



MCALLEN AFT NEWS



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FRUSTRATIONS OVER NEW K-8 MATH TEKS

The education commissioner and TEA staff told the State Board of Education a number of options are under consideration to be added to previously announced changes to the testing and accountability systems in light of widespread reports of frustrated school administrators, teachers, parents and students due to the introduction this school year of a vastly change K-8 math curriculum (TEKS).

The Board was told that:

1. Moving the grades 3-8 math STAAR testing dates later in the school year and tweaks to the accountability system were among the possible options.
2. Off the table due to state and/or federal requirements—are eliminating the STARR

math tests entirely for the affected grade levels this school year, and removing the test results this school year, and removing the test results from accountability calculations.

3. The TEA is moving to do a better job, through improvements to the agency’s website and other resources, that will allow parents and educators to quickly locate information they need to help them in this difficult math TEKS transition year.

The problem is that teachers are being stressed, which is filtering down to students and their parents, in trying to teach the new curriculum to students for the first time this school year. That’s because, the board was told, the new curriculum pushes math skills

previously taught under the “old” math TEKS in one grade to lower grades under the “new” math TEKS.

This has resulted in teachers, this school year, having to teach students math skills that are based on skills that are now being taught in lower grades, and to which students this school year were not previously taught.

In addition, the Board heard many tales of students who did well in math in prior years, but who are now being reduced to tears because they are getting 40’s and 50’s

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on their math assignments, and of parents feeling helpless.

The commissioner's math-test delay comment prompted SBOE member Patricia Hardy (Ft. Worth) to ask that the pre-high school STAAR exams for science (grades 5 and 8) and social studies (grade 8) also be moved from April to May to give students more time to learn the material prior to testing.

The Commissioner's Response was the often-mentioned gaps caused by students starting this school year without having first been taught the math topics that have been moved to a lower grade and his belief, that although teachers are committed, that the level of instruction has "not been hitting the high mark."

TEACHERS UNDERVALUED

A new report from the National Council on Teacher Quality confirms what Texas teachers well know: Teachers are undervalued and deserve more competitive pay. The full report, "Smart Money: What Teachers Make, How Long It Takes and What It Buys Them is online

On average it takes teachers 24 years to reach their maximum pay; this timeframe is much longer than for other professions. The speed of income growth has a dramatic impact on how much a teacher will take home over the course of a career, which is a little-considered feature of teachers' pay packages that accounts for tremendous disparities in teachers' overall earnings. The range of time it takes to reach \$75,000, roughly the average maximum salary, ranges from seven years

in Boston to over 30 years in Wichita.

Because of such disparities, the 30-year, career income of a teacher can vary by more than a million dollars.

AFT President Randi Weingarten puts the teacher-pay issue in a wider perspective. Responding to the NCTQ study, issued on December 3, she said:

Teachers—the very people seeding the minds of future generations—deserve more competitive pay, a predictable and stable income, and a middle-class career path. That means competitive salaries that are predictable and stable and are not based on students' test scores or administrators' favoritism. Of course, pay is only one part of the equation; supporting teachers requires so much more. They need the time, tools, trust and, most important, the respect to be successful in their classrooms.

One of the biggest obstacles we face in public education is recruiting, retaining and supporting great teachers at hard-to-staff schools. The Economic Policy Institute, also cited by President Weingarten, recently updated its own analysis of the "Teacher Pay Penalty" with new data showing that:

—"Teachers earn less than other similar non-teacher college-educated workers."

—"The pay gap is largest for private sector teachers without union representation (-32.1 percent)."

—"In general, teacher pay disadvantages are mitigated if teachers are employed in the public sector—and more so if they have union representation."