



**Texas Association of School Boards**  
P.O. Box 400 • Austin, Texas 78767-0400 • 512.467.0222  
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September 30, 2020

Chairman Dan Huberty  
Texas House Public Education Committee  
1101 Congress Ave.  
Austin, Texas, 78701

Chairman Huberty,

The Texas Association of School Boards submits the following written testimony to the Texas House Public Education Committee for Interim Charge 1B to provide insight into district partnerships established under SB 1882. We hope the provided information can help guide future discussions on revisions and updates to the guiding legislation that will encourage creative partnerships, led by local independent school boards to help improve the educational experience for students in the participating programs.

**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?**

While the evidence of charter schools successfully turning around struggling district campuses is a mixed bag at best, other proven options exist for school districts looking for assistance. When contemplating this proposal, legislators and stakeholders held up two examples of how these partnerships should work. Winona ISD and Premont ISD partnered with The University of Texas at Tyler, College of Education and Psychology and Texas A&M University at Kingsville, respectively, to improve student achievement and educational practices.

In 2018, after facing two consecutive years of improvement required accountability ratings, Winona ISD began a partnership with UT Tyler to “help support systemic improvement in the areas of campus organization, discipline, instruction, curriculum, remediation activities and board training” at their elementary school. UT Tyler received a three-year grant from The University of Texas System Turnaround Partnership Initiative. This funding helped implement a “trainer of trainers” model allowing the district to gain knowledge and develop content experts while simultaneously implementing change. Winona ISD has only three campuses: elementary, middle, and high school. The many supports and changes implemented through this partnership quickly impacted the entire district. In 2018, Winona Elementary was rated Improvement Required, garnering 55 out of 100 overall performance grades. In 2019, the school gained an 85 out of 100, a massive increase in performance.

Premont ISD began its relationship with Texas A&M Kingsville in May of 2013. The school district had faced multiple years of low academic scores and poor attendance. Facing closure by the state, Premont ISD



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looked for a resource to help enhance the educational experience and hopefully turn the school district around from its Improvement Required rating. In 2013, the district had 55% of their students at Level II or higher in Reading/ELA and only 37% of students at Level II or higher in Math. Following their work with the University, Premont in 2019 reported an overall rating of a B. With 61% of students approaches grade level or above in Reading/ELA and 65% of students approaches grade level or above in Math. The most striking improvement within this district is probably the change in dropout rates between 2013 and 2019. In 2013, Premont ISD had an annual dropout rate for grades 9– 2 of 7.7%, compared to 0.6% in 2019. Although these two programs predate SB 1882, they show the possibility for school districts to partner with entities like UT Tyler and Texas A&M Kingsville to greatly benefit the district, community, and, more importantly, the students. If the legislature can find ways to make these higher education partnerships more viable, accessible, and attractive, they could have the potential of improving outcomes for districts in need of assistance, while maintaining local autonomy.

The issue of local autonomy has been a source of contention within districts seeking to establish partnerships under SB 1882, as the law requires districts to appoint a separate boards of trustees for the targeted campuses. This removal of campuses from district oversight creates confusion and concern among parents, staff, trustees, and the community. Legislators should consider a mechanism by which locally elected boards maintain general oversight of and accountability for all district campuses. Additionally, ambiguity in who will ultimately oversee the campuses in the event of dissolution of partnerships is an added confusion that should be resolved in any renditions to the law. Any moves to create clarity on these topics would help to increase public trust in district partnerships with public non-profits. Lastly, while there is some evidence that partnerships with local ISD's and institutions of higher education bear positive results for improving outcomes at partnered campuses, current partnerships with charter school programs have yet to bear the same results. That is not to say that future data may show positive results from such partnerships, but with current COVID-19 delays to accountability records, there are limited results available to confirm the efficacy of such charter partnerships with local ISD's.

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

The disruption to education caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has distorted accountability and performance data for Texas public schools. It is hard to identify programs or partnerships that are showing more success than others. But, in most facets of life, having more tools, programs, and ideas to address any program is a benefit. Local school districts should maintain the ability to find partnerships that works best for their students and communities.

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



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**Implementation Grants** – Help cover initial costs of change and implementation. For example, under SB 1882, Galveston ISD received an Implementation Grant to help combine their processes, curriculum, and services with their partner, the Moody Early Childhood Center.

**Additional State Funding** – A school district can receive funding from SB 1882 that equals the difference between current school district per-pupil state funding for the district and what the school would receive if it was a state-authorized charter school (State average ADA).

**Expert Staff** – Partnering with an institution of higher education can take the form of university staff training and assisting district staff. For example, the partnership between Winona ISD and UT Tyler included the College of Education and Psychology. Content matter experts in education provided board and staff training to ensure the school district was implementing best practices to improve student success.

**Accountability Exemption** – Also known as an accountability “pause button.” A school with an unacceptable state accountability rating can receive a two-year exemption from specific accountability-related interventions to allow the partnership time to improve academic performance. For schools with a first, second, or third consecutive unacceptable rating, the exemption begins the academic year after the school seeks approval for partnership benefits. For schools with four or more consecutive unacceptable ratings, the accountability intervention exemption begins in the current school year.

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

Flexibility for local districts is a necessity when considering establishing any partnership, as each district is striving to address different concerns. School leaders in Winona ISD were concerned with unacceptable attendance and discipline trends. The partnership with UT Tyler sought to reduce absenteeism and discipline referrals. Premont ISD, on the other hand, focused on improving their reading, math, and dropout measures. Some of the many different issues being addressed with these partnerships include:

- Reduced discipline referrals
- Reduction in absences
- Reduction in the dropout rate
- Increased student outcomes on STAAR or other standardized exams
- Increased campus positive culture
- Increased community input and participation



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**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?**

With the programs that have predated SB 1882, there has been enough time and data to show improvement. These programs were also instituted district wide under the stewardship of the locally elected board of trustees. School leaders did not restrict innovations to one campus, but instead focused on the overall district and helped to improve procedures and practices to benefit all students. The state will have a better idea of how current partnerships formed under SB 1882 are performing as education begins to normalize after COVID-19.

CC:

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