

## *Dallas Morning News*

House committee comes under fire for voting to ease new student tests

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AUSTIN — A House education committee vote to ease up on a new testing program for high school students drew a stinging rebuke Tuesday from business and education leaders, who argued it would gut recent school improvements in Texas.

A bill that the House Public Education Committee unanimously approved would allow high school students to earn a diploma even if they failed as many as eight of the 12 new end-of-course exams that will be introduced next year.

The measure would also scrap a requirement that the exams count as 15 percent of a student's final grade in each of the 12 courses. School districts would be allowed to decide whether scores on the tests would count.

"Why is it that at a time when we need our kids better prepared to go on to higher education, we are lowering the standards that will be required to graduate in Texas?" said [Bill Hammond](#), president of the Texas Association of Business and a former lawmaker.

Hammond dismissed claims by school superintendents across the state that planned budget cuts will make it difficult for them to prepare their students for the new exams.

"To use the funding cuts as an excuse to roll back these important reforms is unconscionable," he said, noting the end-of-course tests were approved by lawmakers in 2007.

Hammond was joined by representatives of the Governor's [Business Council](#), the Texas Institute for Education Reform and Sandy Kress, former education adviser to [President George W. Bush](#). All said the House bill would undermine recent academic improvements in the state.

If the full House approves the legislation, it would put the chamber at odds with the [Senate](#), where the chairwoman of the education committee, [Florence Shapiro](#), R-[Plano](#), has promised there will be no retreat on the end-of-course tests in high school or the new State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness in middle and elementary schools.

Both exams will be phased in starting next school year.

House Public Education Committee Chairman Rob Eissler, author of the House bill, said he has been hearing from superintendents who want a delay in the new tests, particularly since most are anticipating funding cuts in the next school year.

“This returns control to local educators, who can decide whether to include the [exam] score as part of the student’s final grade in a course, rather than the Legislature mandating it,” said Eissler, R-The Woodlands.

Under the 2007 testing law, high school students will have to take three exams each in English, math, science and social studies, a total of 12 tests. The law calls on students to achieve a passing average on the three tests in each subject to earn a high school diploma.

The new House bill would require that students pass the English III and Algebra II exams, and one test each in science and social studies.

“How are you going to get kids motivated to take these exams seriously if they don’t count for anything?” asked Jim Windham, chairman of the Texas Institute for Education Reform.