

- SUBJECT:** Assessment of public school students in social studies in the fifth grade
- COMMITTEE:** Public Education — favorable, without amendment
- VOTE:** 6 ayes — Grusendorf, Branch, Eissler, Hochberg, B. Keffer, Mowery  
0 nays  
3 absent — Oliveira, Delisi, Dutton
- WITNESSES:** For — Vernon Cannamore; Mapra Gentry; Pat Hardy; Mary Lynn Johnson; Rosemary Morrow; Debbie Pennington; Mary Smith  
  
Against — Holly Eaton, Texas Classroom Teachers Association; Shanna Weisfeld, Texas State Teachers Association; Jo Hannah Whitsett, Association of Texas Professional Educators  
  
On — Lynda Carter, Texas Elementary Principals & Supervisors Association; Randy Pollock, Texas Association of School Boards and Alamo Heights Independent School District
- BACKGROUND:** Education Code, ch. 39, governs public school accountability, including the assessment of academic skills. Students in the fifth grade, unless they are exempted, are assessed or tested in mathematics and reading and must perform satisfactorily to be advanced to the sixth grade.  
  
Sec. 39.023 requires that students be tested in reading annually in grades three through nine and social studies in grades eight and ten.
- DIGEST:** *(The author plans to offer a floor substitute, which is analyzed in lieu of the original version of HB 31:)*  
  
The floor substitute for HB 31 would add sec. 39.0232 to the Education Code and require students in grade five to be assessed in social studies through the administration of the reading assessment test.  
  
If a student did not perform satisfactorily on the social studies portion of the reading assessment instrument, the student would not be kept from being promoted to the sixth grade.

Selections included in the reading assessment test for fifth graders would include a portion containing historical selections related to social studies, with an emphasis on primary source documents.

The commissioner would determine the portion of selections to segregate in the test for purposes of assessing essential knowledge and skills in social studies for students in the fifth grade, and would have to develop procedures for reporting results of student performance on the social studies portion of the test.

The commissioner would require the SBOE to administer the reading assessment test that included the social studies-related selections to students in the fifth grade no later than the 2008-2009 school year. The Texas Education Agency would include in the evaluation of school districts, campuses and open-enrollment charter school performance, the results of student performance on the test no later than the 2010-2011 school year. By the 2010-2011 school year, the SBOE would have to administer a test to students in a special education program that corresponded to the requirements of the bill for assessment of the essential knowledge and skills in social studies in fifth grade. By the 2012-2013 school year, TEA would include the results of the test in a special education program when evaluating the performance of school districts, campuses, and open-enrollment charter schools.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2005.

**SUPPORTERS  
SAY:**

Current law requires the teaching of social studies in kindergarten through 12th grade. However, it is the only foundation course not tested at the elementary school level. Because there is no accountability measure at the elementary school level, the time allotted to social studies instruction is sacrificed for TAKS-related courses. This problem becomes more acute in schools whose scores on the currently tested courses are below the acceptable ranking. The floor substitute for HB 31 would not add another TAKS test for students, but it would embed the social studies concepts within the existing reading TAKS test given to fifth graders. It would ensure the instruction of fundamental understanding of citizenship, democratic values and skills from elementary through high school.

The bill would allow for the reading portion of the TAKS test to contain stories that related to social studies, including stories about the country's founders. Using primary source documents, including the Texas

Constitution or the Gettysburg Address, would enrich the curriculum and would instill concepts necessary to be good citizens.

It is the duty of the state to prepare thoughtful, active citizens who understand the importance of patriotism and can function productively in a free enterprise society with appreciation for basic democratic values of their state and national heritage.

With the diversity of the school population in Texas increasing rapidly each year, it is imperative that the core concepts and values of a democratic republic are taught at the elementary level and are emphasized each year after that.

Most teachers teach both social studies and reading. If teachers are teaching what they are supposed to be teaching, and the school has a balanced curriculum, then they are already teaching both anyway. Many schools are using social studies stories to teach reading but this bill would ensure that it would happen statewide.

**OPPONENTS  
SAY:**

The bill would require English teachers to teach social studies. Texas has an elaborate curriculum for every subject and the TAKS tests are designed to coordinate with each curriculum. Incorporating social studies into the reading test would essentially be merging the two subjects. It would be difficult to assess students on each subject because they would be treated as one. A student potentially could fail the social studies reading portion of the reading test and still be promoted to the sixth grade, but the failing grade would be on the student's permanent record.

**OTHER  
OPPONENTS  
SAY:**

The bill is a good first step, but it should be implemented sooner than 2008-2009, possibly within the next two years.