

Date: September 30, 2020

To: House Public Education Committee, Chairman Huberty and Vice Chairman Bernal  
Re: Request for Information, Interim Charge 1, Question 1

Chairman Huberty, Vice Chairman Bernal, and members,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit a response to Interim Charge 1[A]: HB 3, which relates to public school finance and public education. Monitor the Texas Education Agency's (TEA) implementation of the bill, including the extensive rulemaking process and broad unintended consequence authority of the commissioner. Examine the pay raises districts have provided to staff and the various approaches adopted to differentiate these salary increases according to experience.

This letter is submitted on behalf of Early Matters and its partner organizations who have added their logos below. Early Matters is a multi-regional coalition made up of organizations across Texas who are committed to increasing early childhood outcomes and awareness of the importance of early childhood education. The signatories below believe quality early education and foundational learning are key to success later in life. House Bill 3 was historic legislation which instituted key data-proven reforms that will significantly impact early education opportunities and improve student outcomes. ***We are grateful for these reforms and ask that you maintain these reforms and their funding in the upcoming legislative session.***

In particular, we note the following HB3 programs as critical components of ensuring all Texas students receive a quality early education:

- Early education allotment for each K-3 low-income student and each English language learner (ELL)
- Required high quality full-day Pre-K for all eligible students
- School Boards must adopt literacy and math proficiency plans, set 5-year disaggregated goals for 3rd grade reading and math, and annually share progress
- Funding to incentivize extended school year for elementary students to address summer slide
- Funding to incentivize dual language instruction
- Funding to support students with dyslexia
- Reading academies required for K-3 teachers and principals
- Common K readiness assessments and cut score and required reporting so we can assess our state's progress in K readiness
- Science of Teaching Reading Certificate required for PK-6 teachers

**These reforms, taken together, make Texas a leader in early childhood best practice policy.** Some will take time to implement, but once implemented, they will significantly transform the quality of education our youngest learners receive.

Within the state of Texas, currently only 58% of students come to Kindergarten ready with the necessary skills to begin their K-12 career, and in 2018, only 4 in 10 students met the state's 3rd grade reading standard<sup>1</sup>. We know that a student's ability to read by 3rd grade is among the most important benchmarks of a student's educational journey. Students not reading on grade level in 3rd grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school. **Improving our postsecondary outcomes begins with high quality early childhood education.**

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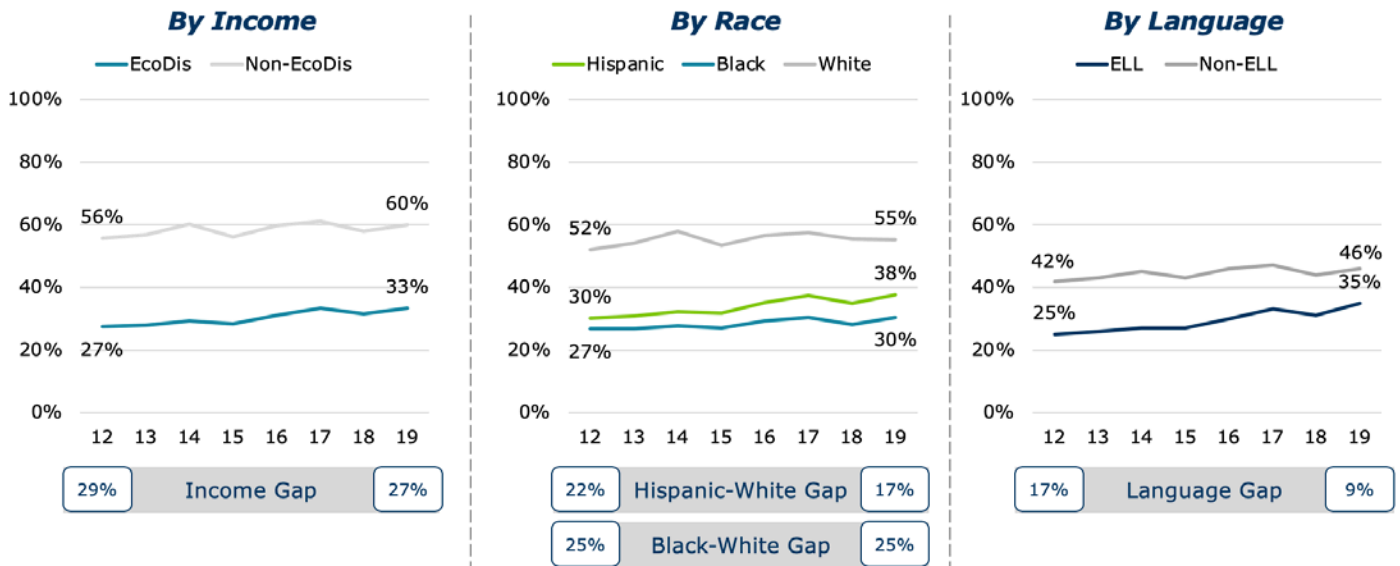
<sup>1</sup> Texas Commission on Public School Finance Final Report. December 31, 2018.

<https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/Texas%20Commission%20on%20Public%20School%20Finance%20Final%20Report.pdf>. 19.

The chart below showing third grade reading proficiency is a strong reminder of why we need to maintain these new programs and ensure they are fully funded.

## Achievement Gaps in 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Reading Exist in Texas by Income, Race, and Language Proficiency

Texas: STAAR 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Reading "Meeting" Proficiency by Income, Race, and Language, 2012-2019



Source: TEA STAAR Aggregate data, 2012 – 2019

As you can see, not only are average third grade reading proficiency rates low as a whole, but they are particularly concerning for our low income and our Black and Hispanic students. HB3 was historic for many reasons, but its focus on helping our students who need extra support, who have historically been under-resourced, is monumental:

- 1) The Early Education Allotment created a new funding stream for our low-income and English language-learning students, providing funding to ensure all eligible students have access to full-day, high-quality PreK.
- 2) HB3 requires high quality full-day PreK for all eligible 4-year olds, with options for temporary waivers for districts that need more time for implementing this new full day requirement. Access to this extremely important early learning opportunity is crucial for increasing equity in Texas, as students who need it the most will have the chance to begin closing opportunity gaps earlier in their educational careers. Students in high-quality, full-day Pre-K classrooms were two times more likely to be ready for Kindergarten, and Kindergarten-ready students were three times more likely to read on grade-level by the end of 3rd grade.<sup>2</sup>
- 3) HB 3 also requires school systems to adopt early literacy and math proficiency plans that include specific and disaggregated annual reading and mathematics performance goals for each campus for five years. These specific and disaggregated goals, which must be monitored annually, help to hold school

<sup>2</sup> Based on an internal Dallas ISD study, 2015

systems accountable for ensuring all students are supported in their early years and will ensure schools focus on closing the gaps highlighted in the chart above.

4) Funding was provided to support students with Dyslexia and for dual language instruction (which has shown to be most effective in improving outcomes for English language learners).

HB3's focus on supporting teachers to ensure they are trained in best practices for teaching reading was also a great achievement. As our third grade literacy numbers evidence and as expert after expert will acknowledge, far too many of our early education teachers have not been well trained on the science of teaching reading, which is best practice for supporting students' reading skills. By requiring all PK-6 grade teachers to be trained in the science of teaching reading and by requiring all K-3 teachers and principals to attend TEA-developed Reading Academies, Texas early childhood teachers will receive best practice training in teaching reading. Texas' Reading Academies are a necessary approach to ensuring educators have updated, relevant, actionable coaching on literacy instruction. This will ensure teachers are fully trained and equipped with the skills to be effective in the classroom for their young readers. We cannot expect reading skills and the percentage of students meeting reading standards to increase if we do not equip our teachers with the necessary training and resources to help their students succeed.

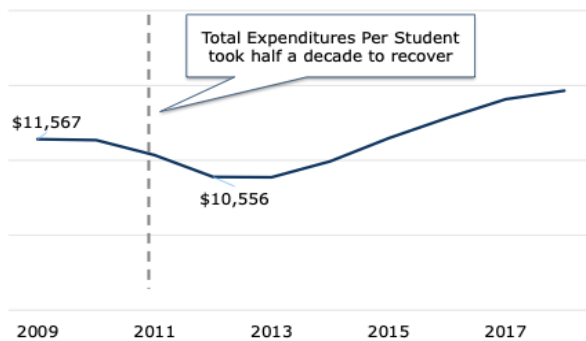
Ensuring all Texas students receive a quality education in their early years is even more critical since a global pandemic laid bare already existing inequities. We must provide effective early learning environments for students to close opportunity gaps between students of color and those experiencing poverty and their peers before the chasms are fully formed. With last year's expected learning loss and the potential for more in-school interruptions in the future, funding for full day pre-K for eligible students and teacher professional development in the science of teaching reading, will be even more critical to support our youngest, most challenged students. In the 2009 recession, legislators made the difficult decision to significantly cut funding for education. As the chart below shows, these significant budget cuts coincided with significant reading proficiency declines.

## 2011 Funding Cuts As A Result of 2008 Recession Marked The Onset Of A Decline In National Education Rankings

*With Low-Income Students and Students of Color Being Disproportionately Affected*

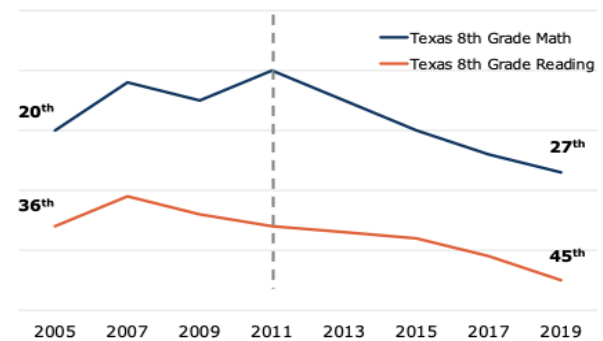
### In 2011, Texas Cut \$5.4B on School Spending...

*Texas Total Expenditures Per Student<sup>1</sup>*



### ...Which May Have Led to Worsening Student Outcomes that Have Yet to Recover

*State Rankings by Subject, NAEP (based on average scores)<sup>2</sup>*



Source: 1. Texas Education Agency PEIMS Financial Reports, 10 Year History for State Total Report; 2. National Assessment of Educational Progress Reports (NAEP), 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Reading and Math 2005-2019

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Thanks to HB3's requirements, districts are implementing the above described reforms designed to reverse these declining literacy rates. Though the impacts of COVID may increase the challenges, the solutions are in process. Now more than ever, it is critical that we stay the course with these reforms. If Texas wants to maintain its stance as an economic leader and a state where businesses and families thrive, we must continue to prioritize our youngest students by keeping these key early education components of HB 3 together.

We understand that this session will be more difficult and look different than ever before, but reducing funding from elements in HB 3 that prioritize early education, literacy skills, and PreK would have devastating effects that will be felt in Texas for decades to come. We cannot neglect our youngest learners because the investment we make in them will affect their success later both in school and the workforce. House Bill 3 is the most important step this state has taken toward increasing equity and improving outcomes in our school finance system. Our organizations are firmly against any programmatic changes or structural alterations to HB3 in the upcoming legislative session. We respectfully urge you to maintain your commitment to our youngest Texas students for their future and for the future of Texas.

Sincerely,

Early Matters

### Additional Supporting Organizations:

Big Thought

Child Care Associates

Children at Risk

Dallas College School of Education

Dallas Independent School District Early

Learning Department

Dallas Regional Chamber

Good Reason Houston

Momentous Institute

Pre-K 4 SA

The Commit Partnership

United Way for Greater Austin

United Way of Metropolitan Dallas

Uplift Education

