



TEXANS ADVOCATING FOR MEANINGFUL STUDENT ASSESSMENT

PRESS RELEASE

March 8, 2019

Texans Advocating for Meaningful Student Assessment (TAMSA)

Contact: Heather Sheffield, president of TAMSA

Mobile: (832) 474-3636

Email: heather@heathersheffield.com

TAMSA, while not shocked, is angered by the revelations in recent New York Times and Texas Monthly articles, and by other media outlets that outline how TEA has been misrepresenting achievement to Texas students, parents, and educators about the Texas STAAR testing system. As a consequence, students have been mislabeled, and suffered consequences based on those incorrect labels. TAMSA applauds the Texas House for acting quickly and hearing testimony on Tuesday surrounding these allegations. **We urge the legislature to continue the investigation into how many children and campuses have been adversely affected by the false reading/Lexile levels on the standardized tests.**

Texas places significant emphasis on the STAAR testing system. Not only are students evaluated, including high stakes of grade level promotion and graduation, but entire schools and districts are “graded” based on performance on these tests. The news that the STAAR test demands students have reading skills not on their actual grade level, but two to even four years ABOVE their grade level, has TAMSA concerned that every single score and school rating may have been inaccurate. As stated by Heather Sheffield, President of TAMSA, “Children, classroom teachers and schools have been told they do not measure up to their expected learning level, and this is actually not true.”

Since forming in 2011, TAMSA has repeatedly questioned the readability levels on the STAAR tests. But the recent news of a systemic “stretch” of required reading levels is beyond unacceptable. By creating higher required reading levels for all tests and setting “meets” grade level standards at reading levels far above the State Board of Education approved TEKS - from third grade through high school – children, teachers and schools have been held to a standard that does not match the state curriculum. Teachers were not aware of the higher levels of reading required on STAAR tests and hundreds of thousands of students have been told that they are behind in reading, when in reality they are likely on grade level, mastering the academic skills that are being taught in their classroom.

“To use a football analogy,” continued Sheffield, “imagine if the referees got together and decided that for a touchdown to count, the team would actually have to go past the end zone. But they didn’t tell the coaches or the players, and when players made it to the end zone, and didn’t get their touchdown, they were puzzled. That’s exactly what has happened to Texas children, schools and teachers. TEA changed the rules by using different reading levels than those associated with a particular grade but did not inform educators, parents, or students.”



TEXANS ADVOCATING FOR MEANINGFUL STUDENT ASSESSMENT

Sheffield continued, “**How many children have taken to heart the message that they are behind, are not smart, and do not measure up, when that is *not* the case? How many have been pulled from electives or other whole-child learning opportunities to get additional help for STAAR scores, when they have been on grade level this entire time?** This is unforgivable.”

Additionally, schools and districts are measured by their students’ performance on STAAR and End-of-Course Exams. Much money has been expended on remediating students with supposedly “low performance” on these tests; those taxpayer dollars have been wasted on unnecessary remediation.

TAMSA calls for:

- 1) An immediate moratorium on using the STAAR tests in Texas for any accountability for students, schools and districts until the reading levels are determined by a non-biased third party and passing levels re-calibrated to match the actual grade level TEKS readability expectations.**
- 2) Texas must re-score at least the last two years of STAAR tests and report the correct results to parents, schools, districts, and any organizations that received testing reports – such as the Federal government – so the true results are brought to light.**
- 3) Commit that in the future all tests are evaluated by an independent third party for grade appropriate readability levels prior to any tests being administered.**
- 4) Test only essential readiness standards in order to ensure tests are better aligned with grade levels.**
- 5) Remove high stakes on children on all state standardized testing – including grade promotion and graduation requirements. High stakes are not required by federal law.**
- 6) Finally, an apology from TEA is in order to students who were told that they failed to meet expectations, when in fact they did.**

TAMSA looks forward to working with our representatives in the Legislature and TEA on resolving these serious issues of mislabeling children and causing the unnecessary waste of time and tax dollars on unwarranted remediation.

TAMSA is a statewide, grassroots organization comprised of parents and other community members concerned with the overemphasis on high stakes STAAR tests and the misallocation of hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars to the tests that should be going to the classroom. Our mission is to improve public education in Texas through the use of meaningful and effective student assessments that allow for more productive classroom instruction and more efficient use of public funds.

www.tamsatx.org