

Laura and I heard when our daughters went to Austin High School, “We’re sick of tests.” And my answer was, “Well, I’m sorry you’re sick of it, but we want to know. We, the adults, want to know whether or not you’re learning, because if you’re not, we expect something else to happen.” So it’s important for children to take tests so they can tell how they stand.

It’s important for parents. There’s a lot of discussion about parental involvement. Senator Kennedy asked a very good question—how is parental involvement? I thought the principal gave a very good answer. But there’s no better way to encourage parental involvement than to diagnose, on a child-by-child basis, where a child stands. There’s no better way to get a parent’s attention than for a principal to send the word, “Well, we’re having a little trouble with your child. We want your child to succeed.”

The worst thing that can happen from a parent’s perspective is there be no information. The worst thing that can happen is that the parent think everything is fine—“Well, my child may have passed a test in the third grade, but there’s been no measurement in the fourth, fifth, or sixth, so I will just assume as a parent that everything is fine”—and then wake up and realize things aren’t fine. To me, that’s a shame, when and if our systems do that to parents.

And finally, measurement is important for management and teachers. First, I want to thank the teachers. Teaching is a noble profession. We need more teachers. And one of the jobs that Laura is going to take on—and to a certain extent, I hope I can, too—is to encourage youngsters to become teachers. That means, of course, safe classrooms. It means making sure teachers can teach a curriculum that works.

There’s nothing better than combining the love of a teacher with the talent and tools necessary to be able to make sure children learn. But it also means convincing teachers of the importance and power of

accountability. A good teacher welcomes accountability, because a good teacher understands that measurement is the kernel for success. A good teacher will be able to see in real stark terms the fruits of his or her labor. A good teacher is somebody who says, “Give me a chance to succeed, and I can prove I can succeed.”

There’s a lot of people in our society who fear accountability. Dr. Shannon, when asked by one of the Members of the congressional delegation about accountability, she said, “At first people were afraid of accountability.” And I can understand that. If you haven’t been held accountable, and all of a sudden somebody starts holding you accountable, it’s going to create a certain sense of anxiety. But I suspect she’ll testify to this fact, that once the accountability measures came in place, once people got used to what it meant to be accountable—that accountability is not a tool to punish but a tool to reward and a tool necessary to correct deficiencies; it’s a positive tool; it’s a positive application—then people begin to accept the importance of a strong measurement system.

So we’re here to applaud leadership and teachers, and we’re here to applaud a school and a district that has got a vision, a vision of high standards and strong measurement systems; a school that not only measures, but when it finds deficiency, corrects; a school that recognizes an accountability will work when you view each child as a child, not as some group—part of a group. An accountability system says every child matters, and when we find a child deficient, we’re going to correct.

Some say, “The accountability systems tend to restrict curriculum, that, oh, all the school will do is teach the test.” This school proves that’s not the case. This school focuses on basic education in reading and math. And by the way, they’ve got a fabulous curriculum for reading, one that works.

But this school also is a school that enriches beyond the basics of reading and math. It’s a school that’s got a curriculum