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# **2007 ATPE Assessment Survey and Policy Recommendations Report**

**ATPE Input to the Senate Education Committee on SB 1031**

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## Background

House Public Education Committee Chairman Rob Eissler (R-The Woodlands) and Senate Education Committee Chairwoman Florence Shapiro (R-Plano) filed identical bills in their respective chambers March 2 that would overhaul the state's assessment system for public school students in grades 3-11. The House version of the bill is House Bill (HB) 2236, and the Senate version is Senate Bill (SB) 1031. ATPE has long requested educator input regarding the state assessment and accountability systems and took this opportunity to poll its members about the assessment provisions of these bills and gather comments about the assessment system as a whole. These findings, along with ATPE's legislative program and our recent research study *Teacher and Parent Perceptions of TAKS*, were used to identify our recommendations for these bills and state assessment policy.

## Methodology

ATPE members were provided a summary of the assessment instrument portions of the proposed legislation and were then asked eight yes-or-no questions. They were also provided additional opportunities to comment. The survey data was collected online from March 8, 2007, through March 14, 2007. Tallied responses and select comments are presented in full in the Results Summary section. The bill summary provided to members is reprinted below. Although the survey focused on these particular bill provisions, the concepts represented are applicable to assessment policy in general. This was not a scientific survey but an informal poll of ATPE members.

Summary of the major provisions of HB 2236 and SB 1031:

- ❖ Replaces ninth-11<sup>th</sup> grade TAKS tests with standardized end-of-course (EOC) exams in Algebra I and II, geometry, biology, chemistry, physics, English I-III, world geography, world history and U.S. history. EOC exams would be designed to assess only the curriculum in each individual course rather than multiple courses or cumulative knowledge and skills like the current TAKS tests.
- ❖ EOC assessments would be scored on a 100-point scale and count for 15 percent of students' corresponding course grades. Students would be required to achieve a cumulative average score of at least 70 on all tests taken across subjects and grade levels in order to graduate. Students will be given multiple opportunities to re-take the tests when failure to pass prevents obtaining a diploma.
- ❖ EOC tests would be designed to measure annual improvement in student achievement and would include embedded questions measuring college readiness. The tests would also be designed to allow for computer administration.
- ❖ The changes would go into effect for students entering ninth-grade in the 2009-10 school year.
- ❖ Requires all eighth-grade students to take a diagnostic college readiness assessment and all 10th-grade students to take the PSAT for diagnostic purposes. The proposal also provides state funding for each student to take the SAT or ACT once.
- ❖ Adds a fifth-grade social studies TAKS test and moves the fifth-grade science test to fourth-grade. The proposal also replaces the grades 4 and 7 writing tests by integrating them into the grades 4 through 8 reading tests.

## Overall Findings

First, teachers are interested. In just two days' time, more than 2,700 teachers had responded to the survey questions, and more than 2000 total comments were submitted. In total, 3,232 ATPE members responded to our survey.

Generally, educators' opinions on these issues are in sync and demonstrate strong support for most of the assessment instrument concepts of HB 2236/SB 1031. An overwhelming majority of responders support the change to an end-of-course system at the high school level, but issues regarding the timing of administration, methods for incorporating the score into course grades, and decisions about who determines the weight of that score on a course grade all surfaced in the comments. A clear majority also supports combining the reading and writing TAKS assessments and administering that assessment in fourth through seventh grades. Yet, responses to the changes in the third through eighth grade assessment system reveal conflict among educators as to the best way to incorporate social studies and science assessments. Overall, educators clearly want to have more input and discretion, want to reduce the number of assessments and the use of those assessments for high-stakes decision-making, want assessments that inform their instruction, and want an accountability system that incorporates multiple ways of measuring learning. Educators are also interested in the college-readiness provisions of the proposed legislation, with generally favorable responses.

However, educators made clear their significant concerns with these concepts and the education system as a whole, particularly what they see as an inappropriate and ever-increasing focus on college prep and a corresponding disregard for career and technology education. They also cite significant issues in appropriately testing special populations—English language learners and special education students in particular.

## Major ATPE Policy Recommendations

We learned a great deal from listening to these educators and have taken into consideration their survey responses as well as our member-created legislative program in making policy recommendations for HB 2236/SB 1031. The scope of these policy recommendations is broader, though, reflecting ATPE member positions on the Texas assessment and accountability systems in general. The following recommendations represent key positions in relation to the assessment and accountability systems as a whole. Later in the report, specific policy recommendations follow each concept area of the survey data.

- Eliminate the high-stakes nature of the assessment and accountability systems, particularly the no pass/no promote rule in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. Allow a broader picture of student learning and professional teacher judgment to determine promotion, not absolute performance on a single assessment.
- Incorporate diagnostic and formative assessment tools into the state system. The current assessment system was simply not designed to make decisions at the classroom level. Make the instructional benefits of assessment a priority and provide educators with a balanced system of diagnostic, formative and summative assessment instruments.
- Address the special education assessment issues in current and proposed policy, particularly in providing practical, effective means of testing of special education students who fall under alternate achievement standards testing. Support greater flexibility for the assessment of special education students in state and federal law.
- Recognize the value of career and technology curriculum by better incorporating those courses within the assessment and accountability systems. The rigor inherent in application-based courses is to be respected, and the wide range of post-secondary options available to students today demands it.

## Results Summary

### Section 1: End-of-course system in grades 9-11

#### Survey Results:

	All Respondents				Grade 9-12 Educators			
	Support		Oppose		Support		Oppose	
<i>Do you support replacing high school TAKS tests with end-of-course exams for core subjects in grades 9-11?</i>	2954	91.4%	278	8.6%	845	92.2%	72	7.9%
<i>Do you support requiring students' end-of-course exam scores to count for 15 percent of students' overall course grades?</i>	2322	71.8%	910	28.2%	652	71.1%	265	28.9%

#### Response Summary:

A clear majority of respondents (91.4%) are in favor of the change from TAKS and Exit-level TAKS to end-of-course assessments at the high school level. However, comments from educators did highlight several important considerations as to the details of this effort, such as timing the administration of these assessment instruments appropriately and providing clarification regarding the course grade component in a semester-based grading system. Also, a significant number of educators commented on the end-of-course assessment score counting toward students' overall course grade. Although 71.8% of those surveyed supported this concept, the comments provided by these educators clearly indicated that local discretion in determining the percent toward course grades should be incorporated. Comments as to the appropriate weight of the end-of-course assessment ranged from 5% to 50%, with a majority of those amounts suggested ranging from 10% to 20% of a course grade.

#### *Sampling of Comments:*

*It makes the test part of the curriculum and increases relevance for the student. The state needs to provide teachers with interim assessments to gauge both teacher and student progress.*

*I am absolutely in favor of moving to End-of-Course exams instead of TAKS.*

*I do support this. It really is no different than a cumulative Semester Exam or Final Exam. Also, this provides for real-life, college experience of final, cumulative exams without it dooming them to fail.*

*We are just now getting used to the TAKS test. Do not keep changing everything. I actually LIKE that the TAKS is cumulative over several grade levels because that means that students have to learn things LONG TERM and not just memorize it for one year and then forget it.*

*In my 36 years of teaching, I have seen how more and more tests have come into the system and how much less the students are learning. I honestly believe that, even though measurement is needed, there is too much pressure on the students and teachers and schools to PERFORM - not learn.*

*I love the fact that my students will be tested on material from my 10th grade world history course, not their 8th grade American history course, at the end of my class. It will mean I do not have to take a couple of weeks out to re-teach a different curriculum in order to meet the requirements of the test.*

*I would like to see a portfolio of projects that the students have completed during the year as well as the end of the year exams. There needs to be a diversity of assessment tools given to the students to determine their knowledge level. This would provide a more true assessment of student capabilities.*

*I have great reservations about this. Is this just going to be more tests that are basically the TAKS test renamed?*

*I would like to see a readiness EOC exam given at the beginning of the year for the subject being taken. This would let students, teachers, and parents know where the student stands in being able to pass the EOC.*

*My main concerns are my special education students who are in the regular classroom with IEPs or a lot of modifications, what are we going to do for them concerning the end-of-course exams?*

*Requiring the test count as 15% makes the student take ownership of the preparation and results.*

*I do not have a problem counting it as part of the grade, but I do not want to have how to count it mandated.*

*Why not 10%, 5%, 50%, and so on? It should be left to the ISD's to decide.*

*When would the testing be done? Most teachers have not covered their entire curriculum by April. How would the 15% be included? We give 1st semester grades and 2nd semester grades, so would those go away and be replaced by an overall course grade?*

#### ATPE Policy Recommendations:

- Require TEA to adopt an appropriate, corresponding diagnostic assessment that can be administered online for each end-of-course assessment instrument adopted, providing our educators with an assessment tool that informs and improves instruction.
- Incorporate local discretion into the course grade provision by requiring that the score count toward the students' grades, but within a range of 10% to 20% to be determined by district policy.
- Provide for the administration of end-of-course assessments in place of eighth grade TAKS assessments for eighth grade students enrolled in high school courses for which there is an end-of-course instrument adopted.
- Give districts flexibility in the timing of end-of-course assessment administration so that testing occurs at an appropriate point at the end of the course; ensuring students have had the opportunity to learn all material and are not faced with several end-of-course assessments at once; and ensuring educators have timely access to scores so that grades can be calculated.

## Section 2: TAKS changes grades 3-8

### Survey Results:

	All Respondents				Grade 4 & 5 Teachers			
	Support		Oppose		Support		Oppose	
<i>Do you support requiring students to take the TAKS test for science in grades 4 and 8 instead of grades 5, 8 and 10, as currently required?</i>	1661	51.4%	1571	48.6%	369	49.3%	385	50.7%
<i>Do you support requiring students to take the TAKS test for social studies in grades 5 and 8 instead of grades 8 and 10, as currently required?</i>	1621	50.2%	1611	49.9%	364	48.6%	385	51.4%
<i>Do you support creating a combined reading and writing TAKS for grades 4-8 to replace the reading TAKS for those grades and the separate writing TAKS for grades 4 and 7?</i>	2175	67.3%	1057	32.7%				

### Response Summary:

Although a majority of respondents supported combining the reading and writing assessments (67.3%), both the survey results (split about half-and-half) and comments represent a real conflict among educators as to how to handle the science and social studies assessment instruments. One overwhelming conclusion from the comments is that educators do not want more tests. But, if assessments in these subject matters are added or moved, they want to see the TEKS curriculum guide those decisions. Many comments suggested that the social studies and science curriculum depth builds gradually in the elementary grades and is not sufficient to support a TAKS until at least grade 5. Educator comments also emphasized the need to keep science at the fifth grade level because an investment has been made in science instruction, professional development, instructional materials and equipment—all at the fifth grade level. Although there were mixed opinions about how often it should be administered and in what particular grades, the majority of comments indicated that educators believe the social studies TAKS is best kept out of the elementary levels where 8 and 9 year old students are focusing on the reading and writing skills essential to their learning in the knowledge-based subject areas like social studies. If an additional social studies test is insisted upon, it is most appropriate at the sixth grade level where sufficient curriculum content has been established.

### Sampling of Comments:

*Elementary students cannot handle the added stress of memorizing Social Studies facts in the fifth grade. This is the first time that they have worked on these TEKS - mastery will take several years.*

*We should not reduce our standards by reducing the numbers of tests or giving earlier tests which do not test more advanced concepts.*

*Fourth graders are already overwhelmed. Please remember these kids are only 9. The stress of testing is too much on these young students.*

*I believe that science should continue to be tested at 5th and 8th. Social studies should be tested at 6th and 8th. The lower grades should concentrate on the basics of reading writing and math.*

*I think the 3 to 8 test needs to be revamped more like the proposal of the 9 to 11. There is too much pressure on these kids and there should be more taken into account than how they do one test day.*

*You cannot expect 4th graders to be prepared for both a science and a writing test all in the same year when the majority of the objectives are not even introduced until that year.*

*Pushing Science and Social Studies TAKS to younger grade levels will take the focus off of the primary goal for the youngest students, which should remain gaining a strong reading foundation.*

*TAKS tests should be diagnostic in elementary grades and given early in the year - maybe September. Then it could be used a tool to support learning.*

*I would rather see an EOC adopted for all grade levels. The current system of testing for multiple grade level content is just as harmful for 3-8 as it is for 9-12.*

*It looks to me like eighth grade will be tested on everything. No break for them. I also wish they would address the passing requirements at 3rd. This is a lot of emotional pressure for such young children.*

*Fifth grade is the first time American History is really addressed. What would the test be on? And are we teaching higher order thinking or facts? Leave it at 7th or 8th after they have had a little more history.*

*We need to have a Social Studies TAKS test implemented. I feel moving Science to 4th and adding Social Studies to 5th would be a good move.*

*There currently is a gap in teaching writing between the tested grades. I believe this would generate more writing in grades 5 and 6.*

*There is too much pressure on 5th graders. TAKS needs to count 15% like the EOC does---not high stakes like it is now.*

*I would like to see a weighting system so that a determination for pass or fail does not rest on the outcome of one test. Especially in elementary grades*

*This is just moving the same bad tests around to different grade levels. The current tests are not a good way to measure student achievement. A more holistic approach is needed.*

#### ATPE Policy Recommendations:

- Keep science TAKS in the fifth grade,
- Do not add a social studies TAKS to the elementary grades.
- Explore the possibility of phasing in an end-of-course assessment system in grades 6-8 to replace the TAKS instruments at those levels.

### Section 3: College readiness

#### Survey Results:

	All Respondents				Grade 8 Teachers			
	Support		Oppose		Support		Oppose	
<i>Do you support requiring all eighth-grade students to take a diagnostic college-readiness assessment?</i>	1878	58.1%	1354	41.9%	151	54.1%	128	45.9%
<i>Do you support requiring all 10th-grade students to take the PSAT?</i>	2087	64.6%	1145	35.4%				
<i>Do you support providing all students the option to take one college entrance exam, such as the SAT or ACT, at the state's expense?</i>	2569	79.5%	663	20.5%				

#### Response Summary:

The eighth grade diagnostic provision caused the most conflict, but responses still indicate a majority (58.1%) of educators favor the concept. It is important, however, to note educators' concern that eighth graders are simply not ready for college and that we should not expect them to be. Those that support the concept clearly limit that support to the diagnostic context and are reticent to support the measure if it will have a discouraging or limiting effect on students and their curriculum choices. The comments also indicate a general concern over the number of assessments in eighth grade, with a few educators specifically recommending that the college-readiness diagnostic items be embedded within the TAKS assessments to minimize the impact on testing time and instruments at that level as well. Regarding the PSAT provision, educators support the measure (64.6%), but the comments reflect a strong number of educators with concerns as to cost, appropriateness of 10<sup>th</sup> rather than 11<sup>th</sup> grade, and narrowed focus on college prep. Generally, the ACT/SAT portion of the college assessment provisions garnered the most support with nearly 80% of respondents favoring the concept. Responses indicate that the "optional" component was the main reason for the higher rate of support, with many commenting that those students who may have financial impediments to accessing these assessments would have the opportunity to pursue their goals by choice rather than face a state mandate. However, comments show overwhelming concern regarding the college-only post-secondary focus. Educators say that an increased regard for other types of post-secondary learning and success are critical; as such, they want to see the assessment and accountability system appropriately reflect career and technology education alongside college preparatory.

#### *Sampling of comments:*

*Not all students want or need to go to college, this sends a message that students who are not college bound are not worthwhile.*

*Instead of spending so much money on assessment, funnel those funds into vocational classes so all students have a chance to feel their education is worthwhile and preparing them to be contributing adults.*

*All students need to be able and confident to enter college. Too many feel they are cannon fodder for society. School is the place to change this.*



*These measures will facilitate students to an easier transition into postgraduate training, colleges and universities.*

*There is too much testing already. We do not need more diagnostic tests for college-readiness. It puts undue stress on students.*

*Some students peak later than others. I do not want kids to get discouraged before high school even starts if the test says they are not college ready.*

*At 14 years old no child is college-ready. Why would we test them for their college-readiness?*

*I would hate for an 8th grader who does not do well on the diagnostic test to feel they were not smart enough to attend college.*

*I think that 8th graders needed to know if they are on track for college when they first enter high school. If they are not on track then the counselors would know how to help them as well as the parents.*

*I believe that giving 8th graders a college readiness test is a wonderful idea, as long as it is only used for diagnostic purpose.*

*Not all parents can afford to pay for college-entrance tests. I think the state should be able to help all students who want to future their educational careers.*

*I teach in a low income school and I see first hand how parents struggle to meet the financial and academic needs of their children. Having the state pay for the SAT or ACT would allow those children an equal opportunity at higher education.*

*Encouraging higher education is a necessary step for the success of all Texas students. Price should not be allowed to discourage them.*

*I do not support the state paying for SAT testing. The testing companies pay for students in free and reduced lunch to have a free test.*

*All the above benchmark tests are good, but a big question is at what expense to other areas? How will this additional testing and the cost affect others areas of academics and extracurricular activities?*

#### ATPE Policy Recommendations:

- Require that the college-readiness diagnostic be embedded within the TAKS assessments at grade 8 in order to minimize the number of assessments and the impact on instructional time.
- Make taking the PSAT optional and move it to 11<sup>th</sup> grade so that participants are eligible for the National Merit Scholarship.
- We support using these assessments for diagnostic purposes and encourage the use of tools that incorporate both college and career/technology readiness for students.