



TEXAS EDUCATION AGENCY

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MIKE MOSES
COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION

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November 23, 1998

Dr. James H. Hughey
General Superintendent
Dallas Independent School District
3700 Ross Avenue
Dallas, Texas 75204-5491

Dear Dr. Hughey:

Thank you for informing me of the development of the Dallas Independent School District's new five-year improvement plan. Your effort to review and examine the goals and objectives of all your current initiatives is to be commended. Your focus on teaching all children to read and on ending the practice of social promotion will serve to improve the educational experience of all Dallas schoolchildren.

Texas has been recognized across the nation for our public school accountability system and the strides we have made in improving the performance of students, particularly our economically-disadvantaged and minority students. At the core of our accountability system is the state's testing program. The Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) is designed to give accurate and specific information about individual student achievement based on the state's curriculum standards, the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). It is the criterion-referenced nature of the test that allows us to see whether schools are successfully teaching students the TEKS. While always subject to improvement, the TAAS test and our accountability system are the best tools we have for increasing student achievement.

Following are responses to the questions you posed concerning the TAAS, the reading instruments for the early grade levels, and social promotion:

The agency defines proficiency in reading as passing the reading portion of the TAAS. A student who is "on grade level" is receiving instruction in and performing satisfactorily on the curriculum specified to be taught at the particular grade. In Texas, this curriculum is the TEKS. The TAAS is a criterion-referenced test in that it measures student performance against the TEKS of the corresponding grade. Thus, the TAAS is an "on grade level" measure of student performance. The agency has taken no position on the use of other instruments, including norm-referenced instruments and other criterion-referenced instruments, to complement the TAAS.

The Spanish TAAS, the results of which will be added into the accountability system in 1999, may also be considered a measure of reading proficiency at each grade level. The agency has taken no position on the use of other Spanish instruments to complement the Spanish TAAS.

The agency has published a list of recommended reading diagnostic instruments for Kindergarten, Grade 1, and Grade 2. The instruments on the list measure reading skill development and comprehension. School districts have the option of selecting an instrument from the list or choosing another instrument. The results from the administration of the

cc: R. Olivas ✓

instruments are to be reported to the local school district's board of trustees. In addition to the commercially available products on the list, the agency included on the list the Texas Primary Reading Inventory. This inventory is aligned with the TEKS. A Texas Spanish Primary Reading Inventory is under development.

At the 1998 Midwinter Conference, Governor Bush announced his goal to end the practice of social promotion. The specifics of his proposal will be presented during the Legislative Session that begins in January 1999. Issues such as passage of the TAAS, passage of all coursework, multiple opportunities to pass the TAAS, and the use of any other instruments to measure student achievement will be thoroughly discussed during the Session.

Our system of a state-adopted curriculum, textbooks and instruction aligned to this curriculum, an assessment system based on this curriculum, and an accountability system which holds individual schools and districts responsible will continue to ensure that our public schools will focus on all Texas schoolchildren achieving academic success.

Sincerely yours,



Mike Moses
Commissioner of Education