against successful models of high-performing public schools. In 2009, C@R began to include all eligible high schools in the state of Texas and extended the ranking system to include eligible elementary and middle school campuses. Thus far, C@R's school rankings have proven to be instrumental in generating conversations among educators and the public regarding methods for improving our public education system. In addition, the school rankings aim to:

- Serve as an accessible guide for parents, educators, and community members on the performance of local schools.
- Generate conversations not just about the data used in the rankings, but around how schools and districts are performing overall in creating college-ready students.
- Be transparent. Research is strongest when it is made available to the public and open to scrutiny. Thus, discussion can be generated, the ranking methodology can be improved, and all districts can utilize this as a responsive tool to assessing campuses.
- Encourage the use of data in public school reform. The rankings have successfully promoted data analysis at the campus and district level, aided teacher and staff professional development, helped leadership allocate funds to better serve children and supported changes in strategic planning.

Each year, C@R re-examines its methodology of ranking schools to ensure that the rankings most accurately reflect school performance, utilize the most appropriate data available, and incorporate feedback from educators, researchers, and service providers.

II. Methods

SCHOOL RANKINGS PANDEMIC EDITION II OVERVIEW

For more than a decade, CHILDREN AT RISK (C@R) has ranked and graded Texas public schools to help parents, educators, and community members understand how schools in their community are performing, and to spark dialogue on the quality of public education across Texas. This year, when CHILDREN AT RISK would normally be putting out the ***2021 School Rankings***, we will instead be releasing the ***School Rankings: PANDEMIC EDITION II***. This analysis is different from our previous iterations to better address the impact of the pandemic on schools as well as data concerns such as: 2019-2020 STAAR data unavailability due to Covid-19 and participation rates and methods for 2020-21 STAAR data. Therefore, this analysis focuses on change in academic performance during the pandemic with special focus on school resiliency.

The goal of the PANDEMIC EDITION II of the school rankings is to determine the consistency and resiliency of schools during the Covid-19 Pandemic. In this time of uncertainty, it is more important than ever to monitor our students' progress in a meaningful way. To provide new and meaningful metrics that can be used to understand the impact of the pandemic we chose to conduct analysis comparing Academic Performance during 2020-21 school year with 2018-19 school year. The analysis resulted in a score which was calculated from raw STAAR scores for both 2018-19 and 2020-21 with reading or English scores being 50% of the campus score and math or algebra the other 50% of the score. The score change was then examined with other variables, such as how the campus ranked in the previous year using the traditional school ranking to arrive at a measure for Pandemic Impact

In the traditional School Rankings analysis, all elementary and middle school campuses in Texas are ranked across four indices: Student Achievement, Campus Performance, Growth, and Racial Equity. High schools are ranked across five indices: Student Achievement, Campus Performance, Growth, Racial Equity, and College Readiness. Within each index, a weighted index score is calculated for each campus. Using the index scores, a weighted average is computed to create an overall composite index. A state rank is determined as the order in which campuses are listed when the weighted composite indices are sorted from highest to lowest, relative to other schools serving the same grade levels (i.e., Elementary, Middle, High). A letter grade is then assigned based on the campus' ranked composite score. To align with these scores used in the weight

of the change performance score, elementary, middle, and high school campuses were grouped, analyzed, and reported independently.

IV. Data Collection

COLLECTION OVERVIEW

The data utilized in the school rankings analysis is collected by the Texas Education Agency (TEA). CHILDREN AT RISK receives a portion of the data directly from TEA through a public information request to the TEA data department. The other portion of the data utilized is downloaded from TEA's publicly available database, STAAR Aggregate Data, available here. CHILDREN AT RISK merges all of the data by campus ID number to create a comprehensive school profile in order to conduct the analysis. The STAAR exam data utilized in the School Rankings PANDEMIC EDITION analysis is from the 2018-19, and 2020-2021 school years. A small portion of students across Texas take modified versions of the STAAR exam. CHILDREN AT RISK does not include data on any of the modified STAAR exams in the school rankings analysis. The analysis does include students who take the STAAR exam more than once, not only those that pass at first attempt. Additionally, the data includes any student who takes the STAAR exam at a given campus, not only those included in the October Enrollment Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) Snapshot.

CAMPUS CLASSIFICATION

CHILDREN AT RISK used traditional grade ranges (elementary school EE-5, middle school 6-8, and high school 9-12) to determine each schools' classification. However, there are many possible grade ranges and many schools fall outside of traditional grade ranges. In response, CHILDREN AT RISK employed a systematic approach to ensure the most comprehensive and accurate picture of school performance relative to school peers is provided by including as many schools as possible. Schools are ranked in each category in which their data is complete for that particular range. For example, an EE-8th grade school is ranked as both an elementary and middle school, but a 4th-8th grade school would only be ranked as a middle school as their data for elementary would not be complete. This leads to some discrepancies due to the fact that schools will have a different rank in each of the classifications for which they are analyzed and assigned a rank and grade. While we recognize this as a limitation, CHILDREN AT RISK's goal is to provide parents and stakeholders with the most complete picture of school performance possible.

EXCLUDED SCHOOLS

For a school to be included in the school rankings, a campus must have complete data profile from the Texas Education Agency (TEA) for each of the indicators included in the

analysis for each academic year. Any campus missing data for one or more indicators is excluded from the analysis. Campuses with fewer than 100 students enrolled are excluded from the rankings as there is not sufficient data to analyze the performance of their campus. Additionally, campuses under an alternative accountability system from TEA (i.e., disciplinary sites) and campuses confirmed to be undergoing a state or district investigation are also excluded from the annual analysis. For the Pandemic Edition II analysis, in the case that a campus had missing STAAR raw score data for either academic year 2018-19 or academic year 2020-21, they are excluded from the analysis. Any campus that had less than 50% of eligible students take the STAAR exam is excluded from the analysis.

SUBLISTS

After the school rankings analysis is completed at the state level, sub-lists are extracted to compare school performance of like campuses based on pre-determined inclusion criteria. Sub-lists include geographic sub-lists for the major metro-areas as well as peer sub-lists comparing schools based social and economic characteristics.

Geographic Sublists

The geographic sub-lists facilitate the comparison of individual campuses in the same major metro areas across Texas. The geographic areas are defined as follows:

- Greater Central Texas Area – ESC Region 13
- Greater Houston Area – ESC Region 4
- Greater North Texas Area – ESC Regions 10 and 11
- Greater San Antonio Area – ESC Region 20
- Greater West Texas Area – ESC Region 19
- Rio Grande Valley – ESC Region 1

Red Flag Sublists

Red Flags are quality schools that have been most impacted by the pandemic. This indicator flags schools that have a history of good academic performance (A or B C@R rating in 2018-19) and experienced the highest decreases in academic performance between academic years 2018-19 and 2020-21 of all schools.

Pandemic Resilient Sublists

Pandemic Resilient Schools are quality schools serving primarily low income students that have been the most resilient during the pandemic. Campuses are considered Pandemic Resilient if they have had no change or an increase in their STAAR Scores,

have a history of academic performance with an A or B grade in the CHILDREN AT RISK School Rankings 2018-19 year, and are campuses with 75% or more students classified as low income.

E. Study Limitations

There are numerous factors that affect the success of children and schools. Research shows some of the biggest factors for student success are parental involvement, social and emotional development, teacher quality and delivery of classroom instruction, participation in extracurricular activities, teacher and parent expectations of students, and engaging class work that stimulates critical thinking. However, there is no standard measure for any of these constructs, and it would be particularly difficult to collect these data efficiently and consistently for ranking nearly 8,000 schools.

DATA CONSTRAINTS

Another constraint is CHILDREN AT RISK's dependence on data collected by the TEA. Thus, the limitations posed by TEA data are valid criticisms for the school rankings analysis. Any erroneous data reported to or by TEA may have an impact on the rankings analysis and final results. Additionally, the CHILDREN AT RISK rankings are limited to campuses that have complete data available through TEA for all measures included in the rankings. Campuses without comprehensive data profiles or those with fewer than 100 students are excluded from the rankings despite the quality of their performance.

CHILDREN AT RISK's reliance on STAAR exam data has limitations for high school students. The performance of high schools on STAAR exams is a limitation, as there are only three required End of Course STAAR exams (Algebra I, English I, and English II). A portion of students take Algebra I in eighth grade; their data is not captured at the high school level due to an inability to tie the individual level data to their high school and the students do not retest in high school.