



TSA Testimony on SB 1031

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TSA is supportive of moving to end-of-course examinations.

- Such a move will provide assessments at the high school level that are better aligned with student course content and that have the potential to provide more meaningful performance information to high school classroom teachers. The transition should allow the assessment program to blend more seamlessly into the high school curriculum, operating more as a final examination that reflects the material students should have learned that year.

- Spreading the high-stakes nature of the assessment across multiple grade levels should improve the accuracy of data collected at the 9th and 10th grade levels by improving motivation and reducing reliance on a single measure to determine graduation.

However, the state should move forward with great care if it is to take this very significant step. In particular, we have the following concerns regarding the implementation of this bill:

- The success of the move to end-of-course assessments hinges on the validity and quality of the assessment. Each assessment must be aligned with the TEKS and students must have access to instructional materials that reflect what should be taught and will be tested. If the assessment is not well aligned with course content, then the state leaves itself open to litigation regarding the fairness of graduation standards.
- The implementation schedule laid out in the bill may be too fast to create high quality tests. The bill calls for twelve end-of-course high

school assessments, the development of a new elementary school assessment in social studies, the modification of the science assessment to the fourth grade, and the modification of writing assessments in the elementary school grades. Adding one or two years to the implementation schedule would allow the Agency time to ensure the creation of higher quality assessments. The additional time may also reduce the field testing burden that is likely to accompany the creation of new assessments and give students more notice of new graduation requirements. In addition, a slight delay would allow more time for the current efforts related to rewriting secondary school curriculum before assessments go online.

- If the state is to become involved in individual course grades, it must ensure consistency in implementation (particularly given the impact of the state top 10 percent law). Incorporating the end-of-course assessments into student grades makes these tests particularly high-stakes as students work to qualify under top 10 percent requirements. If the tests are incorporated into student grades, all students should have an automatic right to re-rest regardless of whether they passed on their first attempt in order to try for a higher score both to guarantee an average of 70 at the end of their high school career and to improve their class grade.
- In implementing end-of-course assessments, the state should take care that it is not creating perverse incentives. By exempting certain students from taking the assessments (such as those enrolled in dual credit, for example) the state may be incentivizing students away from our most rigorous advanced placement and international baccalaureate courses. In addition, by requiring additional assessments for students enrolled in the recommended high school program, we may be incentivizing additional students to opt out of the more challenging course of study. In addition, how accountability will work under a system in which not all students are taking the same assessment is not at all clear.

- The overall number of assessments at the elementary level should not be increased, and the science assessment should remain at the 5th grade level. We must balance the need for good information regarding student performance with the need to preserve instructional time and not over test our children. Consequently, we do not support the addition of a social studies examination in the elementary grades. We also do not support moving the science examination. Texas' reliance on assessment and accountability works best if expectations are gradually increased and districts have time to adjust to new structures and standards.
- The expansion of the state assessment program should be at state expense: Past practice has been for local districts to pay for the state assessment program through a set-aside from the compensatory education program. The current hold-harmless structure associated with school finance effectively passes any new cost on to the state. However, if the state ever returns to formula funding, any increase in cost would be again born by local districts. The state should continue to cover any new cost associated with new assessments. Additionally, we are concerned about the language in Section 10 of the bill which directs the Commissioner to pay fees associated with the administration of new college readiness examinations with funds appropriated to the Foundation School Program and reduce funds allocated to each school district.
- Significant infrastructure improvements are likely needed to facilitate on-line assessment. Before the state can move to online assessment, a number of implementation questions must be addressed including questions related to the length of the testing window envisioned, the impact on the number of necessary items and related costs, and the infrastructure needs individual campuses.