

From: Commissioner
Sent: Thursday, August 18, 2011 5:28 PM
To: arne.duncan@ed.gov; chiefs@ed.gov
Subject: Regarding your comments about Texas students

Mr. Secretary,

I have read your recent comments criticizing Texas public education, and I am disappointed that you have never raised your concerns during any of our personal conversations. If you had, I may have been able to correct any misunderstanding you have about Texas public schools and the efforts of the 333,000 teachers and the 4.8 million students who have been striving to meet increasing standards and graduation requirements.

Your pity is misplaced and demeans the hard work that is taking place in schools across Texas. Texas students are doing very well and in many cases outperforming their national peers. Since you appear to be misinformed about the achievements of Texas educators and students I would ask that you consider the following information:

In 2009, Texas ranked 7th in a 26 state comparison of the only states reporting four-year on-time graduation rates. That year Texas' on-time graduation rate was 80.6%. The Texas on-time graduation rate for 2010 is now 84.3%, an amazing 3.7 percentage point increase in a single year on the dropout indicator that you are now requiring all states to report to the Department.

Texas is ranked 13th in Ed Week's Quality Counts report. Quality Counts gave Texas an "A" in "Standards, Assessment and Accountability," and an "A" in "Transitions and Alignment" of the Texas system with college and career readiness. This year's graduating class is the first to graduate under Texas' required 4x4 graduation requirements (four years of math, science, English language arts and social studies) and we are already seeing great things from the class of 2011.

The Texas class of 2011 posted a record-high math score on the ACT college entrance exam. The Texas average math score was 21.5 and was higher than the national average of 21.1. ACT scores from 2007 to 2011 showed increases in all four subjects.

The 2009 NAEP Science results were impressive, as well. Texas' African American eighth-grade students earned the highest score in the nation and our Hispanic eighth-grade students were eighth. Only eighth-grade students attending the Department of Defense schools scored higher than Texas' white students who were tied with white students in Massachusetts. On the fourth-grade test, Texas' African American students out-performed their peers in every state except Virginia and those students attending Department of Defense Schools. Texas' fourth-grade white students were ranked third behind only Virginia and Massachusetts.

We are also a leader in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) education. Texas has established 59 STEM schools, 7 STEM professional

development centers and is a leading state in creating a national STEM network of states that want to pursue STEM education reform. Texas' STEM reform began in 2005, long before your administration decided to model this and other aspects of your reform agenda on the efforts that have been taking place in Texas for nearly a decade.

Finally, I'm not sure where you are getting your information regarding class sizes in Texas public schools. Texas is experiencing a four-year trend of class sizes getting smaller across the board in both elementary grades and in core subjects in high school. If you would like to see the actual data, I would be more than happy to provide it for you.

As you can see, Texas has a strong record, and I am proud of the accomplishments of Texas educators and students. It is clear that they have risen to the challenge of higher standards and expectations placed before them. Rather than simply talking about education reform, Texas policy makers, educators and students have delivered. I look forward to seeing the student performance results of your efforts to centralize more control of public education in Washington, D.C.

Robert Scott
Commissioner of Education