



Position on Statewide Assessments

November 2012

With the ever increasing demand for accountability placed upon the nation's public schools, we continue to witness the burdening pressure of high-stakes formal testing of students. These circumstances have changed the culture of public education in a variety of ways. Being a public school, Thomas Edison students participate in these assessments; yet, for years the school has taken a fundamental approach that often differs from this new national norm. It is our intent to more clearly inform our public on some basic key points to our philosophical approach.

Multiple Assessment Measures: Generally accepted laws of statistics purport that the greater the sample size of data, the more accurate that data becomes. TECS uses a variety of measurements to assess individual student progress and overall school improvement. The Utah State Office of Education (USOE) looks nearly singularly at state Criterion Referenced Test (CRT) scores. This assessment serves as a snapshot of a moment in time for a student and a school. Though useful and valid, when used alone CRT results fall short of creating an accurate and reliable picture of the reality of a student's and school's performance. TECS uses CRT results along with a variety of other measures, creating a clearer understanding of our progress and performance. Even though TECS generally tests well on the CRT, below are a few other data points of interest, all taken from nationally used and recognized assessments unaffiliated with the CRT.

- TECS students grow on average 2.6 grade levels in spelling, ending each year spelling 3 years above grade level.
- TECS students read on average nearly 2 years above grade level.
- TECS students complete our aggressive homework standards on average at a rate of 91%.
- Returning TECS students score higher on average on every standard assessment than new students.
- TECS has a 94% parental satisfaction rate.

Low-Stakes / Low-Pressure: We believe that testing should be a byproduct of the instructional program rather than the focus. The pressure produced by such emphasis on a single assessment has pushed public schools to adopt the now wide-spread practice of "teaching to the test." Schools take anywhere from weeks to months preparing for the CRT, borrowing valuable instructional time and purchasing specialized software to do so. Furthermore, the pressure to score well and the stress it incurs filters from the state, to the school, to the teacher, and ultimately to the student. The unfortunate yet true effect is that test scores have replaced student learning as the top priority, making the child the decisive victim.

TECS's philosophy and practice over our decade-long existence has been to never teach to the test. Our teachers teach the curriculum, holding all to high standards, and then let the tests take care of themselves. Low stakes. Low pressure. This common sense yet unique approach provides a more realistic rather than inflated measure of student performance.

Maximizing Instructional Time: TECS maximizes each minute of instructional time entrusted to us. As many sacrifice time for test preparation, we don't. When pressed to consider changing our practices to appear more successful through inflated CRT scores, we press back by asking the question... at what expense? Language Arts? Math? Science? Music? We prefer the inverse approach; we spend time on the instruction of students at the potential expense of inflated test scores. The effective teaching of every subject on every day trumps any other potential distraction.

Thomas Edison Charter Schools take seriously the progress of each individual student. We are confident in the success of our philosophies, curriculum, and educational program, and the data from a variety of measures confirms it. We continue to invite current parents and other members of the community to spend some time in our schools and observe the consistent quality found in the details of our daily operations—guaranteed in each class each day. Prioritizing students above all else, TECS will continue to serve the nearly 800 Cache Valley families who have learned for themselves the immense benefits gained from this exceptional program.

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