

San Antonio Express-News

Don't lower the educational bar: The Legislature should not prematurely gut an important reform
April 13, 2011

<http://www.mysanantonio.com/opinion/editorials/article/Don-t-lower-the-educational-bar-1334495.php#ixzz1JPKsOkwJ>

Texas got on the path of serious education reform and educational accountability in 1984, when the Legislature passed the Texas Educational Opportunity Act. The act established the first statewide curriculum standards, known as essential elements, and led to the Texas Assessment of Basic Skills, the first statewide testing program.

Since then, curriculum standards have been revised — with the exception of some meddling on the part of the State Board of Education — mostly upward. Essential elements gave way to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills.

Student testing has become more rigorous. The Texas Assessment of Basic Skills was succeeded by the Texas Educational Assessment of Minimum Skills, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills and the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills.

Two years ago, the Legislature made a significant shift away from standardized testing.

Beginning in the 2011-2012 school year, 12 end-of-course exams were to replace four TAKS exams as requirements for graduation. The end-of-course exams, which are aligned with the curriculum, would also count for 15 percent of a student's grade.

Yet before this latest effort to improve the state's system of educational accountability ever had a chance to be put into practice, the Texas House is prepared to gut this essential reform.

Under a bill authored by Rep. Rob Eissler, R-The Woodlands, students would only be required to pass four end-of-course exams to graduate, not 12.

After 27 years of raising academic standards in Texas, Eissler's measure would for the first time lower the educational bar. That's a mistake that sends the wrong message to schools, teachers, parents and students.

No one yet knows how well the end-of-course system would or wouldn't work. Any effort to change it now is unwarranted.

The House measure faces strong opposition in the Senate, where Sen. Florence Shapiro, R-Plano, has been a champion of the new end-of-course system. The Senate should reject it.

The Legislature is already doing enough damage to public education with proposed funding cuts.

Lawmakers should tweak reforms after, not before, they receive data about accountability system performance.