



e-xtra Special

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Message from the Director

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Dates to Remember:

**Staff Development/
Student Holiday**

February 20, 2009

Spring Break

March 16—20, 2009

**Staff Development/
Student Holiday**

April 10, 2009

Happy Valentines! It seems like it’s been a long time since I’ve talked with you. This seems to be a really busy year with lots of news everywhere. We have a new president. The state legislature is in session. Everyone seems to be really focused on education and I think that is a good thing. I’m especially looking forward to President Obama’s Recovery and Reinvestment Act—it is proposing significant increases in funding for students with disabilities. Maybe I can get a new, bigger purse...I sure hope so.

Each year I have focused on some topic of interest to us as special educators. This year I’m looking at a report from the Public Education Visioning Institute entitled “*Creating a New Vision for Public Education in Texas.*” This is an especially timely piece as we seem to be at a historical point where we must critically examine all of our major educational programs and values.

Last month I looked at the *vision* that this group developed. This month I want to focus on their discussion of *Learning Standards* which is one of their basic principles regarding education. Here’s what they say about *Learning Standards*:

The new digital environment demands new learning standards for students so that they will have the values and capabilities to live, learn, and earn in a free society surrounded by a world that is truly global, connected, and increasingly competitive in scope and character (p. 16).

In their discussion, the authors state that learning standards should be “clear, attainable, and high enough to provide for a system...where all can experience success and challenge” (p. 16). This has always been something that we struggled with for our students in special education. It’s often difficult to find that critical area where our students are clearly challenged but are still able to experience success. I see this as almost a “pendulum area” for our students. In the past, I don’t think we demanded enough of our students. While they were usually successful, I don’t think we had enough rigor in our instruction. Now it seems that we may have too much rigor, and are expecting some of our students to meet standards that are too high. Our current state test system isn’t set up to demonstrate the progress that our students are actually making. I am hopeful that the reauthorization of NCLB (or a new education law) will better address these issues for our students.

The authors also discuss the importance of the “development of the whole person” and the need to “respect and value students ‘multiple intelligences’ and talents (pg.16).” While these statements are true for all students, I think they are *critical* components in the education of students with a disability.

We are at a point where society has made drastic changes in the last century. Our students deserve learning standards that will allow them to receive an education that will enable them to be successful members of our global society. This will require huge changes in what and how we do things. Hang on, it’s going to be a fun ride!

Betty



Making Appropriate Assessment Decisions

Many times ARD Committees struggle with deciding which TAKS test is appropriate for students in special education. TEA has published a manual which is devoted entirely to this issue. If you are interested in reviewing this document, it can be found at: http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/resources/ard/2008_2009_ARD_Manual.pdf

Basically, this process requires ARD Committees to look at several key issues when deciding which test is most appropriate:

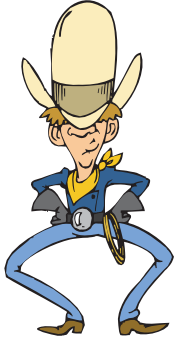
- ✓ Review the student's IEP goals and objectives. Do the goals/objectives reflect mostly enrolled grade level TEKS, or are they reflecting a modified curriculum? Students who are primarily on or near grade level need to take TAKS or TAKS Accommodated. Students whose IEP reflects a **significantly modified** curriculum may be eligible for TAKS Modified or TAKS Alternate.
- ✓ Review the student's modifications and accommodations. If the ARD Committee is recommending modifications or accommodations to the TAKS test, these modifications and accommodations must be **routinely used in classroom assessment** and allowed by the TEA. (See manual for complete list of allowable accommodations and modifications.)
- ✓ Review the student's previous TAKS results. The student's performance on previous assessments can be a guide in making this decision. If a student was successful on a higher level assessment (TAKS, TAKS-Acc), then there should be no reason for the student to take a lower level assessment (TAKS-M, TAKS-Alt). However, in the same manner, the fact that a student was not successful on a higher level assessment cannot be the sole reason to change assessments.
- ✓ Students who take TAKS-M and TAKS-Alt must meet **TEA participation requirements** for these tests. The law also limits the number of students taking off level assessments. It should be noted that students **whose eligibility is learning disabled can never take TAKS-Alt**. This test is designed for students with a significant cognitive disability. By definition, students with a learning disability cannot have a significant cognitive disability.

Regional Day School Students Participate in Distance Learning



The elementary Regional Day School for the Deaf program at Porter Elementary is participating in a distance learning connection with the Texas School for the Deaf in Austin. Our students are able to have an American Sign Language story signed to them each week. This is a unique opportunity for our students to interact with the storyteller in Austin by asking and answering questions about the story she 'tells' (signs) to them. The book is projected behind the storyteller so that the students can see the pictures while she signs the story.





Dear
Tex

This column features questions and answers with Tex Chex, a noted authority on special education issues.

Dear **Tex**,

What are you hearing about education **Tex**? What's happening in Washington? Is it going to be good for us? What about No Child Left Behind? What about IDEA? Tell me what you know **Tex**.

Your friend,

Luke N Forward

Dear Luke,

Let me just say that **Tex** is on the inside track of the news. In fact, **Tex** was actually invited to the big Super Bowl party at the White House! (Well, maybe it was a big white house in Watauga, but **Tex** had a great time at his Super Bowl party). Anyway, **Tex** likes what he is hearing from Washington. IDEA funding seems to be an important part of the President's Recovery and Reinvestment Act. While preliminary figures showed that BISD would receive an additional \$2 million in IDEA funds, the Senate took a big hunk of money back. Who knows what the final version will look like, but **Tex** thinks there will be some additional money and that's good.

However, don't count your money before it comes—the Feds are really good at tying strings around how it can be spent—and it hasn't happened yet! As to your other questions, **Tex** doesn't think that much will happen on either law until the Recovery Act is addressed. The new Secretary of Education seems to have a pretty good picture of reality and **Tex** thinks that is good. **Tex** will keep his eyes open for news and will let you know whenever he hears something.

Your friend **Tex**

Dear **Tex**,

Tex help me understand all that SSI stuff. Last year if a student was in special education and in grades 3, 5, or 8, they had to pass TAKS or TAKS-Accommodated to go to the next grade level. If they took TAKS-M or TAKS-Alt, they did not have to pass the test to go to the next grade level. Are the same rules still in effect?

Luke N Back

Dear Luke,

Gee whiz, **Tex** is answering letters from Luke today. **Tex** really likes your name...it makes him think of one of his favorite country songs! You've asked a really good question Luke. Here's another example of what we did last year is not what we do this year. This year, students who take TAKS-M must follow all the SSI rules regarding retaking the test. TAKS-Alt students still do not participate in SSI.

Now Luke, **Tex** will answer your next question... **Tex** is also a mind reader! Your question is, "If a student fails TAKS-Accommodated, can the ARD committee switch them to TAKS-M?" **Tex** has the official answer from the guru and guru-ettes at TEA. Here's what they say:

Students may change from TAKS-Acc to TAKS-M between testing administrations, but the decision should not be made just because the student failed TAKS-Acc on the first try. The type of test taken should be reflective of the instruction the student is receiving, as noted in the participation requirements for each test. If there has been an ARD decision that has changed the type of instruction that the student is receiving, then there is the possibility of changing the test type.

So listen Luke, **Tex** thinks you better be really, really careful about changing tests. It's all about instruction...

Your friend **Tex**

Produced by **BISD Special Education
Department**

6125 E. Belknap
Haltom City, Texas 76117

Phone: 817-547-5740
Fax: 817-547-5723



Spring Autism Staff Training Focusing on Video Modeling

Most children learn social skills through experience and interactions with others. Because children with autism have difficulty learning appropriate social skills from watching others, they must be taught these unspoken rules of behavior. Studies have shown that students with autism are strong visual learners and benefit from using video to teach appropriate social skills. By using a Small Wonder video camera, available at all BISD campuses, teachers can create short videos that illustrate students using proper behaviors. Video modeling can be used to teach appropriate social behavior such as taking turns, greetings, asking for help and exhibiting appropriate hall behavior. Videos can also be used to teach daily routines such as “my school day,” “changing classes in middle school” or “lining up for lunch.” Many young children with autism do not know how to play with toys appropriately. Because young children enjoy television, video modeling can be used to teach preschoolers how to play.

Bring a Small Wonder camera and join in the learning! Sessions will be at the Shannon Learning Center in the computer lab from 4:00—5:30. On March 10, video modeling overview and examples will be presented by Patsy Stanley and MaryAnn Welborn. Cheryl McKnight will provide basic technical training on how to use the Small Wonder cameras and create a short video using movie maker. On April 21, Cheryl McKnight will lead participants in practicing additional editing techniques using Movie Maker program.

Special Services Department Mission Statement

The mission of the special services department is to provide and support customized educational opportunities for students, staff, and families.

Special Services Staff

- * Betty Grubbs, Ph.D.— Director
- * Cindy Dubuis, Consultant Elementary
- * Patti Mullen, Consultant Preschool
- * Patsy Stanley, Consultant Middle School
- * Margaret Sanders, Consultant High School
- * Nora Fabela, Consultant Bilingual /ESL
- * Judy Beverly, Coordinator Health Services
- * Cheryl Oberkircher, LSSP
- * Barbara Creason, LSSP
- * Teresa Miller, Ph.D. , LSSP
- * Laurel Strahan, Ph.D., LSSP
- * Mark Schmidt, Ph.D., LSSP
- * Jamie Thomas, Special Education Supervisor
- * Mary May, Social Worker
- * Mary Sue Blackwell, Deaf Education Supervisor
- * Clara Fitzsimmons, LSSP Intern
- * Kelsey Martin, LSSP Intern

e-xtra Special
HERO



*Special Services salutes the following
for efforts that go “above and beyond:”*

Ellen Bell

**Associate Superintendent for
Curriculum and Instruction**

*for her leadership to the
Special Services Department*