

Outgoing Senator Shapiro Looks At Texas Education (2011-11-29)

Bill Zeeble, KERA News

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State Senator Florence Shapiro (R-Plano)

DALLAS, TX(KERA) - *Texas public schools are awaiting results from last month's brand-new STAAR test. The State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness replaces the old test and will become the required end-of-course exam. Outgoing Plano Senator Florence Shapiro, Chair of the Education Committee, sat down with KERA's Bill Zeeble to talk about this test and other education issues.*



Shapiro: We heard for years, "Get rid of the TAKS, get rid of the TAKS, it's only teaches to the test." This doesn't teach to the test anymore. It tests what you have learned in the curriculum. Unlike the TAKS test. The TAKS test went one year back, gave you testing on things you learned the year before, gave you testing on things you learned that year, and gave you testing on things that you might be learning in the future year. It was not adequate in my opinion. What we're doing here, is we're doing a linear test that truly does test on what the curriculum was in that class. You don't have to teach to the test anymore. You are going to be taking a test based on the curriculum. I think it's a much better product. Sure it'll take time to adjust. Every 10 years it takes that kind of time.

Zeeble: How long will adjustment time take?

Shapiro: It will take 2 to 2 and a half years to adjust. I know the Commissioner is already committed to leveling down what the expectations for the first year or two. He's going to work up the ladder closely as he sees where things are going. It happens every 10 years.

Zeeble: That's why this first year of the new test is a transition year. STAAR results won't count towards school ratings this year. 3rd through 9th graders will take it. The goal, says Shapiro, is to raise Texas education standards. Another approach towards that goal, says Shapiro? Charter Schools. They use state education dollars, but don't have to follow all the rules public schools must. Shapiro has long championed Charter Schools. Some have done well, others have not.

Shapiro: The variable in charters that don't succeed well is usually financial. There is usually some element of their program that does not work financially. So they cut corners and then

they eventually fall by the wayside, based on some financials that are not appropriate. The good charter schools, and I still say that about charter schools in general - the element that makes them more successful is that parental involvement. And they have chosen to move their students. That's the reason I think it's a success. That's why I think choice is such a big piece of parental involvement. A parent has made the determination that rather than send their student to a neighborhood school, for whatever reason, that parent has said I want my child to go to a different school. that element of parental involvement in our education system is the single most important element we need in the state of Texas, in my view.

Zeeble: Parental involvement in the local public school, charter or not, could have the same impact.

Shapiro: You're absolutely correct. Years ago, when George Bush was governor, I heard him say if we could legislate parental involvement we would have done it long ago.

Shapiro is also passionate about virtual classrooms, something parents may know less about.

Shapiro: We still have a very vibrant virtual school network. It's something we put in place several years ago. Students can go online and take course work. Many of the school districts have their own course work online. The state also has course work online. I happen believe that if you're really looking for quality, if you're really looking for equity, rather than financial equity we need academic equity. And what would be better in the state of Texas than the biology teacher who is teacher of the year and becoming a teacher for students all over the state of Texas.

Shapiro says making that great teacher available to all, online, and statewide, can provide that Academic equity.

Senator Shapiro leaves the legislature to become Executive Vice President, Corporate Communications, with Dallas-based Academic Partnerships. The business works with public colleges to put their best course-work online.

Email Bill Zeeble

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