



September 24, 2020

The Honorable Dan Huberty
Chairman, House Public Education Committee
P.O. Box 2910
Austin, TX 78768

Re: Request for Information, Interim Charge 1B

Dear Chairman Huberty:

The Texas Public Charter School Association (“TPCSA”) is the statewide membership organization for effective charter schools of all types, proudly representing nearly 330,000 students at more than 700 open-enrollment charter school campuses. We appreciate the opportunity to submit a response to Interim Charge 1B.

A-F Accountability and STAAR Testing

The Coronavirus pandemic has caused significant academic challenges for Texas students. While these challenges presented by the pandemic should be measured to truly gauge the extent of the achievement gaps from school closures and extended online learning, **TPCSA strongly advocates for an additional year of waivers where A-F ratings are not applied and therefore sanctions are not issued.**

For Texas charter schools, many decisions about charter renewals and expansion amendments rely heavily on A-F ratings, and these schools should not be penalized under the current accountability system as schools begin to determine best practices and solutions to address the challenges caused by the pandemic. Texas charter schools need certainty that renewal and expansion decisions will be based on an array of data available to TEA that will paint a more accurate picture of individual school performance.

District/Charter Partnerships

The 85th Legislative Session passed SB 1882 as an incentive for school districts to work collaboratively with open-enrollment charter schools to promote innovation and improve student outcomes. These collaborative efforts enable districts and charter schools to bring a particular expertise and a customized offering to their school systems in order to improve student achievement and growth for the benefit of Texas students.

The first 18 Texas Partnership Schools were approved in 2018 for the 2018-19 school year. Currently, there are a total of 101 campuses, 21 districts and 38 partnership operators, providing options that include STEM, IB Programs, Pre-K enrichment, and new career pathways for rural students, dropout recovery and more.

We address the committee's questions regarding these partnerships below:

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 encourage collaboration with high-performing charter schools to establish innovative ideas and best practices to improve student outcomes and achievement for all Texas students. Improving low-performing schools takes a team of passionate educators to dedicate time and resources that requires a culture change and learning curve to overcome challenges to increase achievement. High-performing charter networks such as ResponsiveED and Transformation Waco have risen to this challenge.

ResponsiveED & Beaumont ISD: Fehl-Price Elementary School within Beaumont ISD has struggled for many years. Beaumont ISD made the decision to partner with ResponsiveED to replicate the classical education model that has been successful in ResponsiveED schools across Texas. 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.” Prior to the partnership, Fehl-Price earned an overall D rating and an F in the student achievement domain. Since inception of the partnership, Fehl-Price Elementary has seen improvements in 3rd, 4th and 5th grade reading and math scores, as well as developing relationships with over 15 different community partners.

Transformation Waco & Waco ISD: Waco ISD made the decision to partner with Transformation Waco to improve student outcomes at five Waco schools which serve over 90% economically disadvantaged students. The partnership rose to the challenge and included the community to increase teacher retention and support student programming. As a result, the partnership saw a 20 point increase and jumped two letter grades on the state accountability scale for one of their schools. Additionally, 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.

These partnerships are still young--this is only the third school year the law has been on the books, and things have been a little unusual since March 2020. But, we see great promise in the potential for partnership schools to be incubators of best practices that can ultimately be adopted district-wide.

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

TPCSA supports adequate and equitable funding for all public schools and transformative policies that allow for partnerships and collaboration between districts and open-enrollment charter schools to provide schools with opportunities for greater innovation and student

achievement. This partnership allows for districts and charters to implement strategies and best practices that improve student achievement and support educators.

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

Flexibility: TPCSA understands flexibility and a tenacious focus on student achievement is required at every step of the reform process for these partnerships to work. The performance contracts, which sets the standards and conditions, must allow for the flexibility to immediately make changes that directly affect student outcomes and continue to reassess student learning and instructional practices to refocus the goals.

Committed staff: Texas Partnerships must have the resources to build a team that is dedicated to and highly qualified for the turnaround process. This includes assessing the strength and weaknesses of staff, replacing staff who resist turnaround efforts, and recruiting new staff who have specialized skills and competencies in improving student outcomes.

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

SB 1882 required school districts and charter schools to enter into a performance contract to create a Texas Partnership. The performance contract mandates the contract specify the student achievement goals that must be met, identify a specific annual target for the overall campus academic rating under the state accountability system, and metrics that are specific to the school models implemented under the contract.

Partnerships such as **IDEA Public Schools at IDEA Travis Elementary and Midland ISD** have implemented sustainable metrics to ensure student achievement and growth. Travis Elementary received an “F” rating for the fifth consecutive year and was subject to sanctions if improved student outcomes were not achieved. The partnership allowed the in-district charter to keep the same zoned students, and implemented metrics on various indicators including teacher and student retention, parent satisfaction, and quarterly mastery tests. Despite opening its doors in 2020 and facing challenges with the pandemic, the partnership has seen an increase in student enrollment to the campus with 501 students returning and an extensive waitlist.

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?

Prior to passage of SB 1882, in 2011, Spring Branch, KIPP Texas and YES Prep formed an innovative partnership called the SKY Partnership. The purpose of the SKY Partnership was to provide additional options for students and to increase postsecondary success within Spring Branch ISD. The students are outperforming their peers by at least ten percentage points on 6th and 8th grade Math, Reading, Writing and Science STAAR exams. These achievements have been sustained through high school, as evidenced by performance on English, Algebra I and II exams.

Texas Partnerships under SB 1882 with an unacceptable rating, receive a two-year exemption from specific accountability ratings to allow the partnership time to improve student outcomes. While most Texas Partnerships are within their first or second year of implementation, there have been strong indicators that these partnerships will cultivate and establish best practices to promote innovation and turnaround all low-performing schools in Texas.

TPCSA strongly advocates for and asks legislators for their continued support of these partnerships. Although still in the early stages, these unique partnerships between school districts and charter schools have already made strides to build effective models and establish innovative ideas to ensure that all students in Texas have access to a quality education.

Sincerely,

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Cc: House Public Education Members