



What Testing & Assessment Reveals about Classroom Instruction of African-Americans in Texas Public Schools

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by
Chris Patterson, Director of Education Research

This past week Representative Paul Sadler, Co-chair of the Legislature's Interim Committee on School Finance, stated that he thinks educational adequacy of Texas Public Schools is defined by the state curriculum (TEKS) and state tests (TAAS/soon-to-be TAKS).

The Texas Public Policy Foundation's recent progress report on state assessments, [From TAAS To TAKS](#), and a companion report on the success of public schools to ready students for college, [Losing the Race](#), reveal the contrary - state assessments do not define an adequate education for students of Texas Public Schools.

These reports amass evidence that Texas Public Schools fail to provide most students with an adequate education but fail most for African-American students. Rising TAAS scores mask the fact that most students:

1. perform at one to three years below the level of achievement that corresponds to national standards;
2. fail to acquire the skills necessary for success in algebra and other high school courses; and
3. lack the academic skills necessary for skilled vocational training or college.

[See report: *African-American Students: Texas Public School Facts*]

State assessments do not furnish the comprehensive, honest information needed by legislators and policy leaders to determine if students receive an adequate education. Nor do they furnish teachers and parents sufficient, meaningful information to diagnose and resolve academic deficits.

African-American students are most disadvantaged by state assessments because they generally attend schools that "teach to the test." Many African-American students are taught only that small portion of state curriculum standards measured by tests and are taught at the low level of academic proficiency measured by tests.

Schools that focus on raising TAAS scores, such as Aldine ISD, often show adverse impact on other academic measures – such as percent of students taking more advanced academic studies (ex. Algebra I) and scores on college readiness tests [See chart, *Aldine Independent School District: Math and Related Performance Measures*].

Worse, these assessments disadvantage African-American students by masking the growing achievement gap caused by tests that measure and set goals for classroom instruction at low levels of academic proficiency. NAEP scores expose what TAAS does not - the achievement gap between African-American and White students in Texas is wide and widening [see report *African-American Students: Texas Public Schools*].

Accurate and academically challenging assessments are needed to provide all students with an adequate, excellent, equitable education, but needed most particularly by African-American students who, by most measures, are most disadvantaged by low expectations.

The Texas Legislature can improve assessments and student learning by enacting law to:

- establish a state advisory council on assessments and accountability;
- create tests that –
 - fully measure all state expectations for grade-level/course learning
 - specifically measure grade-level learning at a level of proficiency that corresponds to national standards;
 - pair a criterion-referenced test that measures state curriculum standards with a national norm-referenced test, such as the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (a practice common in most states);
- restrict “teaching to the test” - require schools to conduct test practice before or after class time scheduled to teach the foundation curriculum and to secure written parental consent for test practice; and
- direct the Texas Education Agency to develop performance measures for each curricular expectation that schools may elect to use in evaluating student progress and identifying the need for early academic intervention.