

Texas Schools Chief: Testing Has Gone Too Far

by [Morgan Smith](#) – Feb. 1, 2012

Texas Education Agency Commissioner Robert Scott said today that the state testing system has become a "perversion of its original intent" and that he was looking forward to "reeling it back in."

Addressing 4,000 school officials at the Texas Association of School Administrators' annual midwinter conference, Scott said that he believed testing was "good for some things," but that in Texas it has gone too far. He said that he was frustrated with what he saw as his "complicitness" in the bureaucracy that testing and accountability systems have thrust on schools.

The remarks, which mirrored those he made at a State Board of Education meeting last week, have been his most forceful on the topic since the last legislative session, when lawmakers slashed state funding to public education by \$4 billion. The budget cuts have spurred at least four different lawsuits against the state from school districts arguing they have not received adequate funding to meet increasingly high state accountability standards. The cuts come as the state is rolling out a rigorous new state student assessment system in the spring.

Uncertainty around the implementation of STAAR — and whether students and teachers will be able to meet the new requirements with reduced resources — has caused deep anxiety around the state. With the new system, high school students' scores on exams will count 15 percent toward their final grades in the corresponding course for the first time.

Halfway through the school year, many districts are still determining how they will apply that rule to their grading policies, and the variations from district to district were the subject of a recent House Public Education Committee meeting. At the hearing, parents and school leaders expressed concern that the differing policies would hurt students, and questioned the need to apply the new rules in the first year of the test.

Scott said today that if he had the authority — which he said he doesn't — he would waive the 15-percent requirement in the first year as students adjusted to the test.

Scott, who received a standing ovation at the end of his address, also predicted that there would be a "backlash" against standardized testing during the next legislative session. But he said that the new tests, which are course-based rather than subject-based, would be better for students in the long run and that the transition provided a chance to create a new accountability system that accounts for "what happens on every single day in the life of a school besides testing day."

"We have a huge opportunity to move kids farther and better than we ever thought possible," Scott said. "And I do not want to blow that opportunity."