

ASSESSMENTS, STANDARDS, & ACCOUNTABILITY

THE ISSUE

Large numbers of public schools in Texas are not adequately preparing students for success in college or the workforce. Too many students graduate from Texas high schools deficient in basics and need remedial education courses in college to be ready for college-level work. The disconnect between high school preparation and college expectations costs students, parents, higher education institutions, and taxpayers.

The need for remedial coursework makes the attainment of a college degree less likely. Research finds the leading predictor that a student will drop out and not finish their college education is the need for remedial reading coursework. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics reveals that only 17 percent of students who enroll in a remedial reading course receive a college degree within eight years compared to 58 percent of students who did not need remedial courses. When students take remedial courses in college, taxpayers are charged for the same education twice.

Coupled with these issues is an overly complex state accountability system that is not aligned with the federal accountability system nor is it easily understood by parents and the public. In the 2006-07 school year, 26 schools did not meet federal Adequate Yearly Progress but were rated either *Exemplary* or *Recognized* by Texas' accountability system. This lack of alignment is confusing to parents and makes it difficult for them to determine the quality of their child's school. In addition, the system lacks rigor and does not give schools and districts credit for student improvement if they miss the benchmark.

Texas lawmakers took a step in the right direction by eliminating the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) tests in high school and replacing them with end-of-course exams. End-of-course exams test students at the end of each course directly after they have studied the material and, if designed properly, provide a more in-depth assessment of skills and concepts than a cumulative multi-subject exam. Beginning in the 2011-12 school year, Texas students will no longer need to pass a cumulative high-stakes test to graduate; instead they will be assessed over the course of their high school career in the core subject areas of math, science, English, and history.

THE FACTS

- ★ A 2006 survey found that 81 percent of employers viewed recent high school graduates as "deficient in written communications" needed for letters, memos, formal reports, and technical reports. (Conference Board)
- ★ Only 19 percent of Texas high school graduates were "college ready" for math, science, reading, and English in 2007. (ACT)

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- ★ Over 162,000 college freshmen at Texas public higher education institutions took remedial education courses in the fall of 2006. (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board)
- ★ The Texas Legislature appropriated \$206 million in General Revenue funds for the instructional cost of developmental education at public higher education institutions for the 2006-07 biennium.
- ★ For a public school to be rated *Academically Acceptable* in 2008, only 45 percent of students must pass the science TAKS and only 50 percent must pass the math TAKS.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ★ Incrementally raise the passing standard on end-of-course exams to give students and teachers time to adjust to the new standards and exams.
- ★ Add essay questions to all three history end-of-course exams and adopt foreign language end-of-course exams.
- ★ Have a panel of teachers from another school district grade each exam to prevent cheating.
- ★ Use end-of-course exam scores in assessing high school performance and high school accountability ratings.
- ★ Hold high schools accountable for the number of students they graduate that require remedial education in college.
- ★ Include a growth measurement in the accountability system to track improvement at the school and district level.
- ★ Make the accountability system transparent and easier for the public to understand.
- ★ Ensure that parents have the ability to respond to educational results reported by the accountability system by allowing them to remove their child from their current school to the school of their choice.

RESOURCES

- *The Cost of Remedial Education* by Brooke Dollens Terry, Texas Public Policy Foundation (Sept. 2007) <http://www.texaspolicy.com/pdf/2007-09-PP25-remediation-bt.pdf>.
- *Implementing End-of-Course Exams: The New Testing System at the High School Level* by Brooke Dollens Terry, Texas Public Policy Foundation (Aug. 2007) <http://www.texaspolicy.com/pdf/2007-08-PB29-EOCexams-bt.pdf>.
- *Rethinking Public School Accountability: Using End-of-Course Exams to Measure and Improve the Quality of a High School Education* by Brooke Dollens Terry, Texas Public Policy Foundation (Feb. 2007) <http://www.texaspolicy.com/pdf/2007-PP02-EOC-bt.pdf>.
- *Texas School Accountability Standards 101* by Brooke Dollens Terry, Texas Public Policy Foundation (Jan. 2007) <http://www.texaspolicy.com/pdf/2008-01-PP03-accountability-bt.pdf>.

