

# HIGHLAND PARK INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Superintendent of Schools

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The Honorable Florence Shapiro  
The Honorable Rob Eissler  
Select Committee for Public School Accountability  
P.O. Box 2910  
Austin, Texas 78768-2910

Subject: Testimony for the Select Committee for Public School Accountability

Dear Senator Shapiro, Representative Eissler and Committee Members,

I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today about issues of importance regarding state assessments and the state accountability system for public education. You have an incredibly important role to play in the future of public education in Texas, and I appreciate you giving your time and talents to this vital discussion. There is a quote that is inscribed above the stage in our high school auditorium that I would like to share with you today: "The spirit of a people is disclosed by the education of its youth." Clearly, we know that the education of the students of Texas is vital to the future of our state and nation. We must prepare our students for success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century global marketplace.

We are at a crossroads in Texas in the areas of state assessment and our accountability system. I have followed the progress of your committee in each of your meetings, and I concur with the vast majority of the testimony that has been shared by my colleagues from around the state. To me, the question to ask is: "What are the appropriate roles for state assessment and accountability systems?"

Research and best practice in the science of assessment states that classroom assessment should be the place in which we focus our efforts, because it is in the classroom that assessment can be and is used on a moment-by-moment basis to inform and improve instruction and learning. Top-quality classroom assessment should drive instruction. In Texas, a situation exists where there have been such high stakes placed on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) and the accountability ratings for campuses and districts that they are driving classroom instruction. Indeed, in some classrooms, learning is reduced to preparing for TAKS for the majority of the learning time. The current practice has so narrowed the curriculum that some students, usually, the most at-risk learners, only have access to a sub-set of the curriculum, the tested curriculum. We cannot prepare Texas students for a successful future in the 21<sup>st</sup> century global market place if we continue this practice.

It is my hope that I can share some thoughts with you from the perspective of a school district that performs at the very top of the current assessment and accountability systems. Many people

would look at Highland Park ISD and our performance and assume that we think the current system is working. However, nothing could be further from the truth. As superintendent, I have very serious concerns about the current system, as well as some cautions for you to consider as you deliberate a changed system of assessment and accountability for the future.

- **Test What You Desire**—Our goal is to prepare students for success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century global economy. When we examine the historical strengths of America, we find that we have long been the best in the world at creativity, imagination, innovation, entrepreneurial thinking, and calculated risk-taking. We have been the leaders in the world for creating new products and new and improved ways of executing work. These are the hallmarks of greatness in America, and these are our only hopes for remaining on the world stage as an economic power. Nations around the world are trying to emulate our success in teaching our students how to be successful in these areas. Therefore, we should contemplate the creation of assessments and accountability systems that focus on creativity, innovative and critical thinking, the use of imagination, problem solving, etc.. The current TAKS does not address the very skills that are critical for success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. All students are capable of developing skills in these areas, but the current system of accountability drives instruction to a narrowed curriculum tested with a multiple-choice model.
- **Explore Better Forms of Assessment**—The research and science of assessment is clear that multiple-choice assessment is not the most effective assessment model. You need to consider other forms of assessment and utilize random sampling for accountability purposes. If the goal is to improve the achievement of students and the quality of teaching and learning, then we need to spend the money and time to create models of assessment that represent the best of what is known about effective assessment.
- **Concerns with TAKS**—As new assessments are considered, there are several issues with TAKS that need to be avoided. Please consider the following:
  - Results are not comparable within a subject from one year to the next for individual students or cohort groups.
  - Results are not comparable across subject areas in the same year for a student.
  - Commended scores are not comparable from one year to the next within the same subject area or across subject areas.
  - It tests a subset of the curriculum. The most at-risk students have access to a very narrow curriculum, because teachers and administrators are so concerned about meeting the passing standard. These students need a more enriched learning experience, but they often receive a reduced experience.
  - There are not enough questions on the upper and lower ends to have stability in the scores for students that perform at those levels. Therefore, we get unreliable data on the students. The remedy would be to create tests that have more questions at those levels of performance.

- Multiple Tests—I support the model of a state accountability system that utilizes multiple measures. I also would ask that you consider a model that establishes a multi-layered system within the multiple measures that constitute the accountability system. If all students in Texas are required to take the same multiple measures, then you will have exacerbated the very problems of the current system. When students demonstrate an established level of mastery, then the system should offer varied pathways based on the performance level the student has already established.
- Varied Intervals for Assessment—When students demonstrate certain levels of performance, they should be exempt from annual assessment. Some acceptable interval other than annual testing should be established for these students. This would allow for some cost savings for the state in test creation and administration. It would also allow campuses and districts to differentiate resources based on the needs and performances of individual students. One size fits all is an outdated model.
- Caution for Value-Added Assessment—While the concept and practice of value-added assessment has some appeal, I do have concerns about the following:
  - The current TAKS was not designed for a value-added model.
  - Trying to adapt a test that was not scaled for value-added in its design will not yield the same results as a test that is created for the value-added model.
  - In his model that is used in Tennessee to determine teacher impact on students, Dr. William L. Sanders has stated clearly that it is not reliable for the most effective teachers (top 20%) or the least effective teachers (bottom 20%).

If you want to use a value-added model, I urge you to commit the resources necessary to create assessments that are designed and scaled from the beginning for this model. This will insure that it is statistically reliable, before it is used for high-stakes accountability. If excellence in student achievement is our goal, then we should not design an assessment that is less than an exemplary model of value-added assessment just to save money.

- Release Test—If the goal is to improve instruction and student achievement, then we must be able to study the released tests to adjust curriculum, instruction, resources, professional development, etc.. Even SAT/ACT/PSAT eventually provide released tests or released items so students and teachers can study them to improve their performance. We are told that the reason the state has stopped releasing tests on an annual basis is to save money. Again, if the goal is to improve achievement, why would we compromise our goal to save a fairly small amount of money?
- Professional Development—The most important assessment occurs at the classroom level. We need to invest in the professional development to improve our knowledge base regarding effective assessment. In many classrooms, particularly for the most at-risk students, classroom assessment has been reduced to multiple-choice TAKS practice. The

research and science of assessment shows very clearly the significant limitations of this type of assessment, but in the high-stakes TAKS environment, many teachers and administrators do not trust the use of best practice regarding assessment. It is no surprise that students are not engaged in the learning that occurs as we pursue a model that honors “students as test takers” as opposed to “students as engaged learners”.

- Learning Standards—Since all assessment has its beginning in the learning standards that are established, I urge you to pay attention to the process that is currently in place in Texas for the establishment of the state learning standards. If our goal is to prepare all students for success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century global economy, the learning standards have to meet a standard of excellence that is consistent with the best in the world. We would not ask our physicians to use outdated practices just because we are more comfortable with them. Therefore, we should not ignore the research that has taken place in education when learning standards are established.
- Create a Meaningful Accountability System—The current system is not working in Highland Park ISD or many other school districts. I urge you to dream big, think boldly, and create a system that is aligned with college readiness, workplace readiness, and success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century global marketplace. Our time for learning is too valuable to continue to pursue the “exemplary rating game”. We are already beginning a conversation in our community to discuss the issue. We want to be held accountable for measures, both quantifiable and qualitative, that are aligned with our mission to prepare our students for college readiness. The current TAKS and the accountability system in Texas are not aligned with our goal. Therefore, we are no longer willing to stop our progress on college readiness work to pursue the narrow tested curriculum associated with TAKS. We know that our rating may not always be exemplary, but we are willing to discuss this possibility with our community. I predict that our community will hold us accountable for college readiness measures, not an exemplary rating that has little meaning and no connection to college readiness.

Thanks so much for giving me the opportunity to share my thoughts with you today. Highland Park ISD is very willing to pilot some new models of assessment that are aligned to college readiness and best practice in the areas of assessment and accountability. I appreciate the work that you are doing to lead our great state to a new level of excellence in these areas. You hold the future of Texas in your hands.

Respectfully submitted,



Cathy Bryce, Ed.D.  
Superintendent of Schools

# HPISD Longitudinal Comparison

## TAKS Results from 2006, 2007, and 2008

### District Results by Subject Preliminary Summary Reports for 2008

Test	2006 - Panel Recommendation				2007 - Panel Recommendation				2008 - Panel Recommendation			
	# Tested	# Passed	% Passed	# Commented	# Tested	# Passed	% Passed	# Commented	# Tested	# Passed	% Passed	# Commented
RDG/ELA	4256	4224	99.25%	2536	4250	4202	98.87%	2760	4213	4183	99.29%	3011
Math	4237	4156	98.09%	2757	4276	4188	97.94%	2854	4185	4149	99.14%	3047
Writing	956	949	99.27%	723	884	873	98.80%	647	906	900	99.34%	690
Science	1829	1770	96.77%	705	1987	1901	95.67%	942	1798	1757	97.72%	1028
Social Studies	1358	1350	99.41%	969	1495	1491	99.73%	1176	1337	1332	99.63%	1013