



## ATPE Input on Interim Charge #1

Senate Education Committee  
October 4, 2006

In conjunction with the Senate Education Committee's interim review of the state's accountability system and student assessment structure, the Association of Texas Professional Educators respectfully offers its input on these important issues:

### ACCOUNTABILITY

ATPE believes that it is important to set standards for both the academic achievement and financial efficiency of school districts.

- *ATPE supports accountability systems that will closely monitor and aid the efforts of our schools to prepare students for success in life.*

Under House Bill 1 enacted this year, the commissioner of education is required to determine the accreditation of school districts and to designate each district as accredited, accredited warned or accredited probation. The designation is based on academic and financial accountability systems. Districts rated accredited warned or accredited probation must inform parents and property owners of the rating and its possible ramifications, which include withholding of state funding and closure. If a district's accreditation is revoked, the district will be closed.

ATPE agrees that it is appropriate to impose sanctions on schools that fail to meet these standards and to provide students in those schools with better opportunities to learn. However, we must first ensure that our schools have received adequate resources with which to satisfy those standards before we begin to impose harsh sanctions that may include the closure or privatization of public schools.

- *ATPE supports programs that will enable struggling schools to improve and their students to thrive rather than using public money to fund alternative management programs administered by private entities.*

### STUDENT ASSESSMENT

Assessment instruments can be a valuable tool for educators to gauge student progress and subsequently offer more focused instruction. Recent research shows that although both teachers and parents support the concepts of testing and accountability, the Texas student assessment structure is in need of substantial improvement.

Since 1979, Texas students and educators have been challenged by a series of increasingly rigorous standardized tests. Standardized tests help teachers diagnose specific areas in which students need improvement, and they help educators guide their pupils toward specific academic goals. However, the emphasis placed on standardized testing and the amount of time devoted to it has grown so much since 1979 that many educators believe testing hurts more than helps students.

The overwhelming increase in the number of state- and school district-prescribed standardized tests has reduced the amount of time educators have to actually teach their students. In addition to TAKS, many schools evaluate their students using the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, the Stanford Achievement Test or the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Many school districts also have requirements for additional benchmark testing. All of this testing allows Texas teachers little time to do anything other than prepare students for tests. Being so strapped for time, they find it increasingly difficult to teach all the lessons that would greatly benefit our children.

- ***ATPE supports minimizing the total number of tests required by the state and school districts.***

ATPE believes the time has come for Texas to take an in-depth look at the usefulness of high-stakes testing and the amount of teaching time these exams absorb. This is why we worked extensively with Sen. Frank Madla to draft such legislation, which was incorporated into House Bill 1 earlier this year. ATPE is pleased that the bill authorizes a comprehensive joint interim study of the effectiveness of standardized testing to determine whether the state's assessment structure is serving our student population in the best possible manner. The study will look at the impact of testing on student learning; the time spent on test preparation; testing's impact on teacher and student morale; and whether changes should be made to facilitate learning.

ATPE hopes that the legislative study will consider whether the current assessment structure is helping to raise the quality of Texas children's education, whether it provides an accurate picture of a student's academic proficiency and whether it results in a narrowing of the curriculum. ATPE also urges the Legislature to consider the possibility that the current high-stakes testing system in Texas creates undue anxiety for students and does not motivate them to stay in school.

HB 1 also requires TEA to ensure that any end-of-course exams developed in the future will be appropriate for use as college placement exams. ATPE believes that end-of-course examinations should be explored as a possible alternative to the current high-stakes testing structure of TAKS.

ATPE remains concerned about a provision in HB 1 that requires the commissioner to determine a method by which TEA can measure annual "value-added" improvement in student achievement based on test scores. ATPE believes it is neither feasible nor appropriate to measure achievement solely on the basis of a student's performance on standardized tests. It is even more dangerous to use student performance on the TAKS test as the basis for teacher compensation. The inappropriate use of TAKS scores for evaluating and compensating teachers may actually lead school districts to misidentify poor teachers as effective ones and vice versa. This undercuts the option in current law for districts to incorporate value-added assessment models into teacher compensation systems and new state-administered incentive pay programs.

- ***ATPE supports the use of assessment instruments for diagnostic purposes to improve student instruction rather than for purposes of teacher compensation and high stakes rating systems.***

Through our legislative program, ATPE members have formulated a number of other recommendations pertaining to student assessment, as follows:

- ATPE recommends that the state provide all manipulative instruments and necessities mandatory for the completion of all statewide assessments at the beginning of each school year.
- ATPE recommends that the state allow all secondary ESL students to use a native language/English dictionary as needed on the statewide assessment so that the test accurately assesses students' ability to assimilate and use the English language. This would ensure that students are not penalized simply because of a lack of time to acquire the second language.
- ATPE believes the state should not require all students to take the ACT or SAT, which has been proposed multiple times by the 78<sup>th</sup> and 79<sup>th</sup> Legislatures.
- ATPE supports the use of State Developed Alternative Assessment (SDAA II) instruments as a valid measurement of progress for special education students.
- ATPE supports allowing identified dyslexic students served by a district's dyslexia program to take an alternative assessment in place of the required statewide assessment.
- ATPE recommends that the state support the concept of online TAKS testing as an option as long as it is fully funded by the state, tested and operational for each school district and as long as it allows appropriate modifications for students.
- Finally, for the future of testing, *ATPE supports using educator input to revamp the testing process in order to better meet the needs of all Texas students.* Accordingly, we look forward to working with the 80<sup>th</sup> Legislature and contributing our input in the joint legislative study on student assessment.

**On behalf of our more than 106,000 members, ATPE appreciates your consideration of our positions.**