

Testimony of Richard Marquez  
Texans Can!/America Can!  
Page # 1

Select Committee on Public School Accountability  
April 14, 2008

**Ladies and Gentlemen:**

We at the CAN! Academies appreciate the opportunity to present our suggested changes to the State Accountability System for Charters. We believe in the need for accountability, especially one that takes into consideration all the different entities that must meet the standards.

We, as you may know, are a charter for at-risk high school students (dropouts). We enroll on the average 4,600 students in our ten schools statewide. We are not going to use this vehicle to describe the dropout problem in Texas or nationally. We would rather like to spend this time outlining our suggested improvements to the present system.

**Student Growth Model.**

Presently the accountability model places us in the alternative schools structure. That system has served alternative schools well. It however, has limitations due to the fact that we are still held accountable for Continuous Progress Monitoring caused by low scores.

Our system and other alternative systems do not have the same students enrolled year to year so Continuous Progress Monitoring merely becomes a constant reporting and planning issue that has no educational value. Our test scores are always going to be low and we will consistently miss Adequate Yearly Progress, except for possibly making Safe Harbor now and then. This is not a negative statement or one that would denote defeatism but merely a reality related to the circumstances of our students. Some of these students enroll and leave as many as six times before they graduate. Some of them enroll, leave, and never return.

Our average student, supposedly at the high school level, enters reading at the 4<sup>th</sup> grade level and they are expected to pass the TAKS test by the end of the year. It will take these students up to six different times to eventually graduate.

A better system of accountability would be one tied to the growth of each student. That system could be readily implemented using the scale scores found in the present system. Every student who enters our schools who has attended a Texas school previously has a scale score for each test taken. The next series of tests would create a new scale score which would be compared to the previous score and would verify growth or a lack of it.

This method would mean that continuous progress would become highly individualized and make everyone accountable not only to the state but to each of our parents.

### **One Size Doesn't Fit All.**

The Growth Model is obviously our first priority but there are other areas where the present model does not consider the unique issue related to the At-Risk High School Charters.

We are always on some type of state list due to the nature of our at-risk student population. As an example, one present issue in Special Education whereby schools and districts are placed on a watch list due to having a large percentage of their students in special education.

We are an open charter and take every student that wishes to attend our schools. As a result, our special education population can be as high as twenty percent at any one time. That means that we are viewed as trying to either circumvent testing issues or get more money from the state. Anyone who has ever worked in or around Special Education will tell you that no amount of money is worth the added effort required to meet IDEA standards.

To try and hold our percentage to the state requirement we would have to screen students and either deny them entrance or place them on a waiting list until another special education student leaves to make room for them. That, I am sure, is not the intent of the Law. This is but one of a list of other issues affecting our ability to better serve the students that we have selected to serve.

I believe as you move forward in your work to make the Texas Accountability Model a strong, equitable, and fair system, that you will consider making changes to the overall laws and rules affecting our type of school. We further hope that you will allow us to put together a comprehensive plan outlining those changes.

**Richard A. Marquez**  
2687 Deephill Circle  
Dallas, Texas 75233  
Phone: (214)333-3852 Fax: (214)333-0929  
Email: ramarquez@marqcominc.com

## QUALIFICATIONS

In the past thirty years, I have had the opportunity to work in every possible area of the education business. That experience has given me a unique viewpoint as it relates to the total workings of the system and the solutions needed. As a creative and innovative leader, I have been able to initiate many changes that are now considered educational norms. My experience generating funds, my work in the Nations Capital, along with my time as a school Superintendent and now as President of my own company further accentuate my multi-faceted abilities.

## EDUCATION

1971-1973 A.A. Liberal Arts, El Centro College, Dallas, Texas  
1973-1975 B.A. History, Spanish minor, North Texas State University, Denton, Texas  
1976-1978 M.A. Public school Administration, NTSU, Denton, Texas

## EMPLOYMENT

*March 2007 to Present – President and Chief Executive Officer of America Can! / Texans Can!, Dallas, Texas*

As President and Chief Executive Officer of the organization, I provide overall leadership and direction for America Can! by functioning as the day-to-day principal administrator of the affairs of the organization, including instructional, organizational and financial management, planning and policy direction, as well as fundraising and coalition building.

*2000 to Present – President of Marqcom Inc.*

Since the establishment of the company, I have been responsible for all facets of the business. The company has progressed to the point where it now owns the intellectual rights to four unique educational processes and four books. The clientele during this period have been schools and districts from across the country: Arkansas, Arizona, California, Florida, Illinois, Nevada, and Texas. During this time, I have participated in a number of grants to fund educational innovations.

*1997 to 2000 – Educational Consultant.*

As a self-employed consultant, I contracted and provided services to a number of companies and organizations: Hannel Educational Consulting, Phoenix, Arizona; Kaplan Corp., New York City, Dallas, Ft Worth; Grand Prairie SER; Breakthrough Corp., Iowa City, Iowa; The University of North Texas; Dallas County Community College District; and a number of schools and districts across the country. The work with SER was development, implementation, and funding of their alternative schools.

*1995 to 1997 – Superintendent, Harlandale Independent School Dist., San Antonio, Texas*

As Superintendent, I was responsible for the total workings of the district. During my tenure, the district achieved a fund balance and had zero findings on an 80 million dollar budget. All facilities were upgraded, all roofs repaired, a new addition was built, and a new sports complex was developed without the need for a bond election. The academic achievement level improved to the point where in subsequent years the district achieved recognized status.

*1991 to 1995 – Area 4 Superintendent, Dallas Independent School Dist., Dallas, Texas*  
As the Area Superintendent, I was responsible for the supervision of 20 schools, their Principals, Staffs, and Students. During my first year, the area was considered the weakest in the Dallas school district. In the years that followed the area had the largest gains and to this day is still considered one of the best areas in the school district. All the successes were achieved using team building and total quality management. Through an agreement with the University of Texas at Arlington, I was able to place a social worker or intern on each campus, which was a unique approach for any urban district.

*1989 to 1991 – Special Adviser to the Secretary of Education, United States Department of Education, Washington D.C.*

In the position of Special Adviser, I had responsibility for the national dropout problem. I developed the management by objectives process to address the second national goal of a 90% graduation rate. I established the first long range grant of 32 million dollars, to study possible dropout prevent solutions. Until then all grants had only been for a year. I also participated in the development of the presidential order opening the office of Educational Excellence for Hispanic American, and served as the Acting Director of the office for a short time.

*1985 to 1989 – Principal, Sunset High School, Dallas Independent School Dist., Dallas, Texas*

During my time at Sunset, we were able to increase the graduation rate from below 40% to over 70%. We established the first dual credit course that allowed students to gain college credit while attending high school. We started the first alumni association to raise funds for the school. The school store became a true entrepreneurial center handling all fundraisers and student sales and grossed over \$200,000 annually. We opened our own infant care facility in a local church through a partnership with the YMCA. I wrote and received a grant from the Mobile Oil Foundation to fund the first use of a social worker to work on dropout prevention. Our Community Advisory Committee generated money and support for all our initiatives. The school and myself were featured on the national media and press, and I appeared on the Today Show, the Oprah Winfrey Show, and the Cristina Show to name a few.

*1983 – 1985 Principal, Anson Jones Elem. Dallas ISD*

*1980 – 1983 Assistant Principal, Skyline High School Dallas ISD*

*1978 – 1980 Assistant Principal, Greiner Junior High School Dallas ISD*

*1975 – 1978 Social Studies Middle School Teacher*

### Texans Can! Mission Statement

To provide a second chance for at-risk youth and their families to achieve economic independence and hope for a better life through relationship-based education and training.

*In Texas, one student drops out of school every four minutes.*

*Two of every three Texas prisoners are high school dropouts.*

*High school dropouts will cost the US more than \$325 billion over their lifetimes.*

- Dallas Can! Academy was established in 1985 as a school serving juvenile offenders, providing a remedial education.
- Dallas Can! Academy became a charter school in 1995, offering high school graduation to at-risk students.
- Today, Texans Can! Academies serve over 4,700 at-risk students in ten charter schools: (4) Dallas, (2) Fort Worth, (2) Houston, (1) Austin, (1) San Antonio.
- To date over 50,000 students have been served in one capacity or another over our 23-year history.
- Students must pass the state exit exam to graduate.
- Texans Can! graduated 934 students in 2007.
- Texans Can! currently operates two Early Childhood Development Centers for the kids of our kids (Dallas and San Antonio) and we are looking to expand to more of our sites.
- Teacher salaries are comparable to all of our surrounding districts.
- There is one student advisor for every 90 students.
- We receive approximately \$1,200 less per student than regular public schools, and receive no monies to maintain our facilities.
- Twenty-five (25%) of our operating budget comes from fundraising.

Texans Can! has a distinctive model of staff organization and unique philosophy of removing obstacles to facilitate learning. The common thread in the background of most of our students is they find themselves in overwhelming situations. Not knowing where to turn for help, they often give up on the one thing that will give them a better future – their education.

To raise expectations of themselves and help instill a strong value system, each student works with a teacher and a highly trained counselor. While the teacher teaches, the counselor aggressively addresses problems that students face in their personal lives, such as arranging daycare for students' children and locating safe havens for students who are homeless or live in gang-ridden neighborhoods.

While the State of Texas averages 442 students for every counselor, at the Can! academies one counselor works with only 90 students! This vital support system helps ensure that students can focus on their education and build their expectations for success.