



North East Independent School District

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Superintendent

Date: September 30, 2020

To: House Committee on Public Education

From: Dr. Sean Maika, Superintendent, North East ISD

Subject: Interim Charge 1 [B] Submission

Thank you for the opportunity to provide public input on Interim Charge 1 [B]. North East ISD in San Antonio believes in the importance of a robust accountability system to monitor student progress and achievement.

Interim charge 1 [B] involves monitoring rulemaking and public school sanctions and interventions related to the accountability system. We would like to share four considerations for your review.

1. Current standards in our accountability system do not account for long-term learning loss during a pandemic. We must consider that a normative standard may not be appropriate for our children in 2020-2021. I request that the House Public Education Committee use this disruption to pause accountability, recalibrate, and build upon the progress of HB 1842 (84R) and HB 22 (85R) to create an equitable and accurate accountability system.

The state should use this school year as a transitional year to gather baseline data and update the accountability system. We are not against testing – the STAAR assessments provide us with important data to guide instruction and interventions. We can administer STAAR in 2021 for the purpose of data collection and not accountability. This would enable us to better understand the depth of learning loss and create a strategy to close the gaps. The 2021 data could be used to benchmark 2022 as a transitional year. A new accountability system created by the Legislature could then be fully implemented in 2023.

2. Academic growth is a critical component of the state's accountability system, and the loss of a 2020 assessment sets us back in measuring growth. We cannot adequately estimate student growth without comparable data. Additionally, the current accountability system does not account for the limitations to the provision of consistent and effective

instructional opportunities during the Pandemic. Please inquire about the methodology the TEA plans to use in measuring growth.

3. Since no state accountability ratings were issued in 2020, schools with unacceptable ratings in 2019 maintained the sanctions and interventions for this school year. However, the TEA did not maintain the process for developing improvement plans. The TEA released a new Reflective Prioritization Activity and Targeted Improvement Plan template even though schools were not afforded the opportunity to improve scores. Please inquire why TEA recreated the process in the absence of 2020 test scores rather than holding steady with existing plans that may have been effective.
4. Districts are required to administer a seventh-grade reading assessment to students whose performance on the grade 6 STAAR reading exam did not reach proficiency. Although there was not a STAAR administration in spring 2020, districts are required to use one of four adopted instruments or request a waiver for another instrument in the 2020-2021 school year. Please inquire about the TEA's expectations for administering the seventh-grade reading assessment. We have not received any guidance from TEA in the absence of STAAR scores and developed our own criteria to identify students for testing.

A reliable assessment tool is critical to the accountability system working effectively, and we have four recommendations for the implementation of HB 3906 (86R).

1. The COVID-19 pandemic has shined a light on the digital capacity across the state. While teachers and students are learning virtually, high-speed broadband connectivity has become a necessary school supply. Some of our schools struggled with bandwidth within the building to host teachers "zooming" with their students back home and in the classroom. North East had to provide hotspots in some of our buildings and in our parking lots to increase connectivity. While the district's current bandwidth presently meets the recommended standard, we anticipate that the network may not be able to keep up with demand and infrastructure needs as equipment ages.

Improvements must be made to internet capacity across the state before we are ready to move millions of students to an online testing format. The Legislature was thoughtful to include a transitional plan in HB 3906 to evaluate internet access. We encourage you to expand that requirement to evaluate reliable, high-speed broadband access for the provision of both instruction and assessment on a campus at the same time. That capacity is more aligned to what will be needed to administer a statewide assessment system than just checking if internet is available. The quality of the internet connection must be defined to ensure proper transmission of the test format and results.

2. It is our recommendation that the transitional plan also involve a study on device availability within school districts, with defined minimum standards to administer the state assessment and provide appropriate access for students with disabilities. Many Districts, including North East, have provided devices to students during distance learning and may have limited resources on campus.
3. The transitional plan must also evaluate if some students will perform better with a paper test administration than a digital one. A 2018 study, [“Is the Pen Mightier than the Keyboard? The Effect of Online Testing on Measured Student Achievement,”](#) conducted by the National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research (CALDER) at American Institutes for Research and sponsored by the Institute of Education Sciences (ED) found that students scored lower on the online version of the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) than students taking the paper version of the test. These findings are not unique to the PARCC test.

In North East, we experienced a similar effect when we piloted online administration of STAAR at one of our Title I middle school campuses. After a three-year trend of positive movement from 2016 to 2018 with the same leadership, the performance of students at our trial campus went down at all performance levels in 2019. The school also went from an overall scale score of 83 in 2018 for a rating of Met Standard to an overall scale score of 76 in 2019 for a C rating. The school was identified for Additional Targeted Support after receiving an Academic Growth score of 59 in 2019 compared to an Academic Growth score of 74 in 2018.

In 2016, Education Week published a story [“Comparing Paper and Computer Testing: 7 Key Research Studies,”](#) which explored how computer and paper-based tests yielded different results. Do we want the method of testing to impact student performance or do we want a system of equality that enables all students to meet their potential?

We are especially concerned with the performance of our students receiving special education services. While the electronic administration of STAAR offers more prominent accommodations, students receiving special education services may not perform as well in a digital format. The effect of limiting these accommodations to online testing formats creates a concern as to whether the assessment is measuring mastery of learning or mastery of the technology skills required to effectively access and interact with online supports.

4. HB 3906 also includes a requirement for STAAR to include no more than 75 percent of the questions in a multiple choice format beginning with the 2022-2023 school year. While that requirement is two years away, school districts need to begin preparing as soon as possible. We need blueprints of the tests and wide-ranging examples of the new question format so that we can prepare professional development for principals and teachers in the summer of 2021. This is needed so that teachers can begin using the new test formats in the 2021-2022

school year to prepare students for full implementation the following year. Please inquire to TEA's schedule and plan for communicating new test question formats to school districts.

I greatly appreciate your dedication to public education and willingness to tackle tough issues. Recalibrating the accountability system and testing system is no easy task, but is a necessary one given the disruption to learning. If you have any questions about this submission, please contact me 210-407-0541.