

Education commissioner won't enforce ban on social promotion unless funding restored

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AUSTIN — Texas' education chief said Tuesday that he will not enforce the state ban on social promotion of students in public schools unless the Legislature restores funding to help students in danger of failing because of their low test scores.

Education Commissioner Robert Scott, speaking to school superintendents and administrators from across the state, said he does not believe students should be subjected to the promotion standards unless they are offered remedial classes to correct academic deficiencies.

“I cannot and will not certify the ban on social promotion unless there are resources to provide interventions to students who need to pass the test,” he said during a conference sponsored by the Texas Association of School Administrators.

His comments drew applause from the audience.

Current law requires students in grades five and eight to pass the state achievement test to be promoted under a program initiated by former Gov. George W. Bush called the Student Success Initiative. The program includes remedial instruction in English and math for students who have trouble passing the state exam.

Funding for the Student Success Initiative was slashed from \$293 million in the previous two-year budget to \$23.5 million in the current one — a reduction of 92 percent. That means remedial help offered to hundreds of thousands of students in the past is no longer available.

Students are scheduled to get a break from the social promotion requirements this year because a new state exam — the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness — is being introduced and passing standards won't be set until later this year. So for this year only, fifth- and eighth-graders will not have to pass to be promoted.

The requirement is scheduled to resume in the 2012-13 school year.

Scott also told the conference that he would have waived for one year the state requirement that the new end-of-course exams for high school students count as 15 percent of the final grade in each subject tested.

“We might want to give school districts a little more time to understand what they’re facing,” Scott said, adding that he has no authority under the law to waive the requirement. “A little transition time would have been better for the system.”

School superintendents have criticized the 15 percent requirement, saying it deprives their school districts of local control over grading policies.