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## **Superintendent hopeful: Our kids are being tested to death**

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MARIETTA - Retired educator and Cobb resident Dr. Beth Farokhi, who kicked off her campaign in the 2010 Democratic race for Georgia State School Superintendent on Monday at Marietta Square, says it's time to reform the state's testing system.

"Our kids are tested to death, and we have too many tests. We have the (Criterion Referenced Competency Test), we have the End of Course Test, we have the graduation test, we have the (Iowa Tests of Basic Skills), and I'm sure they're even others," she said.

Farokhi favors nationally normed tests, such as the Iowa Test, because test scores can be compared to other states, as opposed to the CRCT, which as a Georgia test is not comparable.

"Just from experience in talking with teachers and parents, the CRCT needs to be looked at. Is it necessary to have it every single year?" she asked.

"What we're trying to do is educate students, not teach them how to be tested," she said.

Farokhi said she is appalled that there are 5 million Georgians who are below the literacy level.

"Our schools have failed our citizens," she said.

"It's not cost-effective to have illiterate citizens, monetarily nor from a human standpoint," she said.

In addition to testing reform, top changes she would make to state Superintendent Kathy Cox's administration include a renewed support and respect for teachers by bringing them to the table when it comes to decision-making, she said. Focusing on the retention and recruitment of teachers who are not just qualified, but believe that every child can learn, is also critical, she said.

"I'm all for rigorous academic challenges and I think we need to strengthen our math and science, making sure that they meet the international standards - not watering down our science curriculum with misrepresentation. Our children deserve, of course, accurate and

informed information," she said, in a reference to teaching Creationism as science, which she opposes.

Farokhi wants foreign language taught in all grades, wants to strengthen the arts and music programs in public education, emphasizes school nutrition and physical education, cracking down on bullying and sexual harassment, and promoting proper teacher training.

It's a lean time to be in public education with a national recession. The Cobb School District slashed salaries of all employees by 2 percent and increased class sizes to make up for a \$59 million shortfall for fiscal year 2010. And school officials are predicting the 2011 budget year to be even worse. Farokhi said one solution is for the state to end the austerity cuts of school districts.

"Local school districts are suffering," she said.

Farokhi is uncertain how much she will need to raise for the campaign.

"I don't know what the top figure is. With the economy like it is, I think all candidates are going to be knocking on many, many doors asking for help. There are resources out there that haven't been tapped and I hope I'm going to be able to find those and find people who believe enough, not in me, but in the future of Georgia. I believe it's an investment in Georgia, that's what my campaign is about," said Farokhi, an eighth generation Georgian from Augusta who has lived in Cobb County nearly 40 years.

With her years of experience in different levels of education, her focus on curriculum development with Georgia State University's College of Education, and her work with getting programs approved by the Professional Standards Commission, Farokhi said she brings a different perspective to the state superintendent's office.

"The leadership that I can bring comes from serving on national boards, local boards, state boards in a way that I don't think any of my opponents would be able to compare to," she said.