

**SUBJECT:** Requiring Spanish TAAS tests for Spanish-speaking students

**COMMITTEE:** Public Education — committee substitute recommended

**VOTE:** 8 ayes — Sadler, Dutton, Grusendorf, Hochberg, Lengefeld, Oliveira, Olivo, Smith  
0 nays  
1 absent — Dunnam

**WITNESSES:** For — Kathleen Leos, Dallas School Board; Daniel Garcia, Dallas Public Schools  
Against — None  
On — Rene Lara, Texas Federation of Teachers; Ann Smisko and David Anderson, Texas Education Agency

**BACKGROUND:** The Texas Assessment of Academic Skills or TAAS test, was adopted in 1990 to provide a comprehensive assessment of curriculum objectives. The current test structure includes reading and math for third, fifth, sixth, and seventh grades; reading, writing, and mathematics for fourth grade and exit level, or tenth grade; and reading, writing, mathematics, science and social studies for eighth grade.

Spanish language tests are available for the third through sixth grade exams. The Spanish language tests were developed recently, and benchmark tests have been given. The first year in which scores were available on all Spanish language tests was the spring 1998 test.

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) currently is developing the Test of Reading Proficiency in English (TRPE), to be administered to students in grade three through eight. The test is scheduled for Spring of 2000 as a baseline-establishing exam, and will be given in Spring of 2001 for actual assessment. That test is designed to test a student's progress in learning English.

Testing and placement of limited English proficiency (LEP) students is determined by the student's language proficiency assessment committee (LPAC). The LPAC is composed of a professional bilingual educator, a professional transitional language educator, a parent of the LEP student, and a campus administrator. The LPAC makes recommendations on the placement of LEP students and determines which tests, if any, the student is required to take. The scores of LEP students taking the English TAAS are included in accountability system at the discretion of the LPAC. Spanish-speaking LEP students may take the Spanish TAAS. Scores on those tests are reported at the discretion of the committee as well.

DIGEST:

CSHB 3675 would require all LEP students whose primary language is Spanish to take either a Spanish language TAAS test or the English TAAS test for the third through eighth grades. The student's language proficiency assessment committee (LPAC) would decide which test the student should take.

Students in grades three through six would be required to take such tests beginning in the 1999-2000 school year. Tests for grades seven and eight would need to be administered beginning with the 2003-2004 school year. The bill also would require the agency annually to release administered questions and answers after the third year the assessments are used.

The intensive program of study provided to students who failed to perform adequately on the TAAS test would be designed to allow them to attain a standard of annual growth specified by TEA. The performance of students on the Spanish TAAS would be reported in the state accountability system.

All students of limited English proficiency, regardless of their primary language, would be required to participate in an assessment system that measured academic progress, including reading proficiency in English. The performance of students on that assessment would be included in the campus report card and performance report submitted by the school as part of the accountability system. Performance of students whose primary language was Spanish and performance of other students would have to be reported.

The performance reporting of all limited English proficiency students would be required, beginning in the 1999-2000 school year, for students in third through sixth grades and in 2003-2004 for seventh and eighth graders.

CSHB 3675 would repeal a provision requiring the commissioner of education to develop an assessment system for students exempted from the TAAS test.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house.

SUPPORTERS  
SAY:

Currently, assessment and accountability for non-English speaking students in public schools is minimal at best. Many of these students are not tested in either English or Spanish. Even fewer have their test scores reported in the state's accountability system.

There is no need to exempt Spanish-speaking students from taking the Spanish language TAAS now that one is available. And there is no reason that the scores of those students should not be reported in the accountability system.

Exempting these students from the tests is unfair to them. It means there is no way to judge their performance and no way to allow their teachers to use test scores to tailor lessons to help them improve. It is unfair to the state and the schools not to include assessment of those students in the accountability system because it leaves citizens and policy makers without a fully accurate picture of the level of achievement in public schools. Policy makers need information about progress of students in different schools and districts to determine which schools need additional resources. Schools need to know which individual students need those resources.

HB 3675 provides that a student's LPAC committee would determine whether the English or the Spanish test would be most appropriate. Thus, the individual needs of that student would be considered. Students without adequate skills in written Spanish could take the English test, and vice versa. Requiring a test of reading proficiency in English also would be a good approach. It would test students to determine their progress toward understanding written English.

Including the performance data of students on the Spanish TAAS and on the English reading proficiency test in the school and district accountability system would ensure that those students are not forgotten by the system. It

would ensure that their academic progress would be counted in the school's performance rating.

This legislation would not impose any requirements on students or the TEA that are not in the current testing plan—other than requiring the development of a seventh and eighth grade Spanish TAAS. What this legislation would do is speed up the time frame in which these tests are administered and included in the accountability system. It also would create clear rules about which students would take which tests.

OPPONENTS  
SAY:

While it would be appropriate at some specific times to test Spanish-speaking students using the Spanish-language TAAS, many such students are not fluent enough in written Spanish for the test to be useful. Thus, the results may not reflect the achievement of those students accurately.

There are many students in families from other countries who are classified as Spanish-speaking. The variations in Spanish dialects and vocabulary from country to country, or even among different sections of one country, can make it difficult for many students to understand the uniform Spanish TAAS test as developed in Texas. That is why it should be left to the individual student's LPAC committee to determine if it would be appropriate for the student to take any TAAS test at all.

Forcing students to take a Spanish TAAS test could force some of them to devote their efforts to improving their written Spanish at a time when their efforts would be better served studying English. Instead of taking a Spanish TAAS, it would be more appropriate for those students to take either the English TAAS or a reading proficiency test in English.

OTHER  
OPPONENTS  
SAY:

It may not be worth the cost to develop an eighth grade Spanish TAAS because of the relatively few students in the eighth grade who would be unable to take the English test. The eighth grade TAAS currently is the most extensive test, with five parts including a reading component. Translating those tests, field testing, and preparing scorers for the written portion would be very expensive and the small number of students who would take that test means it might be difficult to get any accurate data on their performance.

NOTES:

The original bill would have required the development of a reading proficiency test in English and the development of an assessment system to

evaluate the academic progress of students exempted from taking a TAAS test because of limited English proficiency who are instructed in English because of a shortage of bilingual teachers.

The fiscal note for CSHB 3675 indicates a positive fiscal impact to the state because of the way TAAS testing is funded. The actual cost of developing and administering the seventh and eighth grade Spanish TAAS tests would be \$730,917 a year through 2003 and then \$1,466,917 a year after that. Increases in test costs decrease the amount the state must fund in Tier II of the Foundation School Program, resulting in savings. Local school districts, however, would experience a reduction in funding.