

TESTIMONY REGARDING PUBLIC SCHOOL
ACCOUNTABILITY

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EOC Exams No Better Than TAKS at Measuring Content Mastery

I have 13 years experience as a teacher in both public and private high schools, the last 7 years at Harmony Science Academy, a Houston public 6-12 TEA charter school with nearly 400 students. 100% of my 10th and 11th grade students have passed TAKS each year since the test was instituted. The school was rated Exemplary each year of TAKS until slipping to "Recognized" last year.

I am distressed by our state legislators' headlong flight from TAKS testing into the seductive arms of EOC exams, and I hope this commission will examine alternatives that will measure real academic mastery. While TAKS destroys the coherence of delivering a strong curriculum within a standard school year, and should be eliminated immediately, replacing it with EOC exams will not provide the kind of public education accountability that Texas taxpayers demand.

The problem with both TAKS and EOC exams is they don't measure mastery of anything. Mastery is the goal. Instead, students can "pass" these tests with a certain % of correct answers, just like the tests we give during the year in our classes. So a TAKS or EOC test is a "how high do I have to jump" problem for students and teachers, when what we want is for the students to know how to do something every single time. For skills that are indispensable in the adult world we want students to jump all the way to the top every time. In the adult world, a carpenter can't measure an angle correctly 70% of the time. An accountant can't balance the books correctly 70% of the time.

What we need are tests with just a few questions that evaluate mastery of certain grade-appropriate broad objectives, the mastery of which proves mastery of many discrete skills. Tests that students can take in one class period instead of the stress-inducing, un-timed tests they now take. Tests that would be given at certain times during the school year instead of the one-shot tests we have now, so that teachers could diagnose student weaknesses and correct them. Once the student scores 100%, move on. **This type of evaluation process also would allow for a more precise yearly evaluation of the teacher's ability to teach.**

The tests should require 100% of the students to score 100% in order to proceed to the next objective. For example, if we want 5th graders to know topic sentences before they go on to 6th grade, then we want those students to be able to identify and write topic sentences every single time - and that skill presupposes all kinds of grammar skills they would already have to know. The same idea works for thesis statements for 9th graders, geography skills for 8th graders, fractions for 6th graders, etc. If a student transfers into a school without the grade-appropriate skills, then it's remedial time for that student until he or she demonstrates mastery.

If we want to measure the quality of the job a school is doing, we've got to get away from the current idea that having 90% of students correctly answer 50% of

the questions on a minimum skills test is "Exemplary." **EOC tests do not change that flawed thinking.** Setting national standards is a useless distraction, although realistic state standards might be useful, because we don't want to compare schools. We want every student in each school to learn the skills they need no matter how long or how different that process may be in different schools.

I hope the legislature and local school boards will work for a true accountability system that measures real achievement instead of taking the easy way out and substituting one failed system for another. The next accountability system has to be based on flexibility, local results, and mastery - not just "passing."

Please contact me if I can help in any way.

Sincerely,
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