

## ***Quorum Report***

### DISMAY OVER ROLLBACK OF EDUCATION ACCOUNTABILITY STANDARDS

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A trio of business-oriented education reform groups urged the Senate to stop the rollback of accountability standards that is moving through the House.

Bernie Francis of the *Governor’s Business Council*, in comments to reporters at a news conference this afternoon, said the last five years of progress on the state’s evolving accountability system was at risk of being lost with a number of bills currently being proposed in the House.

“There are several proposals out there that will gut our accountability system and stall its progress,” Francis said. “We applaud Sen. (Florence) Shapiro in her effort to protect accountability and funding instructional materials in her subcommittee recommendations.” The central bill in contention, unnamed by the participants in this afternoon’s news conference, is *House Bill 500*, which has a bipartisan list of authors and a surprising number of conservative co-authors. The bill, which does have House Public Education Chair Rep. Rob Eissler’s (R-The Woodlands) name on it, passed out of committee on a unanimous vote and is headed to the floor of the House.

HB 500, which had broad support from the education community, would end the requirement for end-of-course exams to count toward a portion of a student’s final grade each year in four core subject areas. It would also back off the number of exams that students would have to pass in order to graduate. How the exam would be used in final grades would be left to each local district’s discretion.

HB 500 is a compromise with the education community over the rollout of the new accountability system. Education Commissioner Robert Scott, in a number of recent speeches, has warned the new testing system is probably not one, but two, iterations tougher in rigor than the current *Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills*. Scores on a preliminary round of field tests, while not pegged to make-or-break consequences, have been woefully low, according to the agency.

Sandy Kress, one of the original architects on the Texas accountability system created in 1995, was on hand this afternoon with the *Governor’s Business Council*, the *Texas Institute for Education Reform* and the *Texas Association of Business*. Kress, along with Jim Windham and Bill Hammond, hammered the fact that the state’s passage of college- and workforce-readiness standards two years ago put Texas at the forefront of the nation on accountability standards. Districts have protested the House budget leaves no money for remediation under this more rigorous testing system, much less the instructional materials needed to teach the standards. Even

if the requested textbook proclamations were funding this session, students in world geography would not have new textbooks before the first round of end-of-course exams.

“Just because the economy changes, the mission of education doesn’t change,” said Kress, urging reporters to think about it from the perspective of students and not just school districts faced with budget cuts. “Are we getting them ready for flipping burgers or getting them ready for what’s next?”

Scott had promised he would set the bar for passage of the initial round of end-of-course exams for “where the kids are at,” Kress noted. That means the passing rate will start low and ratchet up, giving schools and districts the ability to keep the ratings they earned under the TAKS system, with or without the *Texas Projection Measure*. Because of that initial low bar, remediation costs, even in these tough economic times, will be kept to a reasonable level, Kress said.

Questioned about the funding issues behind district concerns, everyone in the room expressed support for the Senate version of the education budget and for the funding of the textbook allotment. Windham said it was inconceivable, to him, that lawmakers would leave town without funding necessary instructional materials.