

Talk

about Today's Public Schools

Editor's Note:

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State accountability system should not be changed to mirror NCLB

At a recent Senate Education Committee meeting to gather testimony about a possible revision to the state accountability system, Sen. Florence Shapiro, R-Plano, said the minimum Texas accountability standard should be at least as high as those standards under No Child Left Behind. Her intent is to clear the confusion of how districts and campuses can attain Exemplary, Recognized or Acceptable state ratings but fail to meet federal standards.

However, it simply is not in the best interests of Texas public schools for the state accountability system to mirror NCLB. Although I understand concerns about functioning under two systems, I believe for most of our parents, the current, easily-understandable and defensible state accountability system is what they care about.

Many educators, including myself, have been openly critical of the emphasis on standardized tests in Texas, but the existing state accountability system is far from broken. The system is based on an improvement model within which districts and campuses are provided an opportunity to strive for excellence in a positive and motivating manner designed to help children perform better on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills. The standards bar is continually being ratcheted up, but at realistic, attainable levels. Conversely, NCLB requires that 100 percent of students in public school attain proficiency by 2014 or the campus will be deemed an academic failure. Under this so-called all-or-nothing approach, the vast majority of schools in Texas will be considered a failure – something I am sure that no one wants for Texas.

People may have many different views regarding NCLB. While I have faith in our state accountability system and our testing system to improve student achievement and close the achievement gap, I have seen nothing in NCLB to improve our system. It is punitive and does not take into consideration the needs of all learners. The expectations of the federal system are unrealistic and designed to make public schools appear as failures. Just the manner in which special needs students are counted and treated in the system is not

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right. To demand 100 percent proficiency of students with an exemption rate of 3 percent for special needs students is not fair, responsible or right in terms of evaluating students and schools.

Furthermore, Texas should be very cautious about adopting any portion of NCLB, considering the reauthorization of the law is scheduled for 2007-2008. If Texas is to link our accountability system to the federal system by legislative mandate, we lose significant control of our destiny and are forced to revisit our own state statutes each time such federal changes take place. Texas should stand independent of the federal standards in this time of shifting opinions.

Again, aligning the state accountability system with NCLB would not be prudent. Our current system not only is rooted in reality, it is child-centered and gives incentive for improvement. At the same time, the bar for success in Texas continually is being raised with schools, teachers and students stepping up to the plate to work toward reasonable, achievable goals for all.

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