

Good Morning, My name is Robert Clark. I am a pastor in the United Methodist Church serving congregations in San Juan and Pharr, Texas. I am here this morning to express a few of the concerns our current system of academic accountability have raised in my community.

The major concern, the one that I hear over and over again, is a concern for the adverse effects of the state mandated TAKS test on the emotional, psychological, and physical wellbeing of the children being tested. Just last week I was listening to a conversation between a mother and an elementary school teacher. The mother was sharing her anxiety over the stress her young son experienced around the TAKS test. According to her account the boy could not sleep and had trouble eating in the days preceding the test and on the day of the test he was so upset that he became physically ill. She believed that the pressure her son's teacher felt over this test was inadvertently transferred to the kids. This was affirmed by the teacher she was in conversation with.

There is no question that we need to measure our children's educational progress. The question is how this can be done in a manner that is diagnostic without being punitive. How can we test in a manner that places the best interest of the children ahead of the best interest of the institution?

I would like to share a brief quote that appeared on the blog of a thirty year old school teacher.

Today we had TAKS (dirty word) testing. What an utter waste of time this is. I understand the sentiment behind attempting to measure basic skills necessary to graduate. We do need to ensure that the product we put out from our high schools is a quality oneMost reasonable people can agree that we must devise a way to measure the "knowledge and skills" of our high

school graduates. Results from tests like these can be valuable to assess both the students and the educators to fix any weaknesses.

But, what must be done is to fix the system in such a way that doesn't impede the entire education system by shutting it down 3 or 4 times a year so that everyone can fret over this stupid test.

We wasted an entire day of school so that 11th graders could be given permission to graduate next year by passing the English TAKS test. Yippee. Surely, the body of work that these kids have put in for the past three years ought to count more than one 3 hour test can measure.¹

Without meaning to do so this teacher has hit on the root of the accountability problem with the statement, *"We do need to ensure that the product we put out from our high schools is a quality one"* Our children are not a commodity. Our schools are not, or should not be, factories pumping out quality inspected automated test takers. Unfortunately, the current system promotes the image of children as product and education a utilitarian training. The purpose of education is to help each individual to actualize his or her intellectual potential not as a means to an end but as an end in itself.

Thank you for allowing me to speak this morning. Thank you for listening.

¹ <http://swatteach.blogspot.com/2007/02/taks-testing.html>