

July 28, 2006

TO THE ADMINISTRATOR ADDRESSED:

The Texas Education Agency has a number of policies in place to monitor the activities of school districts to ensure compliance with state and federal laws. Among these policies are those designed to ensure the integrity of our state assessment and accountability systems. A recent study by an outside contractor has revealed substantial anomalies relating to the administration of the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). While these anomalies do not prove that any wrongdoing has occurred, they do raise questions that must be answered. The agency is taking this matter very seriously and will be taking action to ensure the continued integrity of our state assessment system.

Effective immediately, the agency will undertake the following actions:

- An independent task force will be appointed to examine security issues and oversee investigations of campuses and districts with testing irregularities.
- On-site investigations will be conducted to determine if the administration of the TAKS test was conducted in accordance with established state policies.
- The agency will hire ten new investigative staff to assist in this process and will use external staff as necessary.
- Future administrations of the TAKS test will be overseen by state-appointed monitors at the campus level, as warranted, to ensure compliance with state policies.
- Evidence of irregularities that indicates improper action on the part of district staff will be referred to the State Board for Educator Certification for disciplinary action.
- Additionally, sanctions may be imposed against campuses or districts, including the lowering of accreditation ratings.

School districts that have conducted themselves professionally and in compliance with state policies need not worry about these additional test security measures. School districts that are investigated and found to have conducted themselves in an ethical manner will receive a full public disclosure that they have done so.

I know that these measures I am implementing are uncomfortable, but I also know that our administrators, teachers and students who work hard and have conducted themselves properly want, and deserve, this cloud of suspicion to be eliminated. The Texas Education Agency is taking this matter very seriously and is enacting these measures as our highest priority. Texas has been well-served by our assessment and accountability systems and we cannot allow even the slightest hint of flaws within the system to go unaddressed.

I look forward to working with you as we undertake this important process. As always, if you have questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Shirley J. Neeley