

# **Ed board members leave test rule alone**

## **They indicate they won't modify law on end-of-course exams**

By **TERRENCE STUTZ** – Dallas Morning News, Nov. 18, 2011  
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AUSTIN — State Board of Education members indicated Thursday they will not get involved in a dispute over the new high school end-of-course exams and how much they must count toward student grades in the 12 subjects that will be tested beginning this year.

Several board members said they were unwilling to modify a law passed by the Legislature that says the new test must count for at least 15 percent of the final grade in each of the core subjects.

Under the 2007 law, high school students must get a passing average on the three end-of-course tests in each of four subject areas — English, math, science and social studies — to receive a diploma. The law also spells out how the test results will be calculated into the final grade in each course.

School superintendents across the state have complained that the testing law is unclear about how such things as course credits, grade-point averages and class rankings should be determined after inclusion of the end-of-course test scores — and the Texas Education Agency has been reluctant to issue guidelines on the 15 percent requirement.

State Board of Education member Thomas Ratliff, R-Mount Pleasant, proposed Thursday that the board adopt a rule that students failing an end-of-course test still be given credit for a course if they had a grade of 70 or better in the course — exclusive of what they scored on the end-of-course exam for the subject.

His proposal was backed by superintendents, who argued that it would maintain local control of grading policies in school districts and allow students who met all passing standards in the course except for the final test to still get credit for their work.

“I can't find a school superintendent who is not in favor of this proposal,” Abilene ISD Superintendent Heath Burns told the board in voicing support for Ratliff's plan. “This is a change that needs to happen.”

But several board members said they could not favor such a move, particularly since a similar effort in the legislative session earlier this year failed.

“The Legislature had a purpose in mind, that students have to pass these exams to get a diploma,” said board member Terri Leo, R-Spring. “You need to go to the pink house [state Capitol] if you're having problems with this requirement and not ask us to lower standards. This would lower the bar for students when we're supposed to be raising it.”

Board member David Bradley, R-Beaumont, said the proposed change would send the wrong message to students and teachers.

“The state is just asking for some accountability, just 15 percent,” he said. “This initiative will send a message to dumb down our standards. Everybody will get a trophy and nobody will fail.”

Ratliff rejected the notion that the proposal would diminish standards, saying, “What we're trying to do is protect kids who are passing their class as determined by 180 days in a school year and not four hours on a test.”

With less than a majority of board members inclined to take action, Ratliff said he would set aside his proposal for now.

“My goal was to raise awareness of this issue so that we could see the unintended consequences of the law,” he said.

Ratliff noted that some school districts have already revised their grading policies so that any failing grade on an end-of-course test will be converted into a score of 69, making it impossible for a student to fail a class solely on the basis of the test score. Students would still have to get passing averages on each group of tests to earn a diploma.