

Testimony for Select Joint Committee on Public Education Accountability

Good afternoon committee members. I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony this afternoon on the issue of the public school accountability system. My name is Clinton Gill and I am the President of the Lubbock Educators Association as well as a 5th grade teacher in the Lubbock Independent School District.

Since public education is funded by tax dollars, I suppose it will always be a political football that will be kicked back and forth. Many people running for public office have always said they were going to “improve” public education. I think listening to good educators rather than to those who might have a special agenda might be helpful in fulfilling political promises. What concerns me most as a teacher is the possibility that our children are sometimes forgotten about while we are making yearly improvements. While the current accountability system has done much to improve instruction in our public schools, it has also had some negative side effects.

Children are complex organisms and can demonstrate what they know in many different ways. For us to have such limited thinking that one single test can tell us what a child knows and has learned is unforgivable in a time where we have many options. If our desire is to know that a child is getting a well rounded education that will result in their being a life-long learner capable of critical thinking and good decision making, then I believe, we must evaluate our children with multiple tools. Too much of what is needed in the development of a child is lost today to the focus of a single test, whether that test be during the year or at the end of a course.

In my six years of teaching, I have seen student after student get so stressed about the TAKS test that they literally make themselves sick. They know that if they do not pass the test, they face many consequences, including retention. Take a moment to think about how you would feel if it was your child that had such high test anxiety that they could not perform well on the test. I have always been someone that knows the information, but am not a good test taker. I can assure you that classrooms all across this state are filled with very intelligent students that have high test anxiety. Should this test be the sole determining factor of a student being able to move to the next grade level? I hope you will take some time to reflect on that question and come up with an accountability system that is fair, but without such a high-stakes test. Fair does not mean doing the same thing for all students. It means striving to meet the individual needs of each student. I also believe if students and schools are making progress from year to year, they should not be labeled as “Unacceptable” just because they don’t meet the standard set by someone in Austin.

If the agenda of the state is to move from public schools to privatization of public schools, I believe the current test system has that agenda on target. However, if the agenda is to improve instruction in schools, then we must have a system that does not penalize a good school that does well in every area but has a low score in one area. It seems that test results are used more to highlight a fault in the school than to recognize the efforts of their success. One area of instruction that is not successful for one

particular group of students does not mean the entire instruction on that campus is failing to educate students. I believe we can make better decisions for our students, for our schools, and we can stop trying to convince the public that some of their schools are failing.

Many times I've heard the phrase that money is not the problem. Well, to a large extent it is. The legislature will increase the budget of any agency when costs go up except education. I hope each of you understand that the costs go up every year in public schools. They make the same purchases as any other business. The numbers of students go up every year as well and that is an expense. I think we need to bite the bullet a little bit in Texas and acknowledge that what many states are doing by putting more money into their children's future would go a long way in "fulfilling some political promises."

Thank you again for your time. I know the task before each of you is a very complex one, but I truly hope you will come up with an accountability system that will be a tool teachers can use to help children rather than a tool that merely tries to find out what a child knows on one specific day.

Respectfully submitted by:

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