



## TEXAS PARENTS UNION (TXPU)

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### Testimony before the Senate Education Committee November 17, 2014

Good afternoon Chairman Patrick and members of the committee. My name is Matt Prewett and I'm a volunteer with the Texas Parents Union. Our organization's goal is improved public education options for every family in Texas.

Let me start off by saying that I recognize that standardized tests have an important role in public education. Since most public schools group children in classes based solely on their age, there is a very real risk that a child could be promoted from class to class without mastering the necessary skills/knowledge. Educators are frequently pressured (by administrators and parents) to promote a child to the next class even though they have not mastered the content in the current class. Standardized tests are an important tool to combat the issue of social promotion and ensure students have mastered the skills/knowledge for the classes they are taking.

With that said, Texas has been using student standardized test scores for purposes they were never intended: to grade districts and campuses. To make matters worse, education associations such as TASA attempted to limit open-enrollment charter schools in Texas until standardized test scores were "comparable to that of traditional public schools." As might have been predicted, these types of policies and positions resulted in an "arms race" in Texas where public schools put entirely too much emphasis on standardized test scores.

During the last ten years, there have been increasing calls from parents and educators to stop misusing standardized test results. Thankfully Texas legislators responded in 2013 and passed legislation in an attempt to address this issue. Yet, at the same time there was a push to grade districts and charters using an A-F label based on student standardized test scores. While well-meaning, these types of policies will likely increase the education arms race -- the exact opposite of what parents are asking for.

Let me be very clear here:

1. Standardized tests should be used for assessing students, not public schools.
2. Standardized test scores should be used primarily to empower parents, students, and school administrators:
  - Scores should be used by parents and students to verify that the students have mastered the class content and to discern where improvement is needed.
  - Scores should be used by administrators to ensure class grades correctly reflect student performance and identify effective and ineffective practices within their schools.
3. If annual standardized testing doesn't directly benefit the students taking the tests, then the classes/tests need to be redesigned -- semester-long classes and/or competency-based testing should be explored.

As an organization, we strongly support choice in public education. However, continued over-emphasis on school standardized test scores hurts all of the options available to parents/students. Standardized test scores should serve the student, not drive the campus. The quality of schools is not necessarily equal to student standardized test scores. Minimize the bureaucracy, keep parents/students informed and let them decide!

Thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts on this very important subject.

Best regards,  
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