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Jan. 25, 2008

## 2008 state testing brings enhanced test security

AUSTIN- Random test monitoring, seating charts, and scrambling the order of field test items on exams are among more than a dozen steps being taken by the Texas Education Agency this school year to enhance the security measures that surround the administration of the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills.

“We are actively stepping up test security measures to protect the reliability and integrity of our testing program. We want the public to be confident that our test results are an accurate reflection of student learning. Consequently, the Texas Education Agency this year is enacting at least 13 different measures to enhance our test security,” Commissioner of Education Robert Scott said.

Many of these measures will be used as soon as March 3 when TAKS testing begins in 2008. These steps are in addition to a number of actions taken in recent years that included creating an Office of Inspector General to investigate testing irregularity allegations and providing additional training for testing coordinators and administrators.

Many of the latest steps are aimed at making it tougher for students or adults to cheat on the test or will provide additional information that can be used in investigations if testing irregularity allegations arise.

This year the agency will:

- Assign test monitors to certain schools that have been rated *Academically Unacceptable* for multiple years or that received sanctions last year because of testing irregularities. TEA monitors will ensure that all testing procedures are followed;
- Conduct unannounced random visits to schools in all 20 areas of the state to confirm that testing procedures are followed;
- Place different scrambled groups of field test items in tests. By scrambling the position of the field test items, it will provide evidence if someone is copying off another student’s answer sheet. Students and teachers will not know which items on the exam will be graded and which questions will be field tested for possible use in future tests;
- Require districts to maintain seating charts for each test administration;
- Require districts to provide information on the seating charts that shows who administered the tests, which will be helpful information if possible irregularities are alleged;
- Ask students in grades 9, 10, and 11 to sign an honor statement prior to taking tests. The use of honor codes has been found to deter student-level cheating;

- Mandate districts to maintain test security materials, signed security oaths and seating charts for five years following a test administration so that they are available should an investigation be initiated;
- Require districts to inform the agency about any actions taken locally against educators and students who have violated testing procedures;
- Have the authority to assign an *Accredited Warned*, *Accredited-Probation* or *Accredited-Revoked* status to districts that fail to comply with test integrity requirements;
- Provide additional information in test administration manuals about the consequences for educators and students if cheating occurs;
- Issue a contract for the development of a transparent method to identify statistically unusual patterns of tests answers;
- Expedite investigations when testing irregularities are alleged;
- Provide additional training about test security measures to testing coordinators.

The state of Texas tests approximately 3 million students annually. Depending on the grade level, a student spends two to four days during the school year taking state mandated tests.

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