



Dallas Public Schools

November 10, 1998

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Exchange

Dr. Michael Moses
Commissioner of Education
Texas Education Agency
1701 North Congress Avenue
Austin, TX 78701-1494

Dear Commissioner Moses,

The Dallas Independent School District is in the midst of developing a new five-year improvement plan. As part of the process we are conducting a thorough needs assessment and re-examining our goals and all current initiatives. We are formulating a strong vision for the future and are in the process of developing an over-arching strategic plan and an action plan for the first year of implementation.

As part of this process, we are naturally examining the Governor's reading goals for the State of Texas and carefully considering the emphasis the State and the Agency are placing on the elimination of social promotion. We are stressing the goal of reaching reading competency in the early grades and are becoming more vigilant about assuring that we do not allow social promotion.

As a part of this effort, we are examining our accountability measures and are reconsidering our entire achievement testing program. As you are aware, in the past our District has used norm-referenced tests extensively in addition to the *TAAS* and State End-of-Course tests. In light of the emphasis on reading and the stress on eliminating social promotion, we are seeking information regarding the Agency's views and recommendations in several areas. The following questions have arisen and we desire the Agency's input before we complete our plans and make any adjustments to our accountability system. In particular, we desire the Agency's views on these questions:

James H. Hughey *General Superintendent*

3700 Ross Avenue • Dallas, Texas 75204-5491 • Telephone (214) 989-8200

- Given that the goal of the reading program is for all Texans to be proficient in reading by the end of third grade, how is the Agency defining and measuring proficiency in reading? Is passing *TAAS* at the end of third grade a demonstration of proficiency? Is passing *TAAS* at the end of third grade viewed as being on grade level by the Agency? Is the Agency recommending, not recommending, encouraging, or discouraging the use of any other instruments such as norm-referenced or criterion referenced instruments to complement the information from *TAAS*?
- In light of our large population of students who are Spanish-dominant Speakers of Other Languages (SOL), how is the Agency defining and measuring proficiency for students taught in a Spanish-based bilingual program? Is passing the Spanish *TAAS* at the end of third grade a demonstration of proficiency? Is passing Spanish *TAAS* at the end of third grade viewed as being on grade level by the Agency? Is the Agency recommending, not recommending, encouraging, or discouraging the use of any other instruments to complement the information from Spanish *TAAS*?
- What recommendations is the agency making for measuring progress of students from Kindergarten through second grade, i.e., how does the Agency recommend tracking progress toward the state goal prior to the availability of the *TAAS* or Spanish *TAAS* at grade 3? Are any particular type of instruments or particular instruments, norm-referenced or criterion-referenced on the state approved list being recommended?
- With regard to social promotion, is passing the *TAAS* or Spanish *TAAS* in addition to passing all course work sufficient to demonstrate the capability to function at the next grade level or does failing to pass *TAAS* serve as a sufficient indicator that a student should not be promoted? Is the Agency recommending, not recommending, encouraging, or discouraging the use of other instruments than *TAAS* or Spanish *TAAS* in addition to course work in making decisions about social promotion?

As you can see from our questions, we are attempting to make cogent and practical decisions about our accountability system and are attempting to ensure our decisions consider Agency policies and recommendations carefully. We are grateful for what information and guidance you can provide us on these issues. Thank you, in advance, for your assistance.

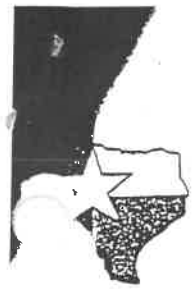
Sincerely,

James H. Hughey
General Superintendent
Dallas Independent School District

RLM:ia

TEXAS EDUCATION AGENCY

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MIKE MOSES
COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION

November 23, 1998

Dr. James H. Hughey
General Superintendent
Dallas Independent School District
3700 Ross Avenue
Dallas, Texas 75204-5491

Dear Dr. Hughey:

Thank you for informing me of the development of the Dallas Independent School District's new five-year improvement plan. Your effort to review and examine the goals and objectives of all your current initiatives is to be commended. Your focus on teaching all children to read and on ending the practice of social promotion will serve to improve the educational experience of all Dallas schoolchildren.

Texas has been recognized across the nation for our public school accountability system and the strides we have made in improving the performance of students, particularly our economically-disadvantaged and minority students. At the core of our accountability system is the state's testing program. The Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) is designed to give accurate and specific information about individual student achievement based on the state's curriculum standards, the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). It is the criterion-referenced nature of the test that allows us to see whether schools are successfully teaching students the TEKS. While always subject to improvement, the TAAS test and our accountability system are the best tools we have for increasing student achievement.

Following are responses to the questions you posed concerning the TAAS, the reading instruments for the early grade levels, and social promotion:

The agency defines proficiency in reading as passing the reading portion of the TAAS. A student who is "on grade level" is receiving instruction in and performing satisfactorily on the curriculum specified to be taught at the particular grade. In Texas, this curriculum is the TEKS. The TAAS is a criterion-referenced test in that it measures student performance against the TEKS of the corresponding grade. Thus, the TAAS is an "on grade level" measure of student performance. The agency has taken no position on the use of other instruments, including norm-referenced instruments and other criterion-referenced instruments, to complement the TAAS.

The Spanish TAAS, the results of which will be added into the accountability system in 1999, may also be considered a measure of reading proficiency at each grade level. The agency has taken no position on the use of other Spanish instruments to complement the Spanish TAAS.

The agency has published a list of recommended reading diagnostic instruments for Kindergarten, Grade 1, and Grade 2. The instruments on the list measure reading skill development and comprehension. School districts have the option of selecting an instrument from the list or choosing another instrument. The results from the administration of the

cc: R. Olvera

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instruments are to be reported to the local school district's board of trustees. In addition to the commercially available products on the list, the agency included on the list the Texas Primary Reading Inventory. This inventory is aligned with the TEKS. A Texas Spanish Primary Reading Inventory is under development.

At the 1998 Midwinter Conference, Governor Bush announced his goal to end the practice of social promotion. The specifics of his proposal will be presented during the Legislative Session that begins in January 1999. Issues such as passage of the TAAS, passage of all coursework, multiple opportunities to pass the TAAS, and the use of any other instruments to measure student achievement will be thoroughly discussed during the Session.

Our system of a state-adopted curriculum, textbooks and instruction aligned to this curriculum, an assessment system based on this curriculum, and an accountability system which holds individual schools and districts responsible will continue to ensure that the our public schools will focus on all Texas schoolchildren achieving academic success.

Sincerely yours,



Mike Moses
Commissioner of Education

TEA Position on Using *TAAS* Data and *TAAS*-Norm Referenced Comparisons

Abstract

The Dallas Public Schools is in the process of defining goals and initiatives for the five year period from 1999 to 2003. Key elements in these efforts are goals and initiatives treating academic subjects. To clarify the accountability measures associated with these goals, the district asked TEA Commissioner Moses for clarification of the TEA position regarding the interpretation of standing on the *TAAS* test and its relation to other instruments including norm-referenced tests and its use in avoiding social promotion. The Commissioner noted the following:

- "The Agency defines proficiency in reading as passing the reading portion of the *TAAS*."
- The Commissioner indicated that the Spanish *TAAS* defines reading proficiency in Spanish at each grade level.
- The criteria for avoiding social promotion including passing *TAAS* will be considered in the 1999 Legislative Session and have not been determined yet.

The Dallas Public Schools conducted a study of the comparability of the *TAAS* and the current District norm-referenced test, the *ITBS*. The study was undertaken because of concerns about the test which have arisen in the course of examining *TAAS* results in evaluating student performance. The major results of the study and information from District project evaluations were as follows:

- The *TAAS* contains sufficient higher order skill items to provide a measure of upper level performance. However, passing *TAAS* is an insufficient measure of upper level performance. A more stringent use of *TAAS* results must be made to assure the measurement of high level performance.
- Equating performance on *TAAS* and *ITBS*, passing *TAAS* in reading at grades 3-8 was equivalent to the 25th percentile of the *ITBS*. In mathematics, passing *TAAS* at grades 3-5 was equivalent to the 40th percentile of the *ITBS*, but at grades 6-8 was equivalent to the 33rd percentile of the *ITBS*. Performance at grade 10 was lower in both math and reading.
- Passing all *TAAS* objectives at a level of 70% was found to be an appropriate measure of higher level performance. Again, at grade 10 all performance values were lower.

It is recommended that the District move to treat passing *TAAS* as a first-level objective only. It is recommended that the District set and reward higher standards on the *TAAS* to promote teaching and learning of higher order skills.

Introduction

The Dallas Public Schools is in the final stages of completing a new five year improvement plan, Vision 2003. In the process of constructing the plan, the District has systematically obtained input from all levels of stakeholders regarding District goals and initiatives to meet these goals. Naturally, academic goals are the most prominent of these goals and initiatives, particularly those in the core subjects and, of those, particularly those in reading. The emphasis on these academic goals and on reading has prompted an equal concern about how progress on these goals will be measured, leading to an examination of the accountability system and the measures used therein.

Parallel to the concerns with the accountability system and the measurement of goals, the District has been in the process of selecting a norm-referenced testing system

2 show work

APPROXIMATE PERCENTILES

| Math - Pass TAAS | | | Read - Pass TAAS | | |
|------------------|------------|---------|------------------|------------|---------|
| Grade | Percentile | Percent | Grade | Percentile | Percent |
| 3 | 40 | 84.2 | 3 | 22 | 85.9 |
| 4 | 42 | 86.5 | 4 | 27 | 84.5 |
| 5 | 40 | 89.1 | 5 | 26 | 82.9 |
| 6 | 33 | 90.4 | 6 | 26 | 87.4 |
| 7 | 33 | 87.2 | 7 | 24 | 81.6 |
| 8 | 31 | 86.4 | 8 | 22 | 83.0 |
| 10 | 23 | 83.3 | 10 | 10 | 86.5 |

| Math - Pass All Objectives | | | Read - Pass All Objectives | | |
|----------------------------|------------|---------|----------------------------|------------|---------|
| Grade | Percentile | Percent | Grade | Percentile | Percent |
| 3 | 76 | 59.9 | 3 | 45 | 65.4 |
| 4 | 85 | 55.9 | 4 | 66 | 50.6 |
| 5 | 78 | 55.6 | 5 | 62 | 48.8 |
| 6 | 79 | 56.9 | 6 | 67 | 53.4 |
| 7 | 81 | 56.7 | 7 | 49 | 60.6 |
| 8 | 75 | 51.9 | 8 | 53 | 59.4 |
| 10 | 53 | 69.2 | 10 | 35 | 67.0 |

| Math - TLI 80% | | | Read - TLI 80% | | |
|----------------|------------|---------|----------------|------------|---------|
| Grade | Percentile | Percent | Grade | Percentile | Percent |
| 3 | 62 | 75.6 | 3 | 36 | 76.9 |
| 4 | 66 | 77.4 | 4 | 41 | 81.3 |
| 5 | 57 | 82.5 | 5 | 36 | 76.5 |
| 6 | 55 | 83.0 | 6 | 35 | 82.0 |
| 7 | 55 | 77.2 | 7 | 36 | 76.1 |
| 8 | 53 | 74.7 | 8 | 33 | 78.3 |
| 10 | 38 | 74.1 | 10 | 16 | 81.4 |

| Math - TLI 85% | | | Read - TLI 85% | | |
|----------------|------------|---------|----------------|------------|---------|
| Grade | Percentile | Percent | Grade | Percentile | Percent |
| 3 | 79 | 61.7 | 3 | 44 | 71.3 |
| 4 | 83 | 61.1 | 4 | 56 | 70.8 |
| 5 | 69 | 72.7 | 5 | 46 | 69.8 |
| 6 | 69 | 74.1 | 6 | 48 | 72.0 |
| 7 | 68 | 71.0 | 7 | 49 | 66.8 |
| 8 | 68 | 67.0 | 8 | 48 | 68.0 |
| 10 | 55 | 69.1 | 10 | 32 | 70.7 |

| Math - TLI 90% | | | Read - TLI 90% | | |
|----------------|------------|---------|----------------|------------|---------|
| Grade | Percentile | Percent | Grade | Percentile | Percent |
| 3 | 96 | 38.2 | 3 | 60 | 59.4 |
| 4 | 97 | 32.4 | 4 | 67 | 58.9 |
| 5 | 87 | 47.9 | 5 | 56 | 59.2 |
| 6 | 88 | 52.2 | 6 | 60 | 66.9 |
| 7 | 93 | 51.1 | 7 | 64 | 61.3 |
| 8 | 90 | 46.8 | 8 | 60 | 59.5 |
| 10 | 84 | 49.0 | 10 | 53 | 64.5 |

for the next three years. Each form of the current test, the *ITBS*, has been used with its norming system for the maximum three years allowed by state law. As part of this process, two concerns were the differences between the *TAAS* and *ITBS* and how both should be used in the accountability system. These concerns were heightened with TEA announcing major enhancements to the *TAAS* and the State accreditation system and with the Governor's initiative in reading and the announced initiative to end social promotion.

These concerns prompted two actions. In the first, the District sent a letter to TEA Commissioner Mike Moses requesting clarification on the Agency's position regarding the use of the *TAAS* and Spanish *TAAS* tests to determine reading proficiency and as a criterion for determining readiness for promotion. Also, the District requested the Agency position on the use of other tests such as the *ITBS* in conjunction with *TAAS*. In the second, the District conducted a study of the differences in level of scoring on the *TAAS* and *ITBS* in both reading and mathematics. This study determined levels of both tests where the tests were approximately equivalent.

This paper summarizes the responses of the commissioner and reports on the results of the study comparing the *TAAS* and *ITBS*. Additionally, it discusses recommendations regarding the use of the *TAAS* test in light of information from the responses of the commissioner, the comparison study, and from related parts of current evaluation reports. The text of the letter sent to the Commissioner, the reply of the Commissioner, and technical information from the study are presented in the appendix to this report.

The Position of TEA Regarding *TAAS*

The District requested from Commissioner Moses and TEA the position of the Agency on the following four points:

- Was passing *TAAS* at the end of the third grade a measure of proficiency in reading and did the Agency view it as being on grade level? Did the Agency encourage the use of other instruments such as *ITBS* with the *TAAS*?
- Was passing Spanish *TAAS* at the end of the third grade a measure of proficiency in reading for bilingual program students and did the Agency view it as being on grade level? Were other instruments recommended?
- Did the Agency recommend any instruments for tracking progress of students in reading from grades K through 2?
- Was passing the *TAAS* or Spanish *TAAS* sufficient as a measure of proficiency for promotion? Was not passing either test sufficient reason to not recommend promotion?

Commissioner Moses sent a letter which gave the following responses to these questions:

- The *TAAS* is a criterion-referenced test matched to the TEKS, the Texas curriculum standards. As such, the "Agency defines proficiency in reading as passing the reading portion of the *TAAS*." Further, he characterized the *TAAS* as an "on grade level" measure of student performance. Finally, he indicated that the Agency had no position on the use of other test instruments.
- The Spanish *TAAS* is a measure of reading proficiency at each grade level. The Agency has taken no position on the use of other Spanish-based tests.
- The Agency has a list of recommended diagnostic tests for grades K-2 to assess reading prior to the *TAAS* at grade 3. Districts may choose from the list or select other tests. The Agency indicates that the results from using these tests should be reported to Board of Education.
- The Legislature is to discuss the issues involved in preventing social promotion during the current Legislative Session. The Commissioner implied that any action will await this discussion.

Comparison of Scoring Levels on the *TAAS* and *ITBS*

To determine approximately equal scoring levels on the *TAAS* and *ITBS*, all students taking both tests in reading and mathematics in 1998 were compared by grade level. The following table gives the number of students by grade level. (At grade 10, the population was the students who had taken the *TAP*, the secondary level of *ITBS*, at grade 9 in 1997 and had taken the *TAAS* in 1998.)

Number of Students Tested on *ITBS* and *TAAS* in 1998

| Grade Level | Reading | Mathematics |
|-------------|---------|-------------|
| 3 | 9,231 | 9,235 |
| 4 | 9,334 | 9,323 |
| 5 | 9,392 | 9,372 |
| 6 | 9,586 | 9,617 |
| 7 | 9,165 | 8,861 |
| 8 | 8,658 | 8,341 |
| 10 | 5,152 | 5,111 |
| Total | 60,518 | 59,860 |

The first comparisons made between tests were to determine the numbers and percentages passing *TAAS* and reaching either the 50th percentile or the 40th percentile on *ITBS* and the number reaching only one of these criteria. The 40th and 50th

percentiles were selected since the 50th percentile is commonly misperceived as grade level and the 40th percentile has been the District definition of functioning at grade level for a number of years. Complete numbers for these comparisons are in the Appendix. From these numbers, the proportion meeting each criterion was computed. The following table presents the portion meeting each criterion relative to the other.

Comparison of Passing *TAAS* and 40th and 50th Percentiles on *ITBS*

| <i>Reading</i> | | | | |
|--------------------|--|--|--|--|
| Grade | Percent At 50th Percentile That Pass <i>TAAS</i> | Percent That Pass <i>TAAS</i> At 50th Percentile | Percent At 40th Percentile That Pass <i>TAAS</i> | Percent That Pass <i>TAAS</i> At 40th Percentile |
| 3 | 96% | 43% | 93% | 60% |
| 4 | 95% | 55% | 91% | 71% |
| 5 | 93% | 52% | 92% | 61% |
| 6 | 96% | 54% | 93% | 68% |
| 7 | 96% | 40% | 94% | 54% |
| 8 | 95% | 44% | 92% | 52% |
| 10 | 97% | 26% | 96% | 44% |
| <i>Mathematics</i> | | | | |
| Grade | Percent At 50th Percentile That Pass <i>TAAS</i> | Percent That Pass <i>TAAS</i> At 50th Percentile | Percent At 40th Percentile That Pass <i>TAAS</i> | Percent That Pass <i>TAAS</i> At 40th Percentile |
| 3 | 88% | 76% | 84% | 85% |
| 4 | 90% | 80% | 85% | 90% |
| 5 | 94% | 73% | 89% | 89% |
| 6 | 96% | 73% | 92% | 87% |
| 7 | 95% | 65% | 92% | 76% |
| 8 | 95% | 55% | 91% | 71% |
| 10 | 98% | 27% | 94% | 56% |

In reading, at least 93% of students at the 50th percentile on the *ITBS* at each grade pass *TAAS*. Conversely, no more than 55% of students who pass *TAAS* reading are at the 50th percentile on *ITBS*. In math, at least 88% of students at the 50th percentile pass *TAAS*, while no more than 80% passing *TAAS* are at the 50th percentile. For the 40th percentile of reading at least 91% pass *TAAS* while no more than 71% that pass

TAAS are at the 40th percentile. In mathematics, the passing rate on *TAAS* for those at the 40th percentile equals or exceeds the converse at grades 3-5, while performance is lower at grades 6-8 and 10. The difference in performance at grade 10 is consistently larger than at grades 3-8. Clearly, passing *TAAS* is less rigorous than attaining the 40th percentile on the *ITBS* with the exception of mathematics at grades 3-5. Also, the tests are closer in the area of mathematics than in reading.

These values raised the question of where the passing rate on *TAAS* matches *ITBS* percentiles. A further question arose regarding what level of performance on *TAAS* could be regarded as a measure of higher level performance. To answer these questions, the next stage of the study was to determine *ITBS* percentiles approximately equivalent to passing *TAAS*, to a TLI score of 80, and to passing all objectives on the *TAAS*.

For this part of the study, the cumulative distributions of the percent passing *TAAS* and each of the other *TAAS* statistics relative to the percent at a given *ITBS* percentile were computed across the range of percentiles. From the point in these distributions where the curves intersected, approximately equivalent percentiles were computed for each *TAAS* statistic. The equivalencies are given in the following table.

At grades 3-8, passing *TAAS* in reading ranges in value from the 22nd to the 27th percentile. In mathematics, percentiles range from the 40th to 42nd at grades 3-5 and from the 31st to 33rd at grades 6-8. For a TLI of 80 percentiles in reading range from the 33rd to the 41st and in math from the 53rd to the 66th at grades 3-8. Finally, passing all *TAAS* objectives corresponds to percentile ranks ranging from the 45th to the 67th in reading and from the 75th to the 85th in mathematics at grades 3-8. The percentile matches in each group are much lower for grade 10.

To summarize the equating of a passing scores on *TAAS* with *ITBS* percentiles, at grades 3-8 passing *TAAS* in reading is approximately equal to the 25th percentile. In mathematics, at grades 3-5, passing *TAAS* is approximately equal to the 40th percentile and at grades 6-8 to the 33rd percentile. For grades 3-8, passing all *TAAS* objectives was found to be an appropriate measure of higher level performance.

| <i>ITBS National Percentile Ranks Matching Selected TAAS Statistics</i> | | | |
|---|--------------|----------|---------------------|
| <i>Reading</i> | | | |
| Grade | Passing TAAS | TLI = 80 | Pass All Objectives |
| 3 | 22 | 36 | 45 |
| 4 | 27 | 41 | 66 |
| 5 | 26 | 36 | 62 |
| 6 | 26 | 35 | 67 |
| 7 | 24 | 36 | 49 |
| 8 | 22 | 33 | 53 |
| 10 | 10 | 16 | 35 |
| <i>Mathematics</i> | | | |
| Grade | Passing TAAS | TLI = 80 | Pass All Objectives |
| 3 | 40 | 62 | 76 |
| 4 | 42 | 66 | 85 |
| 5 | 40 | 57 | 78 |
| 6 | 33 | 55 | 79 |
| 7 | 33 | 55 | 81 |
| 8 | 31 | 53 | 75 |
| 10 | 23 | 38 | 53 |

Related Issues Arising in District Evaluations

The evaluation of the elementary mathematics program in 1996-97 conducted a thorough analysis of the *TAAS* mathematics test. The evaluation noted first that the *TAAS* had sufficient higher order skills items to adequately test mathematics. This countered a misperception about the *TAAS* that it was too easy a test. The report noted that the problem stems from the passing score being set too low, not from the test itself. The analysis reported above verifies this conclusion. Second, District students did not do well on the higher order skills objectives on the *TAAS* test. This is a pervasive problem noted on the *ITBS* as well as the *TAAS* and noted in the observations of all major evaluations conducted in the last several years. Finally, the evaluation noted that it was possible to score well enough on the lower level objectives of the *TAAS* to pass the mathematics accreditation criterion for 1999-2000 (50% passing *TAAS* in all subgroups and total) without mastering the higher order objectives. This last point is important since a school

committed to inexorable drill of lower level objectives will probably be accredited via the *TAAS*.

The results obtained in the analysis of reading during the preparation of the school effectiveness indices reinforce the results obtained in the mathematics study. The *TAAS* reading test contains sufficient higher order skill items to provide a measure of advanced performance. Again, the evaluations of the reading programs indicate a problem in teaching higher-order skills.

Consistently, the evaluations point to inappropriate responses to meeting accreditation requirements in the schools by targeting lower skill *TAAS* objectives and failing to put enough emphasis on higher order *TAAS* objectives. This response is understandable in one sense since schools must meet an immediate threat of loss of accreditation status if low achieving students fail the *TAAS* in sufficient numbers. (In 1998-99, 45% of all students and of each *TAAS* subgroup in a school must pass each relevant *TAAS* subtest to avoid being classed low-performing.) Principals and teachers feel insecure if insufficient attention is paid to *TAAS* and start paying less attention to students who will safely pass *TAAS* and start spending more time with all students assuring a minimum response level. Unfortunately, targeting a minimum response level is insufficient to master higher order skills.

The major problem is that schools are led to believe the percent passing *TAAS* is more rigorous for a school and all students as the school moves from low-performing to acceptable to recognized to exemplary. It is only more rigorous for low performing students in a school. Increasing the percent passing all objectives is a more appropriate higher order objective for *TAAS*. Unfortunately, schools are not sufficiently rewarded for meeting higher order objectives.

It is recommended that the system of rewards for performance on *TAAS* be examined and that an expanded reward system be implemented which stresses performance on higher level objectives. Passing *TAAS* and doing well on the State accreditation system are still highly appropriate objectives for low achieving students in our schools. However, more substantial objectives need to be set, attained, and given the sort of accolades attached to the current State system in order to shift attention to higher order skills and performance.

Appendix

The appendix contains:

- a copy of the text of the letter from Dr. Hughey to Commissioner Moses requesting clarification on *TAAS* issues.
- a copy of Commissioner Moses' response to the request.
- backup tables with information regarding the study of *TAAS* and *ITBS* performance levels.
- and, cumulative function graphs indicating points of test equivalence.



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November 10, 1998

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Commissioner of Education
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As part of this process, we are naturally examining the Governor's reading goals for the State of Texas and carefully considering the emphasis the State and the Agency are placing on the elimination of social promotion. We are stressing the goal of reaching reading competency in the early grades and are becoming more vigilant about assuring that we do not allow social promotion.

As a part of this effort, we are examining our accountability measures and are reconsidering our entire achievement testing program. As you are aware, in the past our District has used norm-referenced tests extensively in addition to the *TAAS* and State End-of-Course tests. In light of the emphasis on reading and the stress on eliminating social promotion, we are seeking information regarding the Agency's views and recommendations in several areas. The following questions have arisen and we desire the Agency's input before we complete our plans and make any adjustments to our accountability system. In particular, we desire the Agency's views on these questions:

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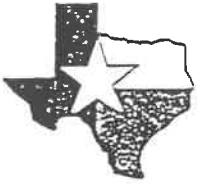
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As you can see from our questions, we are attempting to make cogent and practical decisions about our accountability system and are attempting to ensure our decisions consider Agency policies and recommendations carefully. We are grateful for what information and guidance you can provide us on these issues. Thank you, in advance, for your assistance.

Sincerely,

James H. Hughey
 General Superintendent
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MIKE MOSES
COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION

November 23, 1998

Dr. James H. Hughey
General Superintendent
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3700 Ross Avenue
Dallas, Texas 75204-5491

Dear Dr. Hughey:

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Texas has been recognized across the nation for our public school accountability system and the strides we have made in improving the performance of students, particularly our economically-disadvantaged and minority students. At the core of our accountability system is the state's testing program. The Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) is designed to give accurate and specific information about individual student achievement based on the state's curriculum standards, the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). It is the criterion-referenced nature of the test that allows us to see whether schools are successfully teaching students the TEKS. While always subject to improvement, the TAAS test and our accountability system are the best tools we have for increasing student achievement.

Following are responses to the questions you posed concerning the TAAS, the reading instruments for the early grade levels, and social promotion:

The agency defines proficiency in reading as passing the reading portion of the TAAS. A student who is "on grade level" is receiving instruction in and performing satisfactorily on the curriculum specified to be taught at the particular grade. In Texas, this curriculum is the TEKS. The TAAS is a criterion-referenced test in that it measures student performance against the TEKS of the corresponding grade. Thus, the TAAS is an "on grade level" measure of student performance. The agency has taken no position on the use of other instruments, including norm-referenced instruments and other criterion-referenced instruments, to complement the TAAS.

The Spanish TAAS, the results of which will be added into the accountability system in 1999, may also be considered a measure of reading proficiency at each grade level. The agency has taken no position on the use of other Spanish instruments to complement the Spanish TAAS.

The agency has published a list of recommended reading diagnostic instruments for Kindergarten, Grade 1, and Grade 2. The instruments on the list measure reading skill development and comprehension. School districts have the option of selecting an instrument from the list or choosing another instrument. The results from the administration of the

cc: R. Olvera ✓
11/23/98

instruments are to be reported to the local school district's board of trustees. In addition to the commercially available products on the list, the agency included on the list the Texas Primary Reading Inventory. This inventory is aligned with the TEKS. A Texas Spanish Primary Reading Inventory is under development.

At the 1998 Midwinter Conference, Governor Bush announced his goal to end the practice of social promotion. The specifics of his proposal will be presented during the Legislative Session that begins in January 1999. Issues such as passage of the TAAS, passage of all coursework, multiple opportunities to pass the TAAS, and the use of any other instruments to measure student achievement will be thoroughly discussed during the Session.

Our system of a state-adopted curriculum, textbooks and instruction aligned to this curriculum, an assessment system based on this curriculum, and an accountability system which holds individual schools and districts responsible will continue to ensure that the our public schools will focus on all Texas schoolchildren achieving academic success.

Sincerely yours,



Mike Moses
Commissioner of Education

TEA Position on Using *TAAS* Data and *TAAS*-Norm Referenced Comparisons

Technical Appendix

This appendix contains:

- two backup tables with information regarding the study of *TAAS* and *ITBS* performance levels
- and, ten cumulative function graphs indicating points of test equivalence for *TAAS* passing and *ITBS* percentiles.

The backup tables contain the complete numbers for the computation of data contained in the report comparing percentages passing the *TAAS* and meeting the 40th or 50th percentile of the *ITBS*. The cumulative functions are the graphs used to determine the percentile equivalents of *TAAS* passing. Similar graphs were prepared and used, but are not included in the Appendix for the equivalents of passing all *TAAS* objectives and for the equivalents of meeting a TLI of 80.

**Comparison of TAAS Passing Level
and ITBS 50th Percentile**

MATHEMATICS

| Grade | Number taking ITBS & TAAS 50th Percentile | Number at Passing TAAS | Number at 50th Percentile and Passing TAAS | Percent at 50th Percentile Passing TAAS | Percent at Passing TAAS at 50th Percentile |
|--------------|---|------------------------|--|---|--|
| 3 | 9235 | 4471 | 5197 | 3945 | 88.2% |
| 4 | 9323 | 5080 | 5738 | 4567 | 89.9% |
| 5 | 9372 | 4864 | 6242 | 4580 | 94.2% |
| 6 | 9617 | 5204 | 6806 | 4976 | 95.6% |
| 7 | 8861 | 3687 | 5435 | 3515 | 95.3% |
| 8 | 8341 | 3132 | 5413 | 2982 | 95.2% |
| 10 | 5111 | 985 | 3535 | 967 | 98.2% |
| TOTAL | 59860 | 27423 | 38366 | 25532 | 93.1% |

READING

| Grade | Number taking ITBS & TAAS 50th Percentile | Number at Passing TAAS | Number at 50th Percentile and Passing TAAS | Percent at 50th Percentile Passing TAAS | Percent at Passing TAAS at 50th Percentile |
|--------------|---|------------------------|--|---|--|
| 3 | 9231 | 2765 | 6205 | 2649 | 95.8% |
| 4 | 9334 | 3617 | 6246 | 3424 | 94.7% |
| 5 | 9392 | 3450 | 6184 | 3206 | 92.9% |
| 6 | 9586 | 3851 | 6782 | 3676 | 95.5% |
| 7 | 9165 | 2432 | 5903 | 2344 | 96.4% |
| 8 | 8658 | 2689 | 5754 | 2541 | 94.5% |
| 10 | 5152 | 1089 | 4153 | 1057 | 97.1% |
| TOTAL | 60518 | 19893 | 41227 | 18897 | 95.0% |

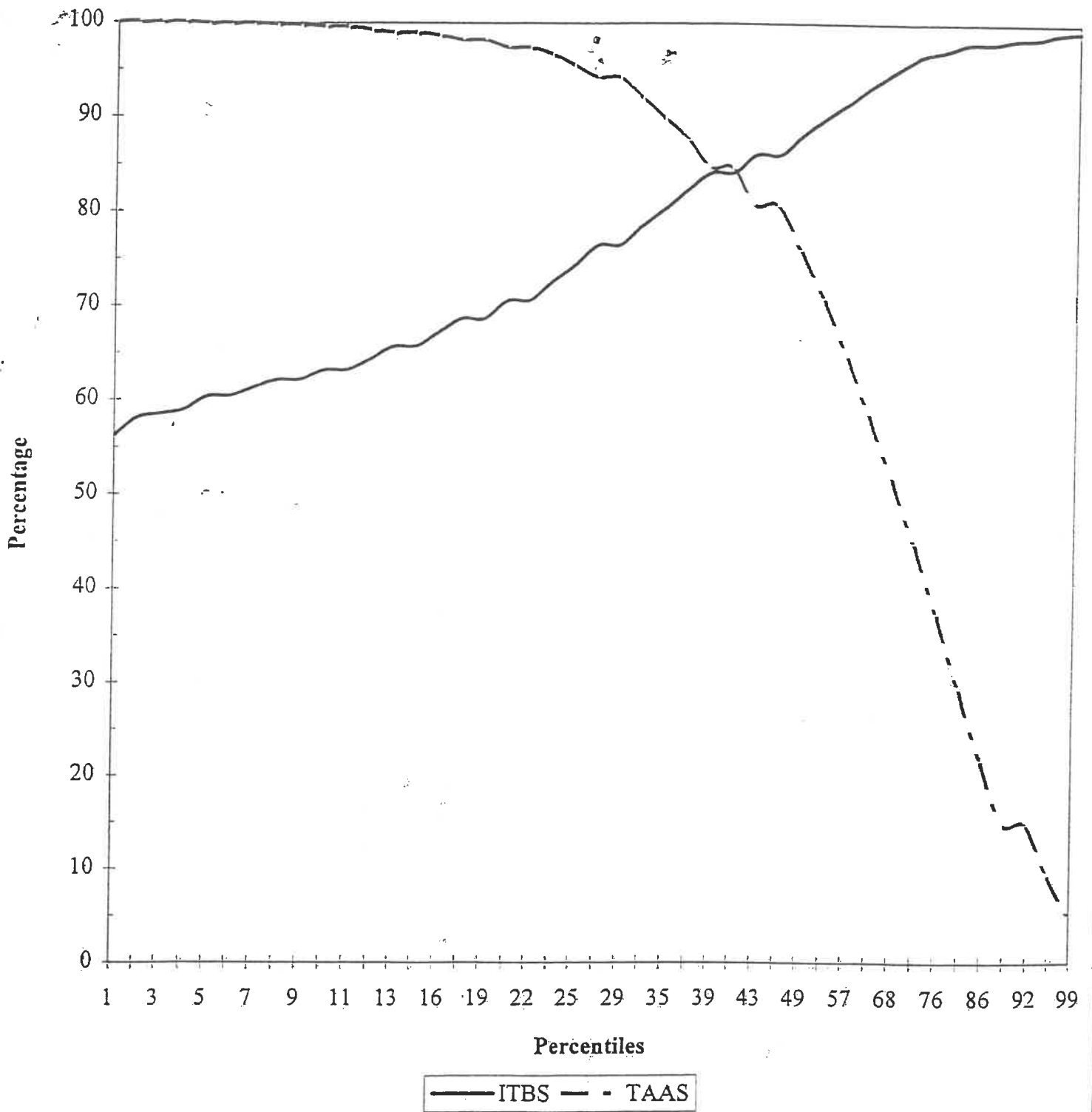
**Comparison of TAAS Passing Level
and ITBS 40th Percentile
MATHEMATICS**

| Grade | Number taking | | Number Passing | | Percent | |
|--------------|---------------|-------|----------------|-------|----------------|----------------|
| | ITBS & TAAS | TAAS | TAAS | TAAS | above 40th Pet | above 40th Pet |
| 3 | 9235 | 5219 | 5197 | 4393 | 84.2% | 84.5% |
| 4 | 9323 | 6063 | 5738 | 5144 | 84.8% | 89.6% |
| 5 | 9372 | 6206 | 6242 | 5529 | 89.1% | 88.6% |
| 6 | 9617 | 6443 | 6806 | 5921 | 91.9% | 87.0% |
| 7 | 8861 | 4529 | 5435 | 4153 | 91.7% | 76.4% |
| 8 | 8341 | 4209 | 5413 | 3845 | 91.4% | 71.0% |
| 10 | 5111 | 2131 | 3535 | 1993 | 93.5% | 56.4% |
| TOTAL | 59860 | 34800 | 38366 | 30978 | 89.0% | 80.7% |

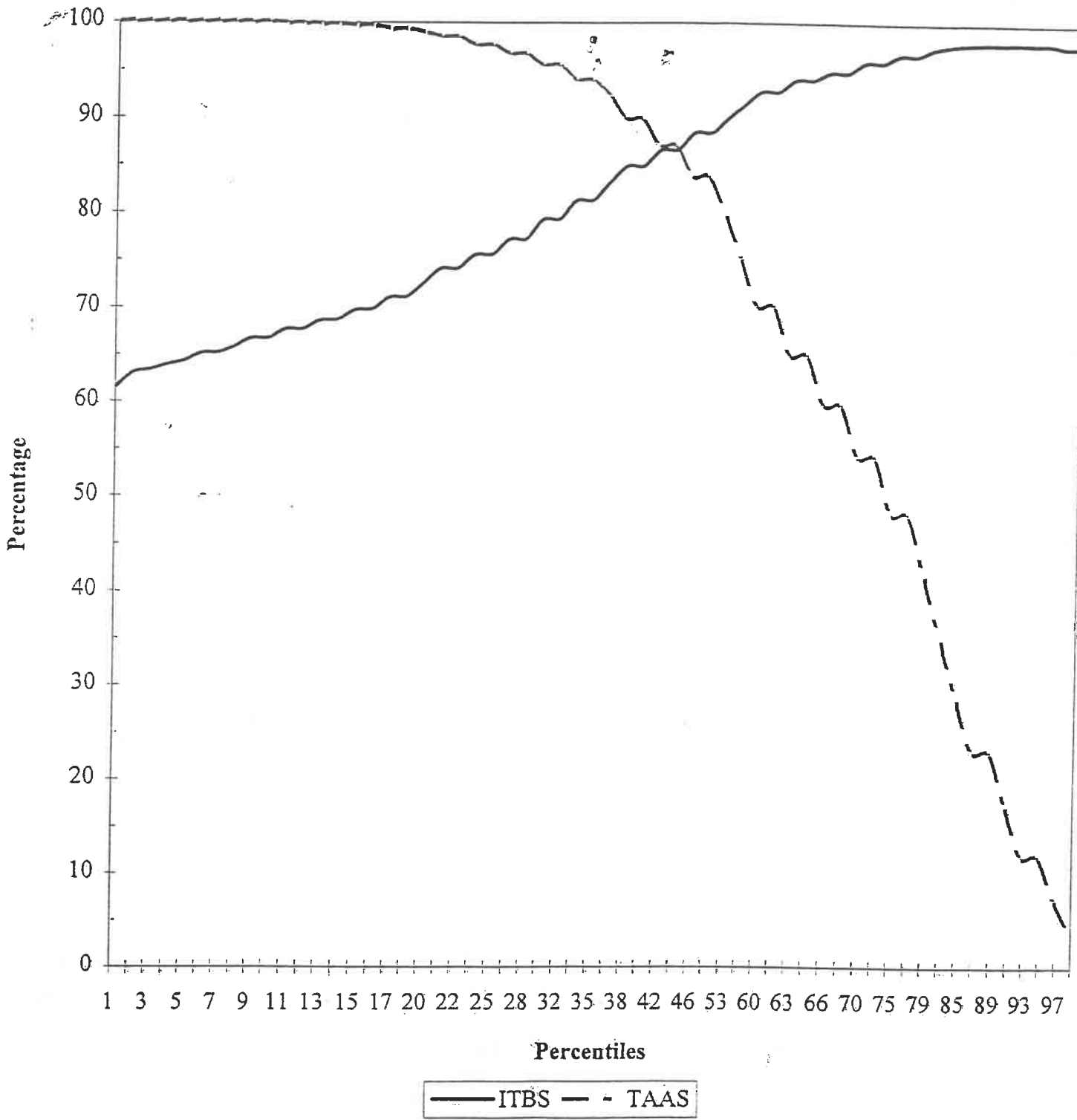
READING

| Grade | Number taking | | Number Passing | | Percent | |
|--------------|---------------|-------|----------------|-------|----------------|----------------|
| | ITBS & TAAS | TAAS | TAAS | TAAS | above 40th Pet | above 40th Pet |
| 3 | 9231 | 3981 | 6205 | 3712 | 93.2% | 59.8% |
| 4 | 9334 | 4895 | 6246 | 4443 | 90.8% | 71.1% |
| 5 | 9392 | 4122 | 6184 | 3770 | 91.5% | 61.0% |
| 6 | 9586 | 5006 | 6782 | 4630 | 92.5% | 68.3% |
| 7 | 9165 | 3396 | 5903 | 3178 | 93.6% | 53.8% |
| 8 | 8658 | 3266 | 5754 | 3012 | 92.2% | 52.3% |
| 10 | 5152 | 1899 | 4153 | 1829 | 96.3% | 44.0% |
| TOTAL | 60518 | 26565 | 41227 | 24574 | 92.5% | 59.6% |

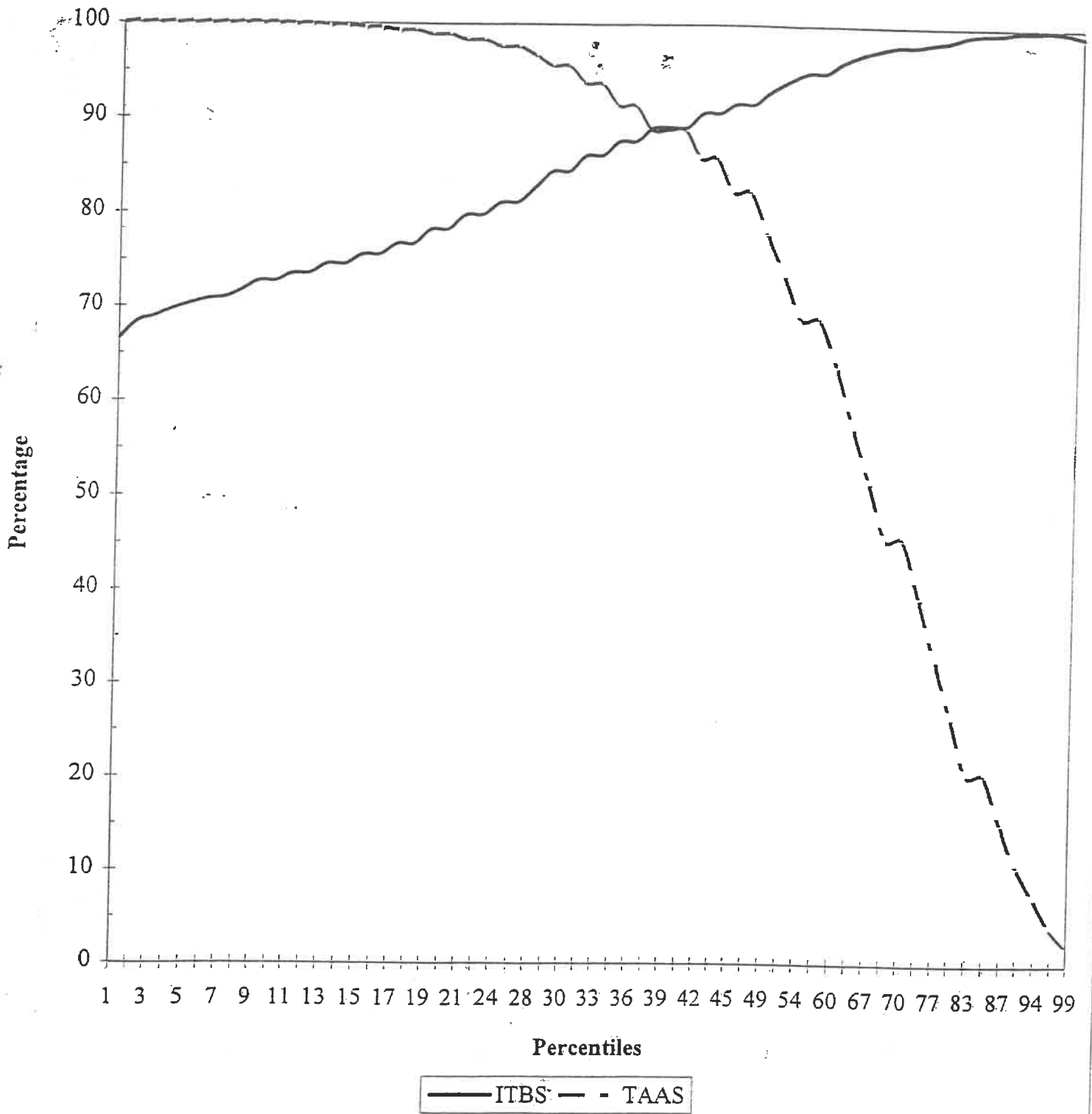
Grade 3 - Math



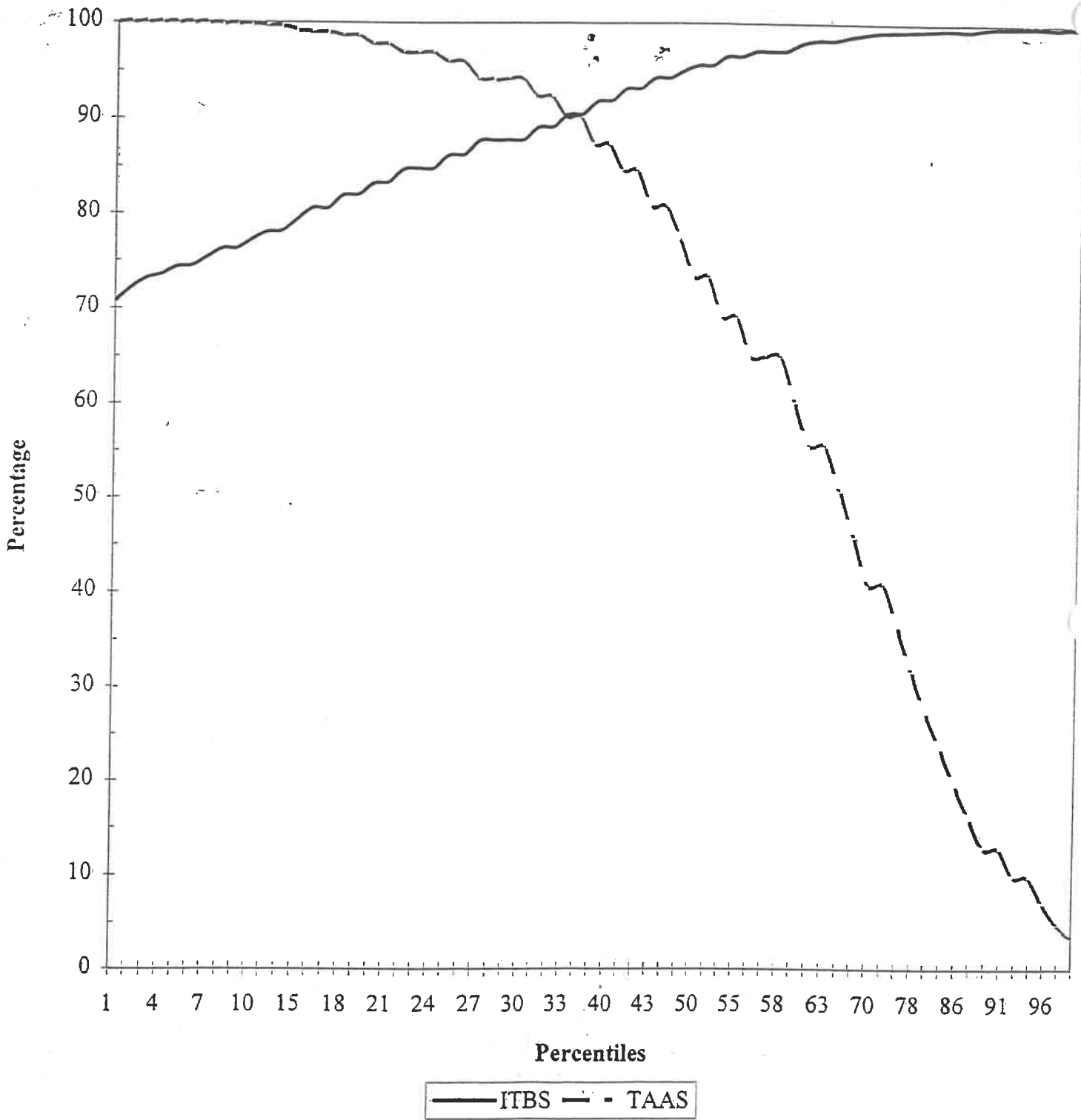
Grade 4 - Math



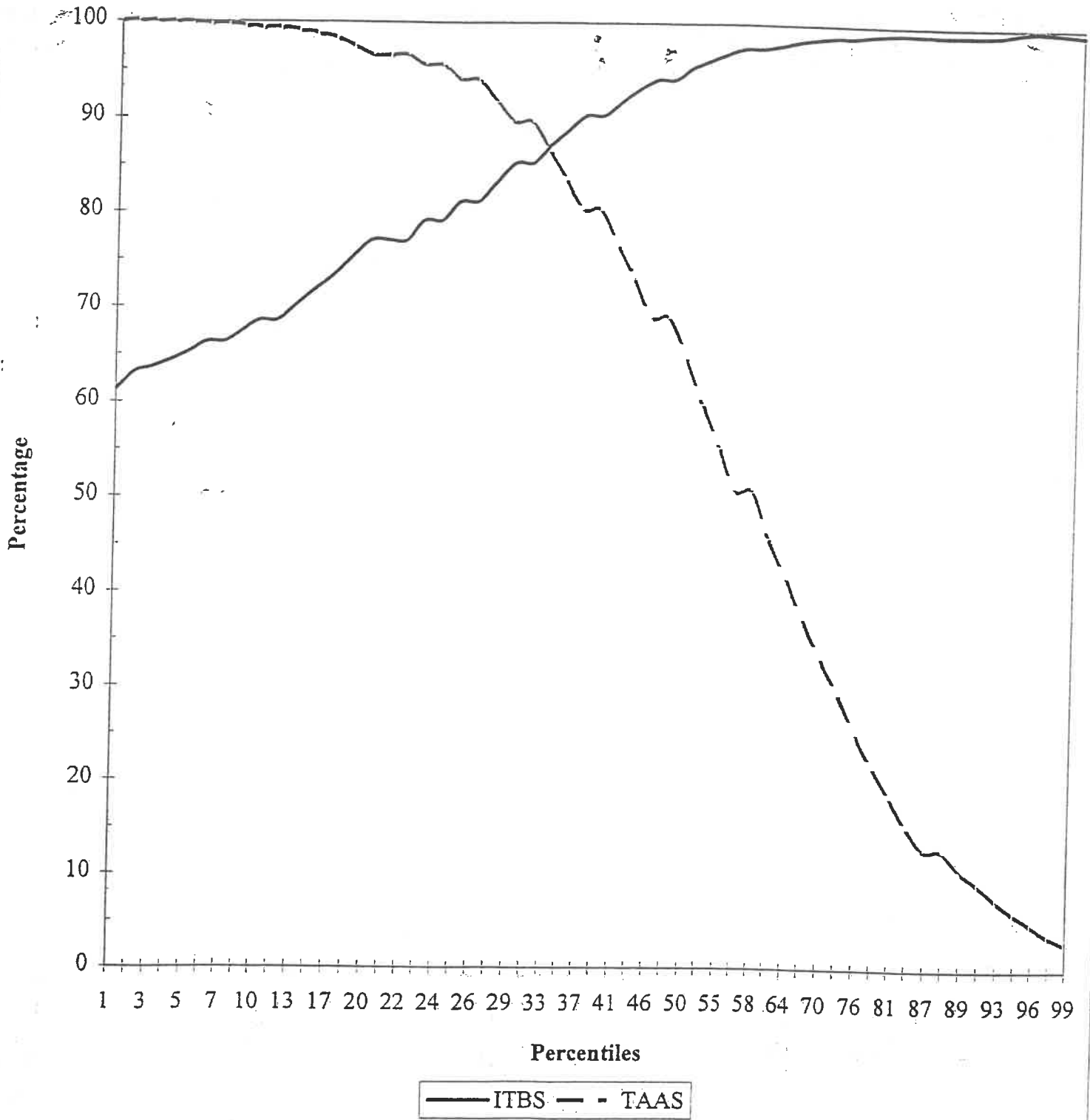
Grade 5 - Math



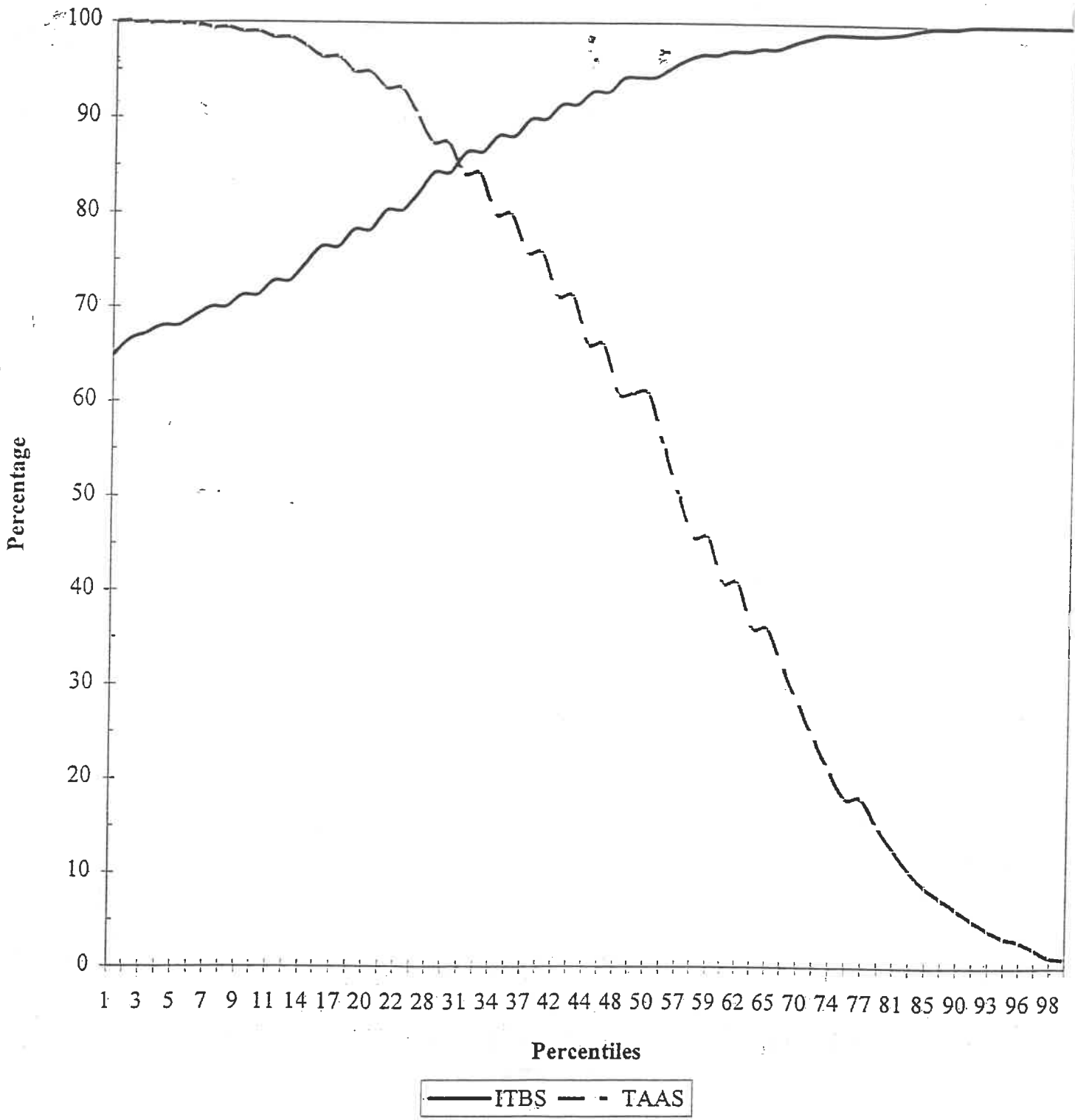
Grade 6 - Math



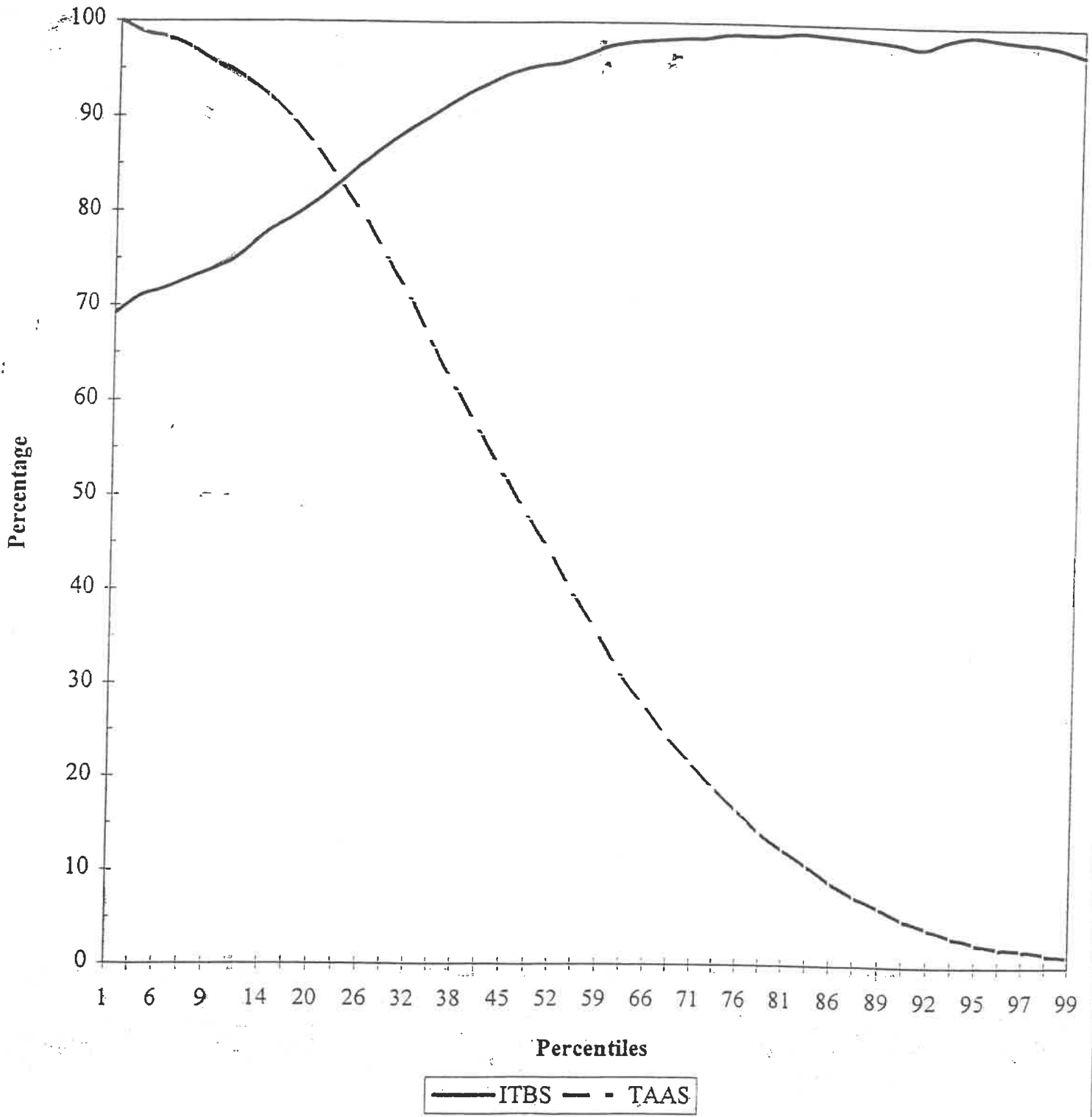
Grade 7 - Math



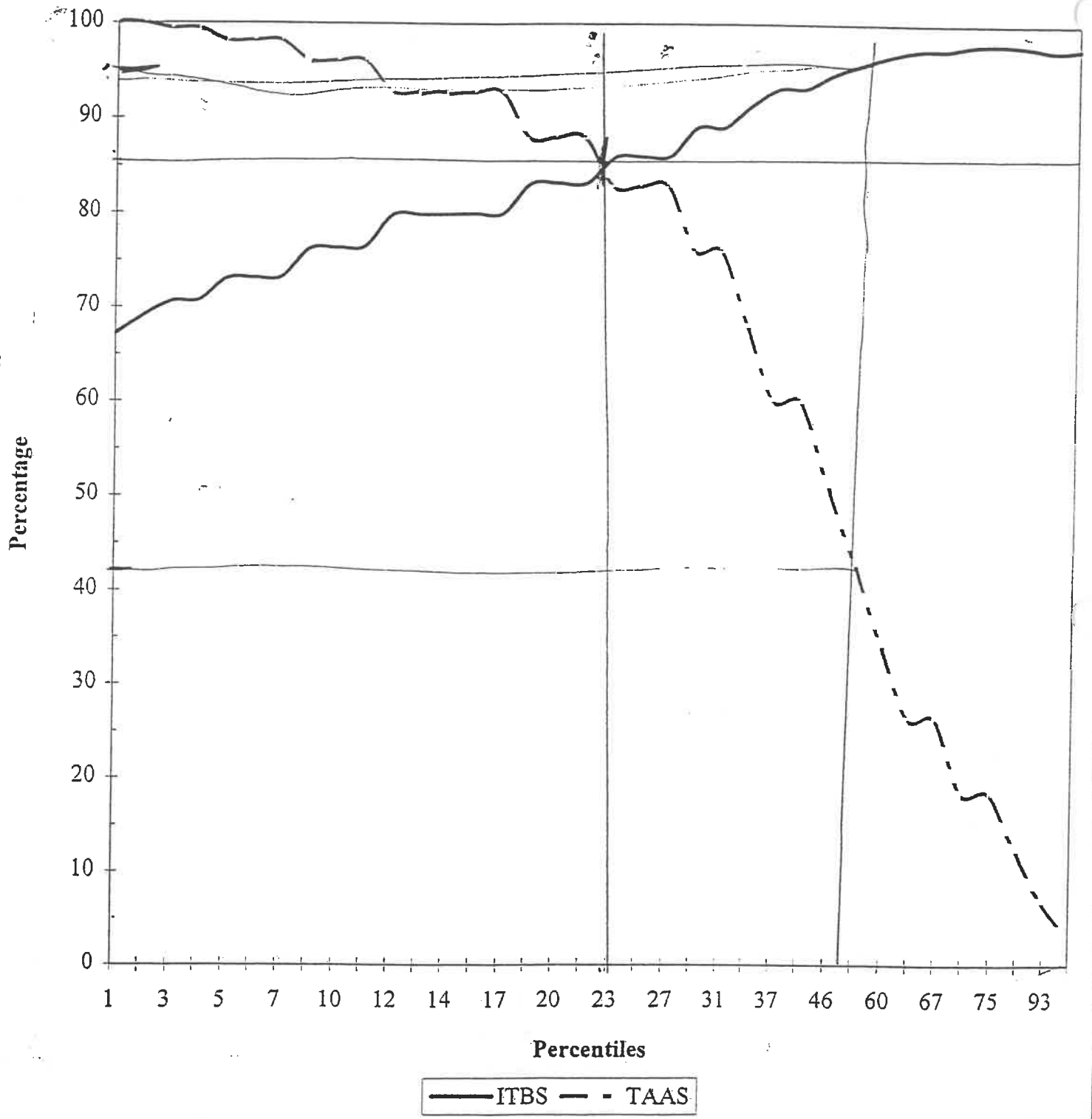
Grade 8 - Math



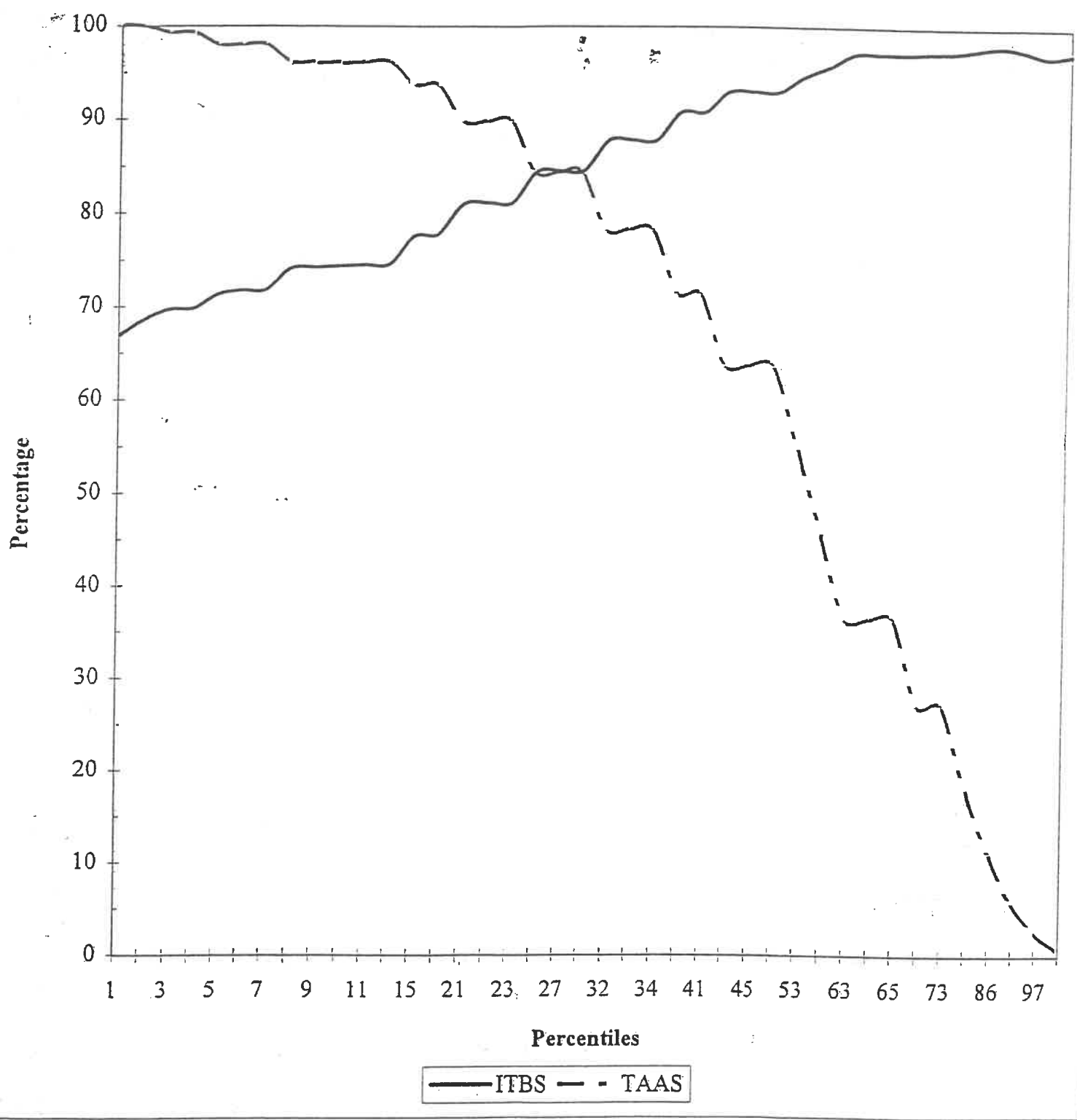
Grade 10 - Math



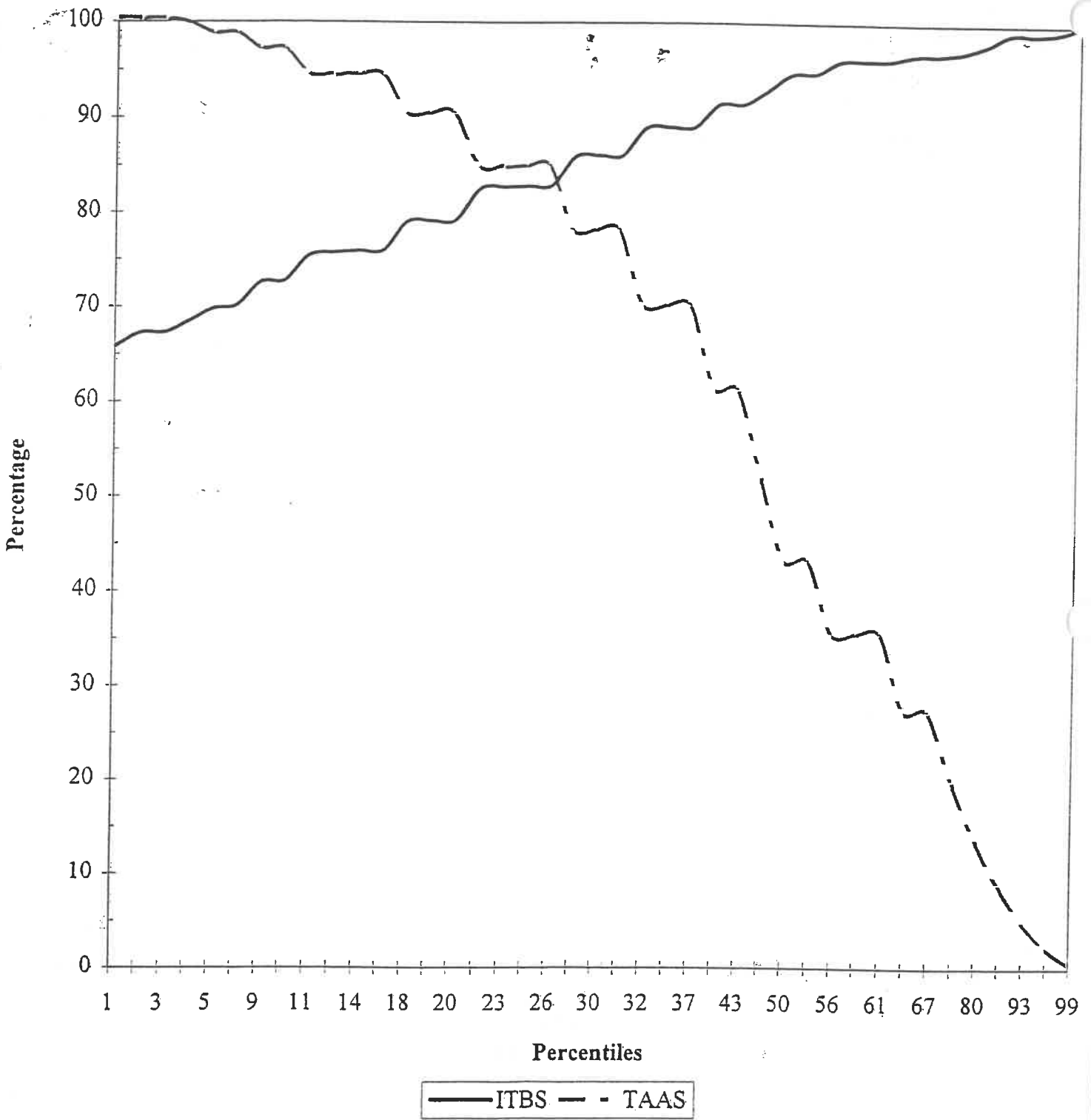
Grade 3 - Read



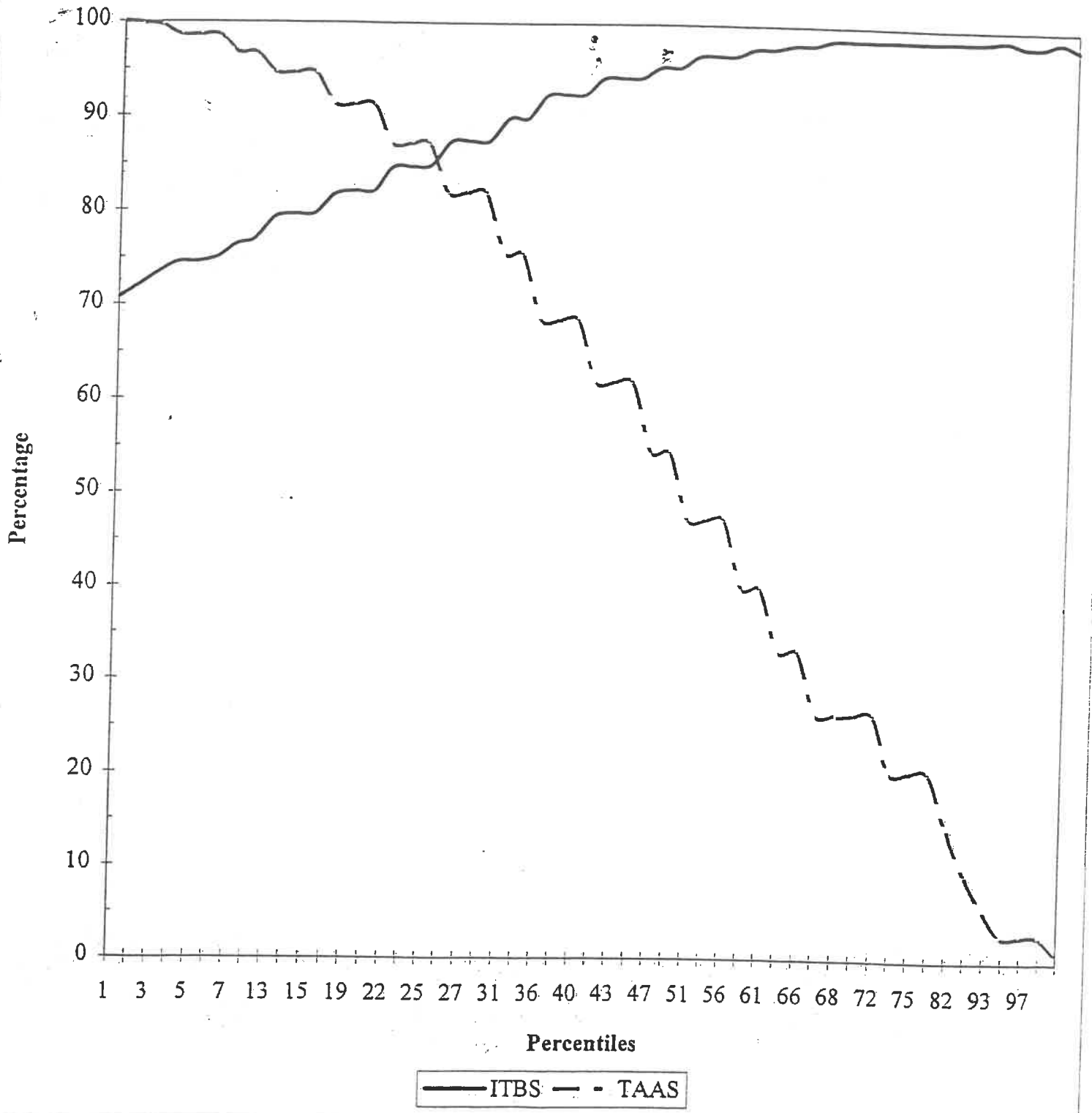
Grade 4 - Read



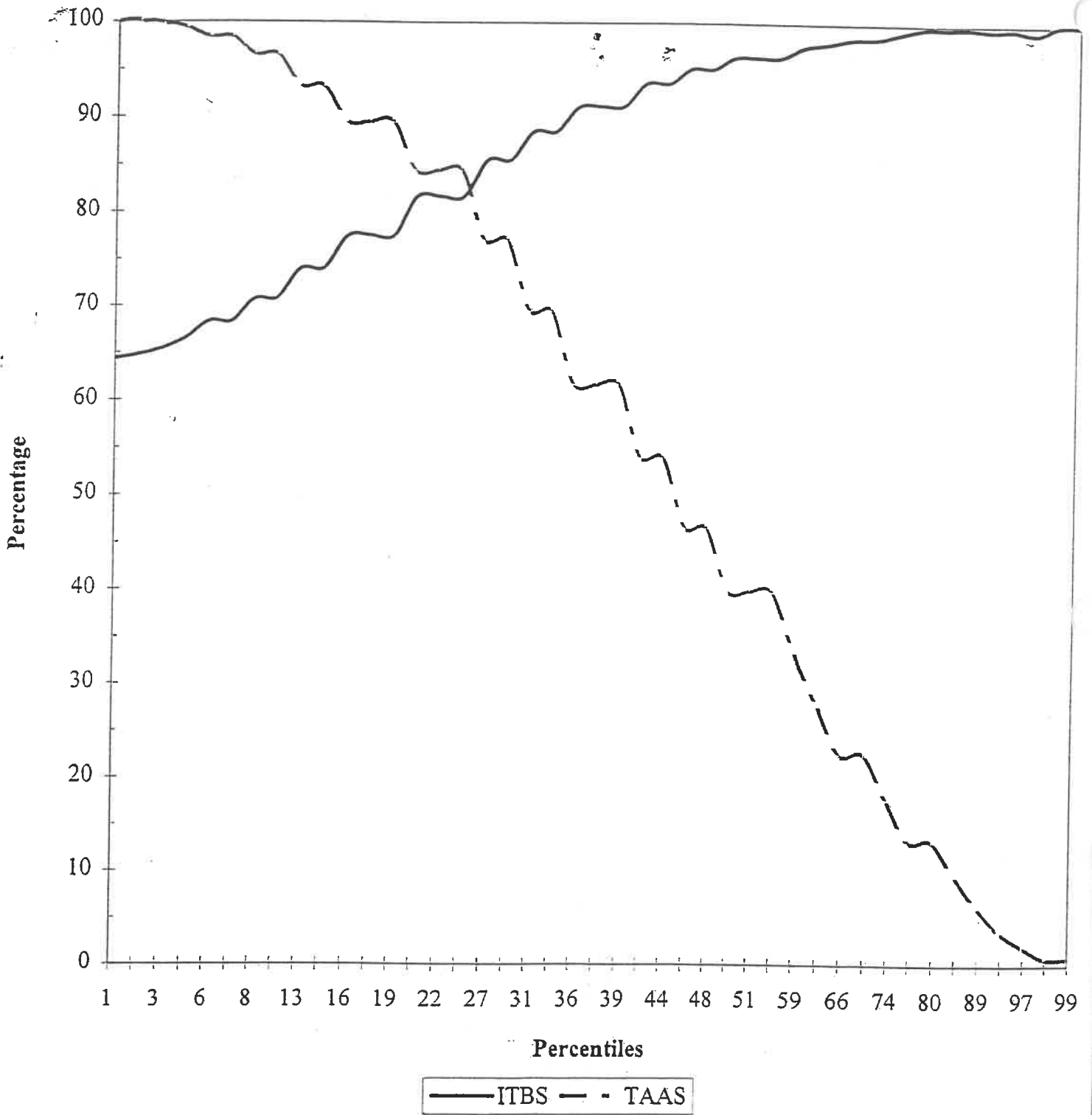
Grade 5 - Read



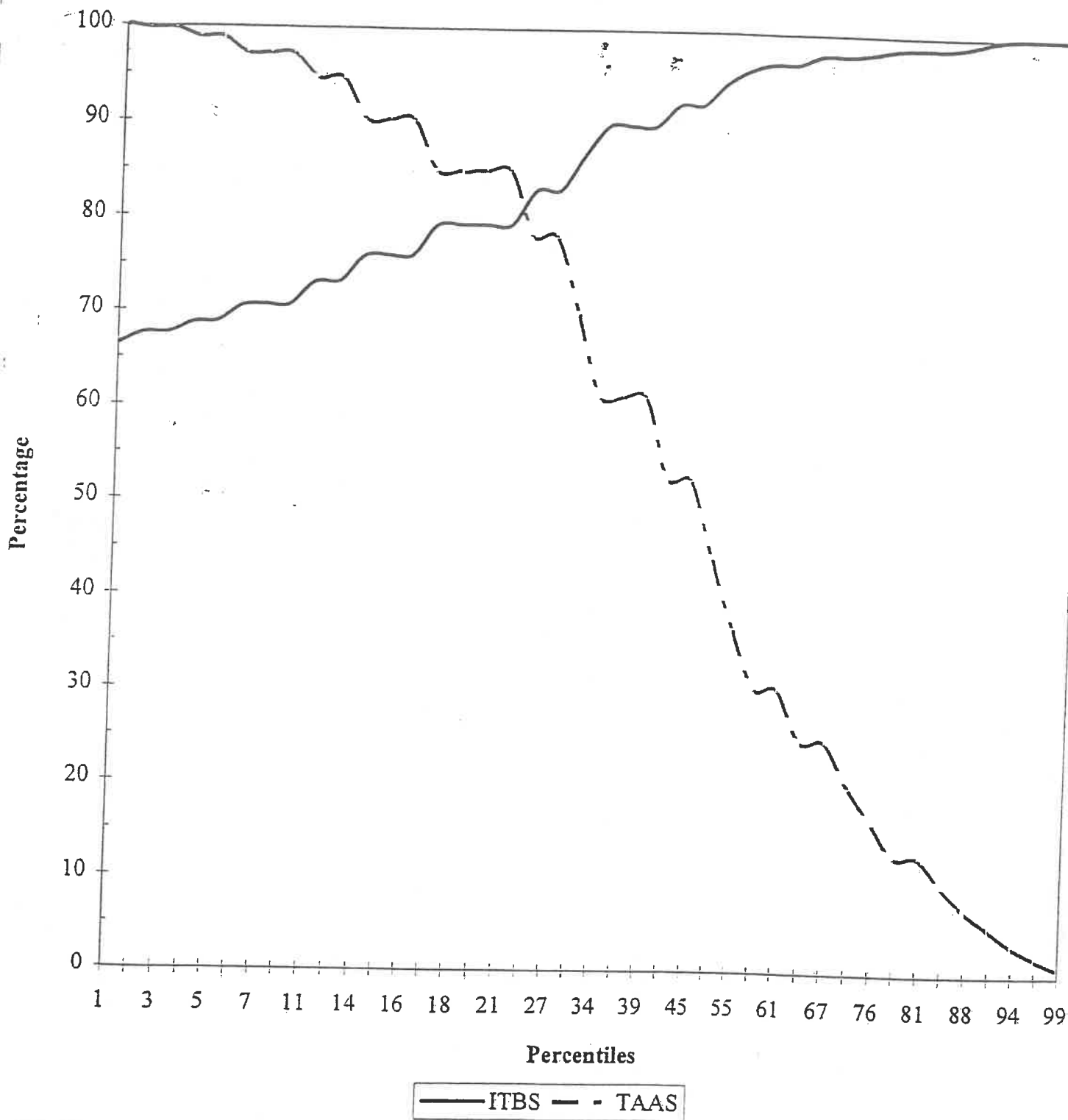
Grade 6 - Read



Grade 7 - Read



Grade 8 - Read



Grade 10 - Read

