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**Researchers: Education Reforms Flawed**

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WASHINGTON -- Eight researchers from Texas and California warned Friday that President Bush's new education reforms could harm Latinos and other minority children who often score low on standardized tests.

The elaborate testing and accountability systems used in Texas, North Carolina and Florida were the models for the assessment systems required under the bipartisan No Child Left Behind Act, which Bush pushed through Congress and signed into law in January.

"State assessment systems such as the one in Texas are causing more harm than good," said Angela Valenzuela, an associate professor of curriculum and instruction at the University of Texas.

More than 100 congressional staff members attended the research forum moderated by Valenzuela. The forum was sponsored by the university's Center for Mexican American Studies, the Congressional Hispanic Caucus and the Hispanic Education Coalition.

Among other things, the new law requires that states test every public school student in grades three through eight annually in reading and math. Schools in which all students (or some groups of students, such as minorities, the poor or those with disabilities) get low scores are to get extra help at first. But if the students continue to get very low scores on state tests, all or most of a school's administrators and teachers must be replaced. Although the law calls for use of "multiple measures" to rate students or schools, the

scores earned by students on the standardized tests end up carrying the most weight, the researchers said.

They said the bad side effects of such "single-score assessments" in Texas include lower graduation rates, lower grade-to-grade promotion rates, rising dropout rates, elaborate ruses by principals to keep from testing low-performing students, and more emphasis on test practice than on higher-order thinking skills.

Material defending the new law was distributed at the forum by White House and Education Department employees. One of their handouts said, "The results of these tests can be used to direct resources, such as after-school tutoring or summer school, toward those who are falling behind, increasing their chance of success during the next school year."

But several researchers said their studies didn't detect such a trend. They said schools in poor neighborhoods in Houston and Austin, and in Oakland, Calif., still have fewer amenities, such as books in the library or running water in science classrooms, than those in more prosperous parts of town.

"As the rest of the nation moves toward high-stakes testing, we think it valid, fair and democratic for states to use multiple assessments, at a minimum," Valenzuela said.

She said that in a "multiple assessments" system, a low test score "can be offset by a positive showing of other areas that include grades, other test score information, portfolios (files containing samples of a student's work) and even teacher recommendations."

Kris Sloan, an education researcher at UT, said the new law has some useful provisions, such as one requiring that the scores of low-income and minority children be included in all-school averages, but also reported separately.  
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