

Public Ed Testimony 1-22-12

Today, the STAAR test is just getting off the ground and we don't even know what a passing score will be, but TSTA is hearing from both teachers and parents who have serious reservations about the continued emphasis and the amount of time devoted to "one size fits all" standardized tests. In fact, some of you may have seen an email from one of our members from San Antonio outlining some serious concerns about the STAAR- Alt testing process.

Standardized tests can have a constructive purpose as a diagnostic tool, but the drill and test, reward and punish process does nothing to help students develop the kind of learning and reasoning skills needed to prepare them to tackle challenges they will face in college and in life.

- STAAR has a different name than TAKS, but it is still just a standardized test that provides only a snapshot in time – and it is not designed to provide timely feedback on student performance to help teachers and students know what needs to be emphasized to improve the learning process in the classroom.
- Standardized test scores alone are a woefully inadequate measure of student achievement and should not be the primary basis for systems (e.g., "value added") that evaluate teacher or campus performance. Meaningful measures of achievement must consider a student's growth, improvement and the development of learning skills. All too often, standardized tests encourage rote learning at the expense of fostering the student's ability to reason and learn.
- Instead of encouraging success, the STAAR assessment provides more ways for students to fail. They can fail the English III or Algebra II EOC. The 15% of the final grade can fail you. And the cumulative score on each subject can also cause you to not graduate
- Most importantly, "accountability" must be a two way street. In the name of accountability, the legislature is demanding more from students and teachers by developing more rigorous standardized tests that count toward a students final grade, but at the same time, the legislature is cutting funding for our children's schools, giving students and teachers fewer resources with which to make the grade.

The effort to raise standards and improve teaching and learning in the classroom can not succeed if we force teachers and students to do their work in crowded classrooms with one hand tied behind their backs, as measured by more standardized tests under STAAR than were required by TAKS.

Our teachers will do their best despite these difficulties, because they are dedicated to doing the best they can for their students. The question remains: will the legislature pass

the accountability test and do their part by providing the resources needed to give every child the opportunity to succeed?