

TEPSA

Texas Elementary Principals and Supervisors Association

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Testimony before Select Committee on Public School Accountability
Texas Elementary Principals and Supervisors Association
Celia Layton, TEPSA President and Principal
Gardens Elementary, Pasadena ISD
March 27, 2008

- State assessments originally designed to be diagnostic, criterion- referenced tests (CRT) to help students and to verify that schools and programs were addressing students' needs
- Currently being used like a high stakes, gatekeeper, norm-referenced test (NRT) to rank and rate schools and retain students
- Raised floor of expectations for all students, but also narrowed curriculum for higher achieving students
- Made principals and teachers more instructionally focused with sharpened knowledge of content standards
- Overwhelming amount of content to master with little, if any, additional instructional time or resources
- Deficit model vs. abundance model – schools rated on lowest common denominator – ratings not reflective of actual performance – no credit for preponderance of accomplishments
- Negative impact regarding retention of students and teachers. Difficult to recruit and retain 4th and 5th grade teachers due to number of tests
- Drain on campus resources (time, personnel, space) during testing. Need flexibility in testing for children's needs such as testing over more than one day. Has become an exhausting test of endurance
- A fear/threat to students, adults, campuses and districts. Stifles the fun, joy, excitement of teaching and learning
- At a recent TBEC Briefing a business leader said, "For the past 50 years we required employees to demonstrate diligence, obedience and intellect to be successful. In today's world that is only 20% of the equation. Now, 80% of what is needed is initiative, passion and creativity. Simply working hard is no longer sufficient."

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“When the culture is fun, interesting and challenging, students will perform well on any type of assessment given to them at any time.”



Celia Layton
TEPSA President

What is our responsibility in our students meeting state and national standards? Students must have the best teachers, principals and parents consistently providing the best delivery of instruction so that they may grasp the necessary skills to grow academically. The focus on testing and meeting state standards is a source of stress for students, teachers, principals and parents. For example, third graders are reminded that they must pass the test or they will have to repeat the third grade. But do we also remind third graders that they have two additional opportunities to redeem themselves? It is no wonder that on testing day, many students “freak out.” I am sure that many principals and teachers have stories they can share about testing days. School staff is on the alert for testing irregularities, and students are apprehensive about doing well on the test.

Some time ago during a test day, one of my third graders arrived at school in a panic about the test. When it was time to start the test, he told his teacher he felt bad. He went to the nurse, and then I was called. I told the student that it was not the end of the world and that he could stay and rest for as long as he needed. Fortunately, our talk helped ease his nerves, and he proceeded to take the test and did just fine. When test anxiety and nerves get hold of you, it is difficult to operate with an open mind. What can we do as principals to ease anxiety and stress?

One of the best things that we can do to help students perform well on tests is to continue to support teachers who teach and deliver instruction in such a way that all students are getting the skills necessary to pass grade level standards and more. It is

not about teaching the test. When the culture is fun, interesting and challenging, students will perform well on any type of assessment given to them at any time.

This year we are trying something new on our campus. Each homeroom has a group of employees who will go into the classrooms daily for five or 10 minutes and sing a song, recite a poem, act out a scene or simply chant a cheer. Everyone will have fun, laugh and enjoy the mentoring. The reward will be that no matter when students take an assessment, they will be successful. In the book, *The Best Schools*, author Thomas Armstrong discusses the human development aspect of students. By developing great relationships among the faculty and staff, our students know that we care about them all the time. We teach them to socialize in an appropriate way and to enjoy having fun in cooperative groups. They engage in give-and-take situations where the teacher is the facilitator, guiding them in making right choices. They want to know about the whole world and how it works. Dr. Armstrong calls that a developmental focus in “Learning How the World Works.”

Making the environment conducive to learning is the key to student success. Our students will perform well on any kind of assessment with the right kind of love, guidance and delivery of instruction. Find what works for children, and they will be ahead of the game always. Good luck to all as you strive to continue to teach the *whole child*.

district events

Dist.	Date & Time	Location	Speaker/Subject
3	05/08 11:30am	Sky Restaurant, Victoria	Sandi Borden
5	04/24 11am	Visitor's Center, Beaumont	Sandi Borden
9	03/26 TBD	TBD	Trae Kendrick
10	04/23 11:30am	Hackberry Creek Country Club, Irving	Sec'y Luncheon/ Sandi Borden
12	04/15 TBD	TBD	Sandi Borden
13	04/23 TBD	TBD	Harley Eckhart
14	03/26 9:30am	Abilene Country Club Fair Way Oaks	Harley Eckhart
15	04/02 Noon	Region 15 ESC, San Angelo	Sandi Borden
16	04/16 11am	Region 16 ESC, Amarillo	Trae Kendrick
17	04/10 11:30am	Lakeridge Country Club, Lubbock	Sandi Borden
18	04/16 TBD	Region 18 ESC, Midland	Sandi Borden
19	04/17 5:30pm	TBD, El Paso	Sandi Borden

National Center continued from page 1

Texas Education Agency; Haidee Williams, SEDL; Susan Holley, Texas Association of School Administrators; Patty Quinzy, Texas American Federation of Teachers; and Paul Henley, Texas State Teachers Association.

TEPSA will keep you posted on any developments. Visit the center's website via a link in the News section at www.tepsa.org.

Source: *Samuels, C.A. (2008, January 23). "Response to Intervention sparks interest, questions." Education Week. Volume 27. Issue 20. pp. 1, 13.*