

## Daily Policy Digest

### Education Issues

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#### END-OF-COURSE EXAMS CAN IMPROVE TEXANS' HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION

Texas should replace the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test with a series of end-of-course exams in math, science, social studies and language arts in each grade of high school, says Brooke Dollens Terry, an education policy analyst at the Texas Public Policy Foundation.

End-of-course exams are statewide finals given at the end of each course to provide an in-depth measure of comprehension and skill attainment. As a result, educators can evaluate subject mastery, determine if the student is ready for the next level of the course, and more accurately measure student progress. Most importantly, end-of-course exams can diagnose weaknesses in academic curriculum and teaching before it is too late.

Research shows that end-of-course exams increase academic standards and student achievement, says Terry:

- Researcher John Bishop found that students in both New York and North Carolina, states with end-of-course exams, are about half a grade level ahead in math and science and almost two-thirds of a grade level ahead in reading among comparable students without such exams.
- New York's examinations are so well regarded for their rigor that the City University of New York uses their English end-of-course exam in place of their own placement test.
- There are as many as 15 states across the country and several countries in Europe and East Asia using end-of-course exams to evaluate student learning.

Ultimately, the rigor of Texas' academic curriculum is only as tough as the tests used to measure performance. If Texas lawmakers want to improve the quality of a high school education and ensure that all Texas students are taught a rigorous curriculum and have an incentive to learn, Texas should adopt end-of-course exams to better assess student learning and achievement, says Terry.

Source: Brooke Dollens Terry, "Improving the Quality of a High School Education Using End-of-Course Exams to Measure Student Performance," Texas Public Policy Foundation, December 19, 2006.

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