

Good afternoon! My name is Tim Smith, and I am a leader with TMO. I have been working for the past several months as a substitute teacher in Houston and have formerly worked as a Teach for America corps member and KIPP school teacher in the Mississippi Delta.

Today, I would like to explain to you how our current system of high stakes testing can negatively impact our children from the standpoint of both academics and behavior.

My first point today is that our current system of high stakes testing has had a negative impact on the way we teach our children. As a first year Teach for America teacher in the Mississippi Delta, I was determined to prove that *my* children, regardless of their backgrounds, could succeed at the highest levels. After carefully studying the state test, I realized that if my students could write a 5 paragraph essay, they would probably be able to pass the literacy portion of the exam. Once I figured that out, I spent the next several months focusing on that one

particular style of writing, while virtually ignoring poetry, letter writing, narrative writing, and other styles that I knew wouldn't be emphasized on the test. School-wide, I saw music, art, and even sports take a back seat to test preparation.

Did I ever wonder if my students needed more of an outlet to be creative? Of course. But was I going to let *my* children fail and be labeled by the state for not performing? Never. Members of the commission, we need a system of accountability that allows us to teach the basics, *and* develop well-rounded human beings. Not either or.

High stakes testing can also limit academic growth because of the "one-size-fits-all" nature of the tests. Two years ago, during the first week of school, I administered a computer-based diagnostic reading test to all of the students in my 7th grade Language Arts class. In that one class, I found students that were reading on a second grade level, a tenth grade level, and everywhere in between.

By the end of that year, there were students in my class who had moved three grade levels in reading but who didn't pass the state test because they weren't yet reading on grade level. These children should never be labeled as "failing". In fact, they were the hardest working students in my class.

High stakes testing has also had a negative impact on the way we discipline our children. Several years ago, a student of mine came to school on test day but refused to directions when he got to class. Though this particular child was virtually guaranteed to make a passing score on the exam, my principal made the difficult decision to stick to the school's discipline code and suspend the child for the remainder of the week. Under ordinary circumstances, this would have been an easy decision to make. A student breaks a rule. The school applies a consequence for the rule that was broken. But, as any teacher in Texas will tell you, the pressure to produce test scores can often make even the

best intentioned administrator forget his or her responsibility to provide firm and consistent discipline to our children.

Members of the commission, we must never put educators in a position where doing what's best for their career isn't what's best for the children they are hired to teach. When money and promotions are tied to test results, this is precisely the consequence.