

Texas Public School Accountability System

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Texas' public school accountability system has undergone many changes in the last ten years, most notably moving from a series of end-of-course exams to the 11th grade high-stakes test tied to graduation. Today, as the Texas Legislature considers additional changes to the public school accountability system, lawmakers should not only consider what the system of the future should look like, but the history and current state of today's accountability system as well.

THE HISTORY OF THE STATE'S PUBLIC SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM

In the late 1990s, Texas had four end-of-course tests: Algebra I, English II, biology, and U.S. history. Although the score on these end-of-course tests did not affect a student's grade in the course, a passing score on three end-of-course exams exempted students from taking the exit-level Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) in order to graduate. Between the 1998-1999 and 2001-2002 school years, students passing three of the four end-of-course exams were exempted from meeting graduation test requirements.

In 1999, Texas replaced the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test with the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test. The TAKS is aligned with the state curriculum, the Texas Essen-

tial Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), and was first administered in 2003.

Currently, Texas students take the TAKS test every year in grades 3-11. The chart below provides a visual breakdown by grade and subject area.

TAKS TEST SCHEDULE BY SUBJECT

Grade Level	Reading	Writing	Math	Science	Social Studies
3rd	X		X		
4th	X	X	X		
5th	X		X	X	
6th	X		X		
7th	X	X	X		
8th	X		X	X	X
9th	X		X		
10th	X	X	X	X	X
11th*	X	X	X	X	X

Source: Texas Education Agency

*Students must pass all sections to graduate.

Texas students take a multi-subject, cumulative exit exam called the exit TAKS test in the spring of their 11th grade year. Students are assessed in language arts, math, science and social studies and must pass all parts of the exit TAKS test to graduate.

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STRENGTHEN STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY WITH END-OF-COURSE EXAMS

End-of-course exams are final exams administered at or near the end of each academic course. The exams are curriculum-based tests tied to the content of specific courses at the high school level and are generally tied to the overall course grade. The best-known end-of-course exams are the Advanced Placement test and International Baccalaureate exams, which measure varying degrees of student achievement in several core subject areas. Some school districts have developed their own end-of-course exams, but most are developed and graded by a centralized entity such as a state education department or national organization like the College Board. The New York Regents examinations, the College Board's Advanced Placement (AP) exams and curriculum-based exams in Europe provide excellent models of end-of-course exams.

Texas should replace the high school TAKS tests with statewide end-of-course exams in all academic subjects including math, science, history, language arts and foreign language.

END OF COURSE EXAMS CAN IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION BY:

- ✓ Raising Academic Achievement and Learning
- ✓ Rewarding All Levels of Student Achievement
- ✓ Giving Educators a Tool to Diagnose Student Comprehension After Every Course
- ✓ Allowing the Test to Follow the Student
- ✓ Linking Teacher Performance with Student Achievement

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

Test Design

- Include essays, open-ended questions and math/science problems on the exams.

Test Administration

- Administer the exams close to the end of the course.
- Have a panel of teachers grade each exam with a standard grading rubric.
- Provide students who fail the exam with opportunities to retake the exam/class and receive tutoring assistance.

Test Scoring

- Attach consequences to the exams by requiring students to pass the exam to pass the course.
- Score exams on a grading scale that the public understands like an A to F scale.
- Incrementally raise the passing standard on exams to give students and teachers time to adjust to the new standards and exams.
- Use exam scores in assessing high school performance and in high school accountability rankings.

Test Transparency

- Publish exam grades on high school transcripts to provide visibility to all stakeholders.
- Release older exams to the public. ★

¹ "2002 Comprehensive Annual Report on Texas Public Schools: A Report to the 78th Legislature from the Texas Education Agency," Texas Education Agency (Nov. 2002) 49, <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/research/pds/2002comp.pdf>.

² English Language Arts includes reading and writing.

³ "State High School Exams Put to the Test," Center on Education Policy (Aug. 2003) 37, <http://www/cep-dc.org/highschool/1/exitexam4.pdf>.

⁴ Bishop, John H. and Mane, Ferran. "Educational Reform and Disadvantaged Students: Are they better off or worse off?" CESifo Working Paper Series No. 1309 (Oct. 2004) 15, <http://ssrn.com/abstract=615566>.