

## **Senate OKs crackdown on replacing fine arts, other classes with TAKS test preparation**

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AUSTIN – The Senate voted unanimously Thursday to crack down on the widespread practice in Texas schools of pulling students out of art, music and other enrichment classes to cram for the TAKS test.

Legislation drafted by Senate Education Committee Chairwoman Florence Shapiro, R-Plano, would require all school districts to "strictly enforce" a policy limiting the removal of students from regular classes to receive test preparation or remedial tutoring.

"The practice of pulling students from fine arts and other classes has become increasingly widespread and I'm hearing complaints from schools across the state," Shapiro said.

Her bill, approved on a 31-0 vote and sent to the House, also would prohibit giving students in all grade levels credit for a class unless the student is in attendance for at least 90 percent of the days the class is offered.

Shapiro said it is usually fine arts classes – but sometimes also science and social studies – where students are pulled out because those subjects are deemed less important since they are not tested on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills. Science and social studies skills are tested in some grades.

The practice has reached the point that some students are missing half the class time in those courses, legislative analysts wrote.

Robert Floyd, chairman of the Texas Coalition for Quality Arts Education, said the practice of pulling students out of certain classes has accelerated as more emphasis has been placed on test results.

"Without question, the No. 1 plea we hear from teachers is, 'Please help us keep our kids in the classroom so we can teach them,' " he said.

Floyd said some of the abuses include one elementary school where certain students were taken out of every music class from October to March, and one middle school where all non-TAKS-tested courses were canceled for two weeks prior to the test. In another case, a music teacher had to create fictitious grades for students who had never been allowed to attend her class because they were receiving remedial instruction.

The legislation was backed by a broad coalition of public education groups.

Another bill filed by Shapiro could ease TAKS pressures on schools next year. That measure would eliminate the requirement that students in certain grades pass the TAKS in order to be promoted to the next grade level. The proposal is currently before the Senate Education Committee.

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