

# The Dallas Morning News

## Sounding Off: Are students being tested too much?

June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2013

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This year the Texas Legislature passed several bills to roll back high-stakes school testing. Gov. Rick Perry signed one that chopped the number and use of tests and made it illegal for employees of Pearson, the company that designs the exams, to sit on state advisory committees.

### **Is rolling back school testing a good idea? Why or why not?**

**Eric Strull, Far North Dallas:** The parallel between high-achieving elementary students and a future skilled workforce runs very strong. Lightening the load on these students by not giving them tests that they would have received in the past is not the answer. Gov. Perry wants Texas to be No. 1 in the labor force. Signing a bill to reduce testing for superior students runs contrary to his desires and beliefs.

**Carl Youngberg, Waterview Preservation in Richardson:** The Texas legislature is an embarrassment to the state and the nation and especially to the students and parents in our state. They have institutionalized “Dumb and Dumber” as a legislative educational platform. It was bad enough when they were in session, but the special session from the Guv is especially painful in many areas of state government. Years ago, when I was recruited to Texas, someone warned me to be afraid when the legislature was in session. They were right.

**Candace McAfee, Richardson:** Testing for accountability works under two circumstances: The tests are accurate and fair for all involved. Dallas ISD has used EOC exams called ACPs and in the past the tests were terrible and some questions had no good answers. The copies of test materials often had blurry and not readable maps and graphs. I went down to a school board meeting and complained and the tests improved after Tawnell Hobb did a front-page story on a college professor’s evaluation of many of the test questions. The problem recently is our students are “over-tested” and the impact of a test loses its value. The students not only are subjected to multiple “official” tests but many “extra” tests called “field” tests, because we have to “test” the test. When I was in school and college tests were a big deal and we studied for them. But no matter what you say, a test only tests a student’s knowledge that day... It doesn’t tell you if they had breakfast, had trouble at home or some other problem that would affect their score.

**Rod Scales, Highlands North in Far North Dallas:** I live in Dallas, and in RISD by choice. The changes in testing are an annual joke. In private business, we make sure that the tests (specifications, quality checks, etc.) are set at the appropriate level for the intended use of the product: not too high if that is of no benefit. Having then set those limits, the rule is do not change, unless there is an overwhelming reason to reassess. We definitely do not lower the standards because production is sloppy. The manipulation of educational testing just boggles my mind. Change the rules every year or so, so no proper annual comparisons can be made. And when there are too many failures, well. Just lower the standards. Kids are not widgets, but it is a competitive world out there, and it does no justice to these kids to let them slide through. The reasons to keep changing the tests are to avoid accountability. I think Mike Miles knows this. Rick Perry does not.

**Anne Healy, Richardson:** School testing has had a way of taking over our educational system to the point of being detrimental. Of course testing is necessary — how else would our educators know what progress is being made? But to test to the extent that it becomes the primary goal is defeating the purpose of education. Children should be experiencing all manner of learning, from reading, writing, hands-on experimentation, interaction among students and between student and teacher, rather than the extensive concentration of preparation for tests, which apparently has become the norm. So cutting back on testing sounds like a good move to me.

**Harry Davis, Far North Dallas:** The governor finally got something right. Last year, tests and test preparation used 60 of our 183 school days, and the state paid Pearson \$500 million for their testing services. Not only will rolling back the testing save tens, and possibly hundreds, of millions of dollars that could better be utilized for school services, teaching tools and more teachers, but it will add as much as 30-40 more days of actual teaching rather than test prep and testing. Less time for testing means more time for what is important in schools — teaching and learning.

**Byron Kern, Richardson:** If teaching is performed at a high level of quality, and if students apply themselves, no additional testing is necessary. The danger of testing is “teaching to the test.” This yields a misleading measure of a students’ knowledge of the various courses of study, and the extra expense is wasted.

According to a Cato Institute study inflation — adjusted spending on public education for a 17-year-old student in the U.S. tripled between 1970 and 2010, but the achievement scores in reading and math were unchanged, and science scores declined slightly. This evidences that spending more money on public education is not improving achievements. Apparently, the value of education is not sufficiently regarded by parents and/or students.

**David McLintock, Lake Highlands:** I believe Gov. Perry is lacking in any type of funding for schools. In regards to this shortening of testing: this does not help our future educated students in any way. Testing, in all aspects of their education background, helps that student grow and assists in any subjects other students may be lacking in. It appears Perry wants all young people in Texas to stay dumb enough to vote for him. He should be voted out of office in the next election and a true Texan, one who cares about this state, to be voted in. The young people of Texas are important to the growth of Texas, it appears Gov. Perry has stopped Texas from growing and is out for his own agenda. It is time for a change and all advantages for our students to be given as many chances as possible.