

Good afternoon. My name is Jose Guerra I am a leader at St. Ignatius, Martyr Catholic Church and a leader with Austin Interfaith, a member of the IAF Network of Organizations.

I am here to speak on behalf of the 3000 families Austin Interfaith has spoken with over the past 9 months. In our house meetings and one on one conversations, we heard and continue to hear the frustration and anger parents and educators feel regarding the current accountability system in our public schools.

In the 1990's, Austin Interfaith led the state in establishing Alliance Schools - those public schools who, recognizing the need for high standards of accountability, intentionally built relationships between all the stakeholders in public schools --parents, teachers, administrators, pastors, and community and business leaders. We established networks of accountability that enabled parents to hold teachers accountable, teachers to hold parents accountable, principals to hold the community accountable, and the community to hold administrators accountable. We did it by *first* building trust relationships and *then* employing tests, data, and research to measure how well or how poorly our children were learning. We set high standards for our children and our educators. We want our sons and daughters prepared for universities and high paying careers. We think and certainly hope you share this same goal as should anyone who understands how to prepare our state for a 21st century economy.

However, we differ on 2 major points with those who support the accountability system in its current form:

1) **We do not believe the current system of testing is leading to quality teaching and learning.** One teacher in AISD we spoke to spent 1~~4~~ of the first 2~~5~~ days of last semester administering mandated standardized tests. We could inundate you with stories like this: teachers' teaching time and creativity being devoured by mandated tests, students' learning enfeebled by continuous drill and kill test-taking tactics. Many of our brightest students are turning into "bubblers." Bubblers are those students who get so sick and tired of taking standardized that they no longer read the questions, they just randomly fill in bubbles in creative shapes and designs on their scantron sheets. Precious learning and teaching time is being squandered.

2) **Punitive approaches to school measurement do not produce better schools, they produce fearful schools.** The most attractive element of NCLB is its potential to bring attention to underserved children, namely, children of color and low socio-economic income who are in danger of getting left behind. Ironically and tragically, the current accountability system is doing just that - leaving those children behind. They get left behind from afterschool enrichment programs to prepare for the TAKS, they get left behind from art and music for still more tutoring, they get left behind from reading classics of literature to read shorter passages like the ones on the test and to practice strategies for identifying plausible answers on multiple-choice tests. Children feel undo pressure because teachers feel pressure. Teachers feel pressure

because the administration feels pressure. Administrators feel pressure because of the threat of punitive measures. Pressure in itself is not bad - as long as it is producing the results you want. We are not getting the results we want - we want schools teaching at high levels; we want a relational approach to high accountability, and we want students assessed with a variety of tools that show their acumen of skills and understanding.

We don't think that is too much to ask. In fact, our communities insist on it . And will keep working and organizing to create the quality public schools we deserve.