

Dear FWISD School Board and Administration,

My name is Adam Boyette. I have a third grader and a first grader at Bruce Shulkey Elementary School. I am a member of the “world famous” Sugar Daddies and my wife and I are both members of the school PTA. We are active participants in our children’s school and their education because we know how important education is to their future and how critical our involvement is. Both of our children have been identified as Gifted and Talented and we have open and supportive relationships with their teachers and principal. We consider ourselves partners with these professionals in the education of our children. Every paper that comes home is reviewed thoroughly by each parent.

We are dismayed with the tests known as “short cycle assessments” or SCAs. Our problems are with the frequency of the tests as well as the poorly-written questions. Many times the question seems intent on tricking the students into the wrong answer. The questions are poorly written, the instructions are ambiguous, and the answer choices are often so close as to be indistinguishable. My daughter comes home discouraged by a low score. We go over the exam with her and have trouble telling her how she could have done better. Typically when a problem arises, we are able to consult the teacher and come up with a plan to support and supplement the classroom lessons. We have been unable to do this with the SCAs.

Again and again we have been stumped by poorly written questions. We have compiled several examples of these, which are attached. One particular math area we’ve observed weaknesses in are the test questions pertaining to rounding and estimating. When the question asks for an answer that is “about” and not “exact,” care must be taken. A well-prepared question should give the same answer if there is more than one way to get to the answer. For example, 15 plus 16 equal 31. If 30 and 40 are choices, what is the student to choose? If they’ve been instructed to round these numbers to 20 first, they would get 40. This is absurd as 31 is much closer to 30 than 40. We have seen this issue several times. A better prepared question would avoid this discrepancy.

We have observed many careless grammatical errors in these district-authored tests. Had we been keeping them since the start of the school year, I could provide more specific examples. One example I did save uses let’s with an apostrophe, when the correct word is lets without an apostrophe. This is particularly alarming as this error occurred on a test that included grammar questions. As parents, we notice that our children often learn by example. We expect the district authored tests on grammar to be free of grammatical errors. We expect more from our students when they’re completing assignments and tests. We should certainly expect more from our professional administrators.

Tests are supposed to assess where students are in their learning so the teacher can monitor and adjust her teaching and so parents can be aware of weaknesses that need to be addressed. However, the frequency of the SCAs, every three weeks, does not allow for re-teaching of

concepts missed. The student must proceed. This does not allow the teacher to scaffold the students' learning, and therefore students are asked to move beyond without a firm foundation.

Even more troubling is the fact that these SCAs are taking from our students opportunities to learn and thrive. Each year our school has three opportunities for students to work on a larger project, either by themselves or with a group: the history fair, the science fair, and the Invention Convention. Normally these are held at separate times, allowing students plenty of time to spend on each one. This year, with the increase of the SCAs the students are administered, there wasn't enough time for all three of these activities at separate times. Instead, they were all done at the same time. The result was that instead of being able to do all three, my children had to choose one or two to participate in. Instead of having plenty of time with the librarian in the GT pull-out time, much was left to be done at home. These ridiculous SCAs took from my children the opportunity to learn and work in-depth on a topic that interests them. Last year our daughter competed in all three fairs and we were looking forward to our son participating for the first time this year. However, these learning opportunities available to them last year were limited this year, because of these SCAs.

My children are not below average students struggling with routine tasks. They were both identified in kindergarten as Gifted and Talented. They have two parents who care for them and participate in their education. Yet they struggle with this nonsense prepared by the district. Many students in our city do not have these advantages. If my children are struggling, how do you expect less-equipped students to succeed?

The frequency and poor writing of these SCAs does little to increase student knowledge and confidence. Our daughter has begun to question her own ability to succeed academically. This has never been a problem before, and we are very concerned as she approaches her first STAAR test. We want her to know she is smart and capable.

We have spoken to the teachers, librarian, and principal about these issues. They are as upset as we are and unable to offer a solution. We feel helpless. We understand that benchmarks are needed, but the frequency and erroneous nature of these tests seem to be doing more harm than good. Everybody involved can see how ridiculous this system is, yet we keep going further down this road. It is time to stop and use some common sense. Our children should be learning and thriving, not stuck in an endless cycle of test preparation and anxiety. Our children will benefit, our teachers will benefit, and our community will benefit as well.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Adam Boyette