



Campaign 2000

Media Reality ✓ Check

Expert Documentation of the Latest Liberal Media Bias ✪ Tuesday, October 24, 2000

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ABC & NBC Ignored July RAND Study Touting Texas, But Promoted Critical RAND Election-Eve Report

An Educational Example of Anti-Bush Bias

Everyone knows Election Day is only two weeks away, so it's dubious a politically inflammatory research study would simply appear on the media landscape by happenstance. This morning, ABC's *Good Morning America* and NBC's *Today* each put their spotlight on a new RAND Corporation study which criticized the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills test for school-age children (the TAAS test).

The study didn't mention Bush or the presidential campaign, but NBC's David Gregory spun it as a crippling blow to the Republican's White House hopes.

"His record on improving education is what Governor Bush points to as the Texas success story, and the proof, Bush has argued throughout the campaign, is in the numbers," Gregory slammed on *Today*. "But a new study from the nonpartisan RAND organization claims that TAAS scores are an unreliable measure of student achievement, and that Bush's boast of closing the achievement gap between white and minority students is suspect."

Good Morning America put the story at the top of their 7:00 am news segment: "The report found that while scores climbed dramatically on state tests, the same students showed little improvement in scores on national tests," ABC's Antonio Mora related, adding, "An author of the study described the results saying 'I think the 'Texas Miracle' is a myth...with few exceptions. Notably, fourth grade math, gains in Texas in recent years were about the same as in the United States.'"

The author quoted by ABC was Stephen Klein, a senior researcher at RAND and the study's lead author. He assured a reporter for Reuters that, "We started this project

in April and it has nothing to do with the election." Bush had locked up his nomination by mid-March. Had word of the upcoming election not trickled down to RAND by April?

The RAND researchers measured the Texas state tests by comparing their results with the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) tests, which the authors

presumed "are not subject to the same external pressure to boost scores as there are on the TAAS." In other words, any variability between the Texas test and the federal test was scored by the authors as a flaw in the Texas test.

But a different research group at RAND used the national test results to praise Texas in a study released a few months ago. "Some states are doing far better than others in making achievement gains and in elevating their students' performance," RAND reported in July. "Texas and Indiana are high performers on both these counts."

RAND put out press releases touting both studies, but NBC never found the pro-Texas report newsworthy. Neither did ABC, although in two separate interviews at the time of the Republican National Convention, former House Speaker Newt Gingrich told ABC viewers about the study. But with just two weeks left in Campaign 2000, the morning shows found this report to be just irresistible.

— Rich Noyes, Director
MRC's Free Market Project

What RAND's July Study Said:

"Although the two states are close demographic cousins, Texas students, on average, scored 11 percentile points higher on NAEP math and reading tests than their California counterparts. In fact, the Texans performed well with respect to most states. On the 4th-grade NAEP math tests in 1996, Texas non-Hispanic white students and black students ranked first compared to their counterparts in other states, while Hispanic students ranked fifth. On the same test, California non-Hispanic white students ranked third from the bottom, black students last, and Hispanic students fourth from the bottom among states." — RAND News Release, July 25, 2000.

L. Brent Bozell III, Publisher; Brent Baker, Tim Graham, Editors; Jessica Anderson, Brian Boyd, Geoffrey Dickens, Ted King, Paul Smith, Brad Wilmouth, Media Analysts; Kristina Sewell, Research Associate; Liz Swasey, Director of Communications. For the most complete media bias analysis, see the *CyberAlert* at www.mrc.org