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Tests, tests and more tests.

That's one of the major problems facing Georgia's schools, according to democratic state school superintendent candidate Beth Farokhi.

Farokhi, a retired educator who announced her run earlier this summer for the office currently held by Kathy Cox, made a stop in Laurens County Wednesday as part of a local RESA conference.

From curriculums that continue to be centered around raising standardized test scores, to the reduction and elimination of programs like the arts and physical education, Farokhi said she sees a lot of challenges facing Georgia's students as they move further into the 21st century.

"I'm really concerned where our education system is moving," said Farokhi, a retired educator from Cobb County who spent more than three decades in the field. "I think we've become an education system of testing rather than learning."

And she added that the standards set and held by tests like the Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (or CRCT) are unique only to Georgia, and fail to offer comparisons "to Alabama, or say California."

"One of the things I've suggested is reducing the number of tests," she said, "and instead focus on the real growth of the child rather than allow one test to determine that."

According to Farokhi's campaign website, she is taking a three-pronged approach to revamping the education of Georgia's children:

- Create a balanced curriculum for the whole child.
- Focus on resources and support for teachers.
- Reduce the number of state-wide tests.

And that, she said, "would allow for more teachable moments."

"I certainly believe teachers deserve the time to teach," she said. "Unfortunately, the curriculum has become so bound to preparing students for a test...A test should be a diagnostic tool, not an end-all."

But, shifting the weight and purpose of standardized testing is only one of several areas that Farokhi said she would attend to if elected.

Farokhi said, if elected, she would put additional emphasis on educating youngsters during formative "early childhood" years because, as she puts it, "if we don't focus and capture children early, we could lose their interest when they get into middle school or high school."

To go along with her stances on the importance of early childhood education, she also plans to install foreign language programs for grades K-12, as well as assessing student dietary needs and physical fitness needs.

"I read somewhere in one study where Georgia's children are ranked third in obesity," she said. "Our kids are not involved in enough physical action in the day. Some systems have reduced or even set aside recess. This impacts their learning capability and

behavior.

The former teacher said educators must also be provided with the necessary resources to accomplish the task of schooling Georgia's children in "skills they can use later."

"I think we need a strong hand at the state level; a real advocate for our teachers," Farokhi said. "I think that's been lacking for the last 15 years. We need a true advocate for our teachers...A strong advocate for our local systems, to allow them to be in control of public education."

Finally, Farokhi concluded by saying that all of these changes are attainable, but not without new leadership and renewed interest by members of local communities.

"We need to be focusing on our kids," Farokhi said.