

August 4, 2011

Dear Stonewall Parents,

As many of you know last week the Texas Education Agency (TEA) released their state accountability ratings and Stonewall's rating dropped two levels from 'exemplary' to 'acceptable'. This drop in our rating was not unexpected. The purpose of this letter is to briefly explain the change in the state's school accountability system and the effect it had on our school.

According to the TEA's testing program, 2011 was the year that all students would be tested on grade level and that all student test scores would count. This included our small group of Deaf Education students who have previously taken a modified version of the TAKS test. This is the first year that the state has aggregated their scores with the general education population.

As background, data is gathered and aggregated for each student who takes the TAKS test. Each data point is categorized and considered as a separate student population. These categories are: **ethnicity, economic status, whether or not a student is in special education, language, and gender**. All of our students typically fall under two or more populations. The accountability ratings depend on how each student population scores, not just the school's overall scores. Also, prior to this year, each student group must also have at least 30 students for that population to be counted in the rating.

At Stonewall, a few things contributed to the decline in our rating:

- **Counting all student TAKS scores** - Historically, not all of our student populations were counted toward our overall rating, specifically Deaf Education, given they were smaller in size. That student population has grown over time. That, coupled with the TEA's requirement to count all TAKS scores for all students, impacted our rating.
- **Modified TAKS test** - Our Deaf Education students currently take a modified or accommodated TAKS test per the requirement that all students must participate in TAKS testing. This is not unusual. However, the challenge is that many of these students have learning differences that are beyond just being hearing impaired placing them two to three years behind their mainstream peers. Yet, they are expected to meet the academic expectations at their grade level on a standardized test.

I have been working with our Site-Based-Decision-Making (SBDM) committee as well as with our Representative Dan Branch, chairman of the legislature's education

committee, to express our concerns regarding the TAKS testing of our deaf students. My position is that I believe that it would better serve those students to be tested in a way that would measure growth rather than a pass or fail examination. We take these issues seriously and have been actively addressing them.

Stonewall's overall performance remains at a high level. Our reading and math scores continue to be much higher than the district's scores and are on par with many other schools in the state. Student TAKs commended rate continues to grow and is among the highest in Dallas ISD. The Deaf Education program is one of our best assets; it makes Stonewall unique among the district's elementary schools, and the exposure to Deaf culture helps our children to one day become understanding and tolerant adults.

As a school, we will continue to strive to provide a quality education for *all* of our students. And, we will continue to work through the district and our elected representatives to voice our concern to create an equitable testing program.

Thank you for your continued support and please don't hesitate to call me with any questions.

Sincerely,

Olivia Henderson, Principal
Stonewall Jackson Elementary