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May 25, 2018

Mike Morath, Commissioner
Texas Education Agency
1701 N. Congress Avenue
Austin, TX 78701

Re: 2018 STAAR Online Testing Issues

Dear Commissioner Morath:

The Texas School Alliance (TSA) serves over 2 million students or nearly 40 percent of the state's total pupil enrollment. Our students represent 44 percent of the state's economically disadvantaged student population, 52 percent of its English Language Learners, and 45 percent of all at-risk students in the state.

As such, TSA's member districts appreciate the clarification and guidance that was provided yesterday regarding the 2018 STAAR online testing disruptions that occurred in April and May.

After reviewing TEA's press release and the To the Administrator Addressed (TAA) letter, the 37 member districts of TSA have two remaining concerns about the online testing issues that occurred this spring and offer the following recommendations:

1. **There appears to be a mis-match** between the May 15th email instructions from Deb Sauberer, TEA Executive Director in Student Assessment (*"Please do not require students to sit and wait for the [online] issue to be resolved for more than 15 minutes"*), and the identification criteria TEA is using to determine if students were 'affected' by the online testing issues (*"The students impacted by the system slowdown were determined by establishing the number of inactive test sessions lasting longer than 30 minutes and the number of students who logged in more than five times during the event"*).

a) This mis-match means that using the 30 minute, 5x login criteria, TEA has potentially under-identified the number of students who experienced some sort of online testing disruption.

b) Based on the TAA letter, it appears that the hold-harmless provision for accountability applies only to those particular students identified by using the 30 minute, 5x login criteria; not to any student who experienced an online testing issue. For example, a student may have been kicked off the



system, logged in 4 times and then “shut down” and refused to try again, and the student’s results would be included in the student group performance for a campus and the district. The hold-harmless provision would not apply in this particular case.

c) And since ELL students and Students with Disabilities who require an accommodation are required to test online, the results for our most vulnerable student populations may not accurately represent their testing performance. This could possibly impact the accountability ratings overall, as well as each of the three domain ratings. Please recall that the Closing the Gaps Domain specifically requires each student group to meet varying performance targets.

Recommendation: Expand the hold-harmless provision to ALL students affected by ANY online testing disruption in April and May. For state and federal accountability purposes, this means that TEA would exclude the results of ALL students whose STAAR tests were affected by the online testing issues that occurred in April and May 2018 - not just those students who meet TEA’s defined criteria. If, however, including the results from either the April and/or May test administration would positively benefit a district or campus rating, that district or campus would receive the higher rating.

2. **Districts have NOT received a complete file of ALL students affected by the online interruptions.** As of this afternoon, districts have received a file that contains the students who met the 30 minute, 5x login criteria, but that file does not identify ALL of the students who were affected by any online testing disruptions.

Recommendation: Provide a complete file of ALL students affected by ANY online disruption in April and May.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on the online testing issues that our students faced this spring. TSA member districts are committed to a strong and fair system of accountability to support continuous academic improvement, and we would be happy to discuss the recommendations with you as you continue to refine the state and federal accountability systems.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "HD Chambers". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mr. HD Chambers, President-Elect, Texas School Alliance
Superintendent, Alief Independent School District