



Date: September 30, 2020

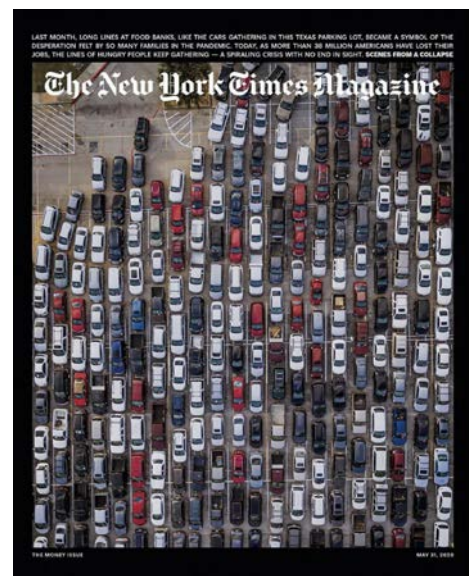
To: House Committee on Public Education

From: Bexar County Education Coalition

Re: Request for Information, Interim Charge 1[B]

Bexar County school districts and families were relieved by and appreciative of the speed with which the state responded to the initial COVID-19 shut down. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) and the Governor's office were almost immediately responsive with daily conference calls for public school leadership as well as on-going case reports from Health and Human Services (HHS). Additionally, Governor Abbott recognized that schools would be struggling with a wide variety of challenges during this time and canceled the administration of the STAAR on March 16th stating that students, "health and safety are top priorities, and the state of Texas will give school districts flexibility to protect and ensure the health of students, faculty, and their families."¹ While many of our schools were looking forward to demonstrating the incredible amount of work and improvement that they accomplished over the 2019-2020 school year, all of our schools turned their attention and focus, just as the Governor stated, towards the health and safety of the students they care for each and every day.

Throughout fall, as we inch closer to recovery and a renewed sense of normalcy, our educators are still correctly focused on and prioritizing the health and safety of our students. In addition to continuing to ensure our students are fed, many of our teachers, counselors, and social workers are helping students recover from the collective trauma of experiencing a lock-down. In Bexar County the rates of domestic violence spiked, and the City of San Antonio made national headlines for the lines of cars that waited for food from our area food bank. Our children have dealt with so much that their retention and on-going




¹ Office of the Governor, "Governor Abbott Waives STAAR Testing Requirements" -

<https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/covid/Governor%20Abbott%20Waives%20STAAR%20Testing%20Requirements.pdf>

comprehension is going to be understandably affected, but no matter what we know learning will continue, whether it is virtual or in-person.

Bexar County Education Coalition (BCEC) believes that this school year's accountability framework should be motivated by discovery and evaluation and not by remediation. At a minimum we believe campus ratings need to be paused. We greatly appreciate the thoughtful presentation that was made to the Accountability Technical Advisory Committee (ATAC) and Accountability Policy Advisory Committee (APAC) in July that detailed four options for accountability for the 2020-2021 school year. While we did disagree with TEA's assessment of which option is "stable" (slide 10 - status quo would not be stable by many experts estimate changing trends of virtual vs in-person class attendance and enrollment), we do agree that this is an opportunity for the state to fully realize the call of House Bill 22 (HB 22) - to make a more equitable accountability system for all schools and students.

 Potential Approaches to 2021 Accountability	
Option 1—Maintain Status Quo	Option 2—Modified System
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ System remains the same▪ Maintain existing calculations and performance expectations▪ Use closest data proxy for growth▪ Identify/exit campuses for school improvement using existing methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ System remains the same▪ Adjust calculations and/or performance expectations▪ Use closest data proxy for growth▪ Update identification/exit criteria for school improvement
Option 3—Adapted/Temporary System	Option 4—Transitional System
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Revise and/or replace some elements due to missing/impacted data▪ Revise weighting and/or scaling▪ Return to 2019 system in 2022▪ Evaluate identification/exit criteria for school improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Use minimally available indicators▪ Use disruption as opportunity to phase in indicators of the updated system▪ Use 2021 data to benchmark 2022 as a transitional year▪ Fully implement the updated system in 2023

Source: TEA.Texas.gov "2021 Accountability Development Materials"²

When HB 22 was passed in 2017, TEA and the bill authors recognized that there were some elements of the bill that would need to be tweaked over time when the data became available (see: Extra-curricular/Co-Curricular study) and when technology improved (see: later passed House Bill 3906 (HB 3906)). In an interesting turn of fate, COVID-19 lockdowns, the 2020-2021 school year, and the next interim period will correspond with the release of the required extra-curricular/co-curricular study from HB 22 (December 1, 2022) and the release of a technology transition plan as required by HB 3906 (no later than the 2022-2023 school year). Based on current pandemic conditions and the statutorily required accountability study and update, **BCEC strongly recommends that**

² <https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/APAC%20%26%20ATAC%20July%202020%20Slides.pdf>

TEA implement option 4 – “Transitional System” and allow the Texas legislature to fully evaluate benchmarks from the 2021-2022 school year with the adoption of an updated system by the fall of 2023.

Even under a “transitional system”, BCEC recognizes that there is no guarantee an accountability waiver would be granted from the federal government and does not support completely waiving test requirements. We believe this year’s test should be an opportunity to gather benchmarking data only. With that in mind, we also suggest the following measures be encouraged by this committee and implemented for the coming school year:

1. Suspend House Bill 1842 and all sanctions triggered by consecutive years of a “D” or “F” ratings. Instead, assign districts and campuses numeric grades only. These numerical values would not trigger any additional interventions or sanctions, but would allow for a campus under state intervention to exit.
2. Should the state still be required to identify the bottom 5% of campuses across the state that need comprehensive support, BCEC strongly encourages the suspension of the inclusion of multiple year “D” campuses. Furthermore, the statute should solidify campus improvement plan and campus rating standards to remove forced failure administrative rules and clearly delineate between campus ratings of a D and an F in statute.
3. Prior to implementing the online transition plan for HB 3906, the legislature must expand the definition of “availability of Internet access” to a definition that asks TEA to evaluate reliable, high-speed broadband access. That capacity is more aligned to what will be needed to administer a statewide assessment system than simply checking for internet access.

BCEC greatly appreciates the time and commitment of this committee to do what is in the best interests of all Texas children. BCEC members wish to thank the committee for the time, labor, and consideration on these issues and look forward to continued partnership during the coming session.

The members of the Bexar County Education Coalition (BCEC) are districts that collectively care and educate approximately 350,000 students, 60% of whom are economically disadvantaged, and are suburban, urban, fast-growth, recapture, military, and rural independent school districts ranging in enrollment sizes from 1,000 to 100,000 students. BCEC members also employ close to 200,000 citizens of this great state.

