



District Charter Alliance

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DISTRICTS

ALDINE ISD
BEAUMONT ISD
EL PASO ISD
FORT WORTH ISD
GRAND PRAIRIE ISD
LONGVIEW ISD
MIDLAND ISD
SAN ANTONIO ISD
SPRING BRANCH ISD

CHARTERS

EL PASO LEADERSHIP ACADEMY
DEMOCRACY PREP
GREAT HEARTS
IDEA PUBLIC SCHOOLS
KIPP TEXAS
RELAY LAB SCHOOLS
RESPONSIVED
RURAL SCHOOLS INNOVATION ZONE
SCHOOL INNOVATION COLLABORATIVE
FW LEADERSHIP ACADEMY
TRANSFORMATION WACO
UPLIFT EDUCATION
YES PREP PUBLIC SCHOOLS

September 29, 2020

To: Texas House Committee on Public Education, Chairman Huberty and Vice Chairman Bernal via e-mail

CC: Representative Allen, Representative Allison, Representative Ashby, Representative Bell, Representative Dutton, Representative González, Representative King, Representative Meyer, Representative Sanford, Representative Talarico, Representative VanDeaver

Re: Request for Information, Interim Charge 1B, Questions 5-9

Chairman Huberty, Vice Chairman Bernal, and members,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit a response to Interim Charge 1B, Questions 5-9, related to Senate Bill 1882 (85R), Texas Partnerships Law. This letter is submitted on behalf of the [Texas District Charter Alliance \(DCA\)](http://www.texasdca.org), a non-profit organization composed of 22 district and charter superintendents who have come together to support state and local action that puts students' interests above all else and thereby improves all public schools. We support transformative policies that stimulate collaboration between districts and charters that seeds innovation, expands the talent pool and expertise available to districts, and raises student achievement.

Interim Charge 1[B]: HB 1842 (84R), HB 22 (85R), SB 1882 (85R), and HB 3906, which relate to public school accountability, assessment, interventions, and district-charter partnerships. Monitor the ongoing progress of the TEA's implementation and rulemaking of the A-F rating system, the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR), and public school sanctions and interventions.

The Texas Legislature passed Senate Bill 1882 during the 85th Legislative Session with strong bipartisan support, and it became effective immediately in June 2017. As summarized in the state's [Texas Partnerships](http://www.tea.texas.gov/partnerships) overview, SB 1882 "incentivizes districts to work collaboratively with new and existing partners to promote innovation and dramatically improve student outcomes" by providing financial and accountability incentives. Partnerships enable districts to bring specialized expertise and customized offerings to their school systems in response to a variety of needs and interests. The partnerships are forged between districts and charter schools, nonprofit organizations and institutions of higher education that commit to ambitious student achievement goals in a performance contract that ensures accountability to the school board as well as autonomy as long as those goals are met.

The first eighteen Texas Partnerships schools were approved in 2018 for the 2018-2019 school year. The third cohort of Texas Partnerships began operation this year, in the 2020-2021 school year. There are a total of 101 campuses, 21 districts and 38 operators, providing options that include STEM, IB Program, Pre-K enrichment, new career pathways for rural students, dropout recovery and more. Because most partnerships were approved to begin operation in the 2019-2020 or 2020-2021 school years, state assessment data are only available for the 2018-2019 school year (due to the suspension of Spring 2020 testing per COVID-19). Consequently, minimal state performance data is available. Many partnership schools across the state are using an array of other assessment tools to evaluate student growth and mitigate any learning losses during the COVID-related disruptions.

Question 5: The stated purpose of these partnerships with charters was to serve as incubators of innovative ideas in how to turn around failing campuses. Have any successful programs been identified that can be replicated by struggling campuses?

Texas Partnerships support collaboration and cooperation over competition, have the potential to provide shared solutions to turnaround schools, and encourage innovative ideas and best practices between partnership schools across the state. SB 1882 provides for both turnaround and innovation partnerships. We recognize that turnaround work is tough and are grateful for accountability that keeps the work focused on students as school leaders overcome challenges to increase achievement. Turnaround requires a culture change and a learning curve for districts and partners.

The examples below illustrate how several partnerships are addressing the many challenges struggling campuses must overcome. Each example shows the importance of innovative ideas in service of students whose schools have been struggling for too long.

Leadership Academy Network Partnership with Fort Worth ISD The partnership between Texas Wesleyan University and the Fort Worth Leadership Academy Network (LAN) is instructive because it demonstrates how the gains achieved through the Accelerating Campus Excellence (ACE) strategy can be sustained over the long-term. The multi-pronged ACE strategy has been highly effective in raising achievement at chronically low-performing campuses, but requires investment beyond the budget typical of schools serving the same grade range. The additional costs associated with initial implementation are usually covered by state and federal grant funds directed toward improvement of low-performing schools. Thereafter, however, some districts struggle to find the funds necessary to maintain all the components that make ACE so successful. **The additional funding available through the SB 1882 partnership fills this gap and allows for the partnership to provide a longer school day, the extra staff needed for social and emotional learning, and salary supplements associated with the ACE model.** Texas Wesleyan University sponsors and supports the incubation of school models at six Fort Worth ISD campuses, serving students PK-8. **In the first year of operations, all LAN campuses were removed from Texas Education Agency's "Improvement Required" list and demonstrated levels of student growth that placed them among the top half of campuses across the state.**

Pre-K 4 SA Partnership with Edgewood ISD Pre-K 4 SA was established in 2013 as a comprehensive, early childhood initiative aimed at changing the education and workforce trajectory of San Antonio in one generation. In addition to directly providing full-day pre-kindergarten for 4-year-olds living in the City of San Antonio, **the initiative aims to build the capacity for high-quality pre-kindergarten in school systems across the city.** Edgewood ISD is at the forefront of this capacity-building work. Edgewood ISD and Pre-K 4 SA are leveraging the additional funding and flexibility available through SB 1882 to replicate proven practices, initially in early learning classrooms at Gardendale Elementary. **The partnership between Edgewood and PreK4SA created 40 additional high quality seats for 4 year olds in the San Antonio area in one year.**

ResponsiveED Partnership with Beaumont ISD Beaumont ISD is partnering with ResponsiveED to replicate the classical education model that has been successful in ResponsiveED schools across the state. This model emphasizes rigorous classical education in the liberal arts and sciences and prepares students to be "critical thinkers, global-minded problem solvers, and responsible citizens of character". In partnership with Beaumont ISD, ResponsiveED is implementing this model at Fehl-Price Elementary School. Fehl-Price struggled for many years prior to the partnership, earning an overall D rating and an F in the student achievement domain prior to the partnership beginning. **In the first year of the partnership, Fehl-Price suffered the devastating effects of Hurricane Imelda and COVID-19. But with the support of the partnership, the school has seen improvements in 3rd, 4th and 5th grade reading and math scores. In addition, the partners have**

developed relationships with over 15 different community partners, offering free haircuts, meals, school supplies, dental checkups, counseling support, and tutoring support for students in need at the school.

Transformation Waco with Waco ISD Transformation Waco partnered with Waco ISD to improve student outcomes at five Waco schools which all serve over 90% economically disadvantaged students. Transformation Waco made tremendous efforts to connect with the Waco school communities, to improve retention of teachers and support student programming, including building a spring break learning program. **One of the five schools they partnered with saw a 20-point increase and jumped two letter grades on the state accountability measures. All of the Transformation Waco 5th grade students beat the state average in growth in both reading and math and 8th grade students scored similarly in math STAAR tests.**

Question 6: Have certain types of new partnerships been more successful than other types of alternative educational arrangements?

Partnerships are about finding expertise and bringing in solutions to help students. Superintendents and school boards who engage the full community are able to determine the needs of families, students and educators. Strong leadership and governance are a key to success and to implementing change. Partnerships are locally designed collaborations tailored to the needs of the community and students, and there are several key factors districts and partners need to strive for.

The District Charter Alliance supports state policies that incentivize partnerships between strong operators and school districts committed to the principles underlying SB 1882. **Partnerships are most successful when (1) partner leadership teams have demonstrated prior success in raising student achievement and (2) a performance contract ties continuation of the partnership to achievement of ambitious student outcome goals.**

The partnership in **Lubbock ISD with the Lubbock Partnership Network** has exceeded expectations in student achievement and turnaround work. **STAAR practice tests administered in 8th grade just prior to COVID-19 had accountability growth scores of “B”, from its previous year rating of an “F”. Discipline incidents in the last school year were down 400% across the campus and 150 students stayed for afterschool programming and dinner each evening. Retention rates for teachers were at 92% and staff attendance increased by over 4% from the previous year.**

Question 7: What type of resources (financial and other types of supports) have been necessary to implement new turn-around partnerships?

Funding Flexibility. Transformation of a chronically low-performing school requires a persistent focus on student achievement above all else. The performance contracts that form the backbone of partnerships under SB 1882 set the conditions for this focus by establishing explicit and ambitious performance goals in exchange for greater flexibility. Accordingly, as noted above, SB 1882 partnerships offer a uniquely powerful approach to school turnaround. At the same time, however, partnerships necessitate significant investment in planning and start-up activities that can be quite complex given that the partner and district must coordinate and integrate multiple policies, procedures, and systems. The student achievement gains far outweigh these costs of talent, time, and funding, but the costs must nevertheless be accommodated. The Texas Education Agency has done an outstanding job of targeting grant resources to support upfront costs, but its flexibility is often limited by statute and federal regulations. Many partnerships struggle with planning costs and the lack of technical assistance funds available to support new partnerships, making it challenging for new operators to create partnerships or establish planning years. Any additional flexibility that would enable TEA to help partnerships in the early stages of development would be welcome.

Family and Community Support. Partnerships have created virtuous cycles in which the public application process and the explicit and ambitious goals required by performance contracts raise expectations of the school and empower parents to hold its leaders to their public commitments. As expectations and engagement grows so does student achievement. **This cycle is at work in the Lubbock Partnership Network, for instance, where 100% of parents participated in school-sponsored activities and, as noted above, student achievement is on the rise.**

Question 8: What measures of "success" are being used to know if these partnerships are working and sustainable?

The commissioner's rules for SB 1882 require that the district and its partner enter into a performance contract that specifies the student achievement goals that must be met in order for the partnership to continue. At a minimum, performance contracts identify a specific annual target for the overall campus academic rating under the state accountability system. Additionally, partnerships are measured by indicators that are specific to the school models implemented under the contract. For instance, the performance of schools under the multi-district **Rural Schools Innovation Zone (RSIZ)** partnership is measured in part by the extent to which students enrolled in the three districts served by the RSIZ have improved access to high-quality career pathways. **The RSIZ partnership serves students from Brooks County ISD, Freer ISD and Premont ISD, allowing students from each district to gain access to a wider variety of career pathways, including health professions, STEM, CTE and arts pathways.** Partners supplement traditional accountability measures with leading indicators including student and teacher retention and parent satisfaction surveys.

The partnership between **Midland ISD and IDEA Public Schools at IDEA Travis Elementary** entered a planning year in 2019 and opened its doors in 2020. Travis Elementary received an "F" rating for the fifth consecutive year and was subject to state takeover if changes were not made. The partnership between Midland ISD and IDEA allowed the in-district charter to keep the same zoned students, ensuring that these students now have access to a high quality school experience while providing another choice option for the Midland community. Despite the challenges with COVID-19, **the partnership has seen an increase in enrollment to the campus, has 501 returning students and an extensive waitlist, providing these communities with a new option.** Absent STAAR data, school leaders will be measuring success on various indicators including teacher retention, student retention, parent satisfaction and quarterly mastery tests.

Question 9: Can programs that have been deemed successful at these low rated campuses be replicated at other campuses within the district? If not, why? If yes, have similar results in increased student achievement been realized?

Although most partnerships are still in the first or second year of implementation, there are strong indicators that partnerships will catalyze adoption of successful school models and practices in the district beyond the original partnership. For instance, **Edgewood ISD and Pre-K 4 SA** are deliberately building the capacity for the early learning practices at Gardendale Elementary to scale across the district.

Similarly, the partnership between **Grand Prairie ISD and Uplift Education** and the recently renewed partnership between **Spring Branch ISD and KIPP Texas and YES Prep Public Schools** are co-located with traditional district-run schools and charter programs operating in the same school building, which fosters the sharing of best practices across the campus.

The Uplift Delmas Morton school (*formerly Uplift Lee*) and Grand Prairie's Delmas Morton Elementary (*formerly Robert E. Lee elementary school*) share a campus together, allowing their teachers to work and collaborate together while maintaining their own curriculums and programmatic efforts. **The partnership enabled Grand Prairie ISD to offer an International Baccalaureate (IB) Program, which was previously not available to students. Further, Uplift Delmas Morton earned academic distinctions in Mathematics, Reading, Postsecondary Readiness,**

Closing the Gaps and Academic Growth. The campus received an “A” rating for the 2017-2018 academic school year and a 100% rating on closing the achievement gaps according to the TEA 2018 Report Card. Together, Uplift Education and Grand Prairie ISD work hand-in-hand to innovate and scale effective practices across public school systems, demonstrating that student success is **not about competition, but about collaboration.**

The SKY Partnership (Spring Branch ISD, KIPP Texas and YES Prep) was created in 2011 in an effort to provide additional choices to students in the Spring Branch ISD area and to accelerate and support a culture of post-secondary success. **The students served in the partnership are performing at exceptional levels, outpacing peers by ten or more percentage points on 6th and 8th grade Math, Reading, Writing and Science STAAR exams. These achievement levels are sustained through high school, as evidenced by performance on English, Algebra I and II tests.**

SB 1882 is spurring a new generation of partnerships between school districts and the charter, nonprofit, and higher education sectors, infusing new ideas into district systems and enabling effective models to take root in, continuously improve, and scale across schools that had previously been chronically low performing. We are in the early stages of this movement and already see partnerships tackling some of our state’s most intractable challenges:

- The RSIZ is expanding high-value career pathways in rural South Texas.
- Fort Worth’s LAN partnership is expanding its implementation of the ACE model and is well on its way to advancing its schools from good to great.
- Edgewood ISD, a district in which 94% of students come from low-income backgrounds, is building a best-in-class early learning program.

The contributions of partnerships will grow as they mature and hit their stride. Accordingly, it is critical to continue the financial incentives for such partnerships. It is important to note that with the welcome additional funding from House Bill 3 during the 86th Legislative Session, the funding incentive amounts were consequently lowered for Texas Partnerships from previous levels. Texas Partnerships students will benefit from the state’s continued investment.

School boards, district administrative teams, and their new education partners across the state have invested a great deal of time, energy and courage in collaborating and forging new learning opportunities for Texas students. They have stepped out of their comfort zones to try something different for the benefit of their students and communities. Parents have embraced the power to require clear performance commitments and hold school leaders accountable for meeting them. **We ask that legislators signal support for bold action and new ideas by continuing the accountability and financial incentives for Texas Partnerships.**

Respectfully,



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