

My name is Vernita Grimes, and I am a recent retiree from the Houston ISD. As a 40-year veteran of Elementary Education, I served as a classroom teacher and then as a Title I Instructor and Test Coordinator.

As a Title I teacher, I provided remedial instruction to 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade students who failed the TAKS test the previous school year. I was responsible for supervising, managing and administering the TAKS test --- and all of the other tests that the school district required. Instead of being available to teach, I attended inservices, prepared teachers on how to give a test, and handled all aspects of test administration. **I was frustrated that my students did not receive the valuable instruction that would have brought their skills up to par so they could be more successful.**

Many other teachers also faced frustrations and complained about the stresses and pressures that they felt from the principal. Ms. Davis, a 5th grade Social Studies teacher lost sleep and suffered from severe headaches. She consulted her doctor who advised her to resign because she was at risk of having a heart attack or a stroke. This young teacher with a promising career left the profession because of the TAKS.

As for the tests themselves, I am not convinced that they provide a truly reliable “assessment” of all students’ “knowledge and skills”. For example, I vividly recall a 4th grade bilingual student named Jose, who took the TAKS in Spanish and passed it-- despite the fact that he did not read formal Spanish very well—and he read absolutely no English. On the other hand, there were students who did well academically in their class work, and yet they scored poorly on the TAKS. Also, on the writing portion of the test, students are told “to just write”—with no regard for the punctuation or grammar rules—which underscores the teachers’ concerns about basic skills being left by the way side. Students are being cheated out of learning the broader range of basic skills that would provide a solid foundation for their future success.

I firmly believe that Jose—and all of our children—deserve a quality education that ought to be experienced in a healthy and engaging environment that fosters their enthusiasm for learning. ***This should not be sacrificed for the sake of high-stakes testing.*** We need an accountability system that encourages students and teachers to be fearlessly creative in the pursuit of knowledge. Thank You!