

# **Listen carefully to education commissioner's critique of standardized testing**

## **Austin American Statesman - Editorial Board, Commentary**

Feb. 11, 2012

Robert Scott is and has been a loyal appointee of the governor, so his critique of standardized testing was not only remarkable but also deserves a thorough hearing.

Scott was appointed the state's top education official in 2007 by Gov. Rick Perry, who places a high value on loyalty.

Scott's critique of the tests — an article of faith for those who demand educational accountability — should prompt an honest review of the effectiveness of the tests that have been around for 30 or so years.

The tests, Scott said, have done some good things, but the overly rigorous preparation for them is a "perversion of what's intended."

The standardized tests have long been a target for the teachers and administrators whose professional futures are often tied to results and even to some parents who question whether their children are learning to answer test questions at the expense of a well-rounded education. School days are spent "teaching to the test" as the examinations approach, critics say.

Test proponents say the exams ensure that students are learning by demanding accountability for the results from teachers and the school districts that employ them.

The commissioner made the critical comments first to the State Board of Education in late January and again earlier this month to the Texas Association of School Administrators.

Scott's comments come as a new standardized test is being unveiled this year. High school students' scores on the STAAR exam will make up 15 percent of their final grades in the subject areas tested.

Parents and school officials have protested, some saying the \$4 billion cuts in school funding the Legislature approved last year undercut instruction. The cuts have also attracted lawsuits.

Scott told administrators that he would waive the 15 percent requirement if he could, but he doesn't have that authority.

Though Scott drew a standing ovation from the school administrators, his comments also prompted push back from state Sen. Florence Shapiro, R-Plano, chairwoman of the Senate Education Committee.

"That's a direction I've never heard him take," The Texas Tribune quoted Shapiro as saying. "He's been the one that's been talking about school accountability over the years. We've all been a part of this. School accountability is something we started many, many years ago, and we believe in it."

That Scott has been an advocate of school accountability over the years is reason enough to pay attention to his dramatic break of formation.

Legislative action will be needed to adjust or change high-stakes testing, but Scott's comments ought to provoke review, not recrimination.

To maintain its economic vitality, Texas should always look for ways to improve its products — particularly its education system.

To maintain the state's robust growth that Perry bragged about in his presidential campaign, its schools are going to have to turn out students who can excel against their global competitors.

There was no ambiguity in the commissioner's statements. It behooves us all to pay attention.

Find this article at:

<http://www.statesman.com/opinion/listen-carefully-to-education-commissioners-critique-of-standardized-2168192.html>