



HIGH STAKES TESTING

Q. As a public education advocate, can you share a little about yourself?

A. I am passionate about advocating for those who cannot speak for themselves – children. As a child psychiatrist, I help children affected by today's stressors. With the passage of legislation in 2009, I witnessed the emphasis on standardized testing reach a level that has created an unhealthy, high stakes testing environment. Over the years, I have seen firsthand how this negative environment has affected children with the rise in diagnoses of ADHD, anxiety and depression.

Along with others, I now work with a group of concerned parents who formed Texans Advocating for Meaningful Student Assessment (TAMSA).

Q. To make sense of it all, what is STAAR?

A. The federal law Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires states to give curriculum specific state designed standardized tests to determine if students are meeting state standards and are ready for college, career or military. This student testing/assessment program is called the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness – known as STAAR.

ESSA also requires states to have an accountability system in place; based in part, on the assessment. For Texas, this would be the STAAR. As a note, ESSA allows for states to use their own assessments and allows for states to design their own accountability system.

Q. State-mandated standardized tests are often described as "high stakes" test. What are TAMSA's concerns?

A. Texas creates a "high stakes" environment at multiple levels when using STAAR. High school students must pass five End of Course STAAR exams to graduate. Fifth and eighth grade students must pass reading and math STAAR test in order to advance to the next grade level.

TAMSA has concerns with the readability of the test. Experts have stated that the content within the tests has been found to be as high as two grades above the actual student grade level. This and other concerns create a blurred picture of student achievement.

In the fall of 2018, the state's accountability system introduced an A-F model that now labels school districts with a single letter grade. The STAAR test – a snapshot in time – is now the foundation that determines how well our local schools are performing. Think about it; a single letter grade is used when in fact a single letter cannot capture all the aspects involved in educating all children within a school campus or district. (School campuses will be individually labeled in the fall of 2019)

Our concern is that Texas is creating good test takers, not good problem solvers and a flawed system is being used to evaluate our local public schools.

Q. Assessing students is important. What solutions does TAMSA advocate to improving the current system.

A. We believe it is important to assess all students. Using better assessment tools can improve the system. We advocate for using problem and project-based learning models with meaningful target assessments. Students learn more when they are inquisitive, ask and answer questions, and practice problem solving.

We advocate for the removal of "high stakes" from our current system, as it is not a federal requirement. We advocate for testing no more than is required by federal law. Currently, Texas gives five more tests than ESSA requires. We advocate for the continued use of Individual Graduation Committees as an alternative for graduation for those students that fall short of passing all five STAAR EOCs. Within guidelines provided in state law, these Graduation Committees use a more holistic approach and considers the student's body of academic work.

Q. History provides us with inspiring famous quotes about education. What is your legacy quote that we may find inspiring future generations?

A. "Eliminate over-testing and under-investing in Texas students. Education is a process, not a product." Theresa Treviño