

The Washington Post
Democracy Dies in Darkness

Were public schools better way back when? Giving today's schools an honest grade.



Former Hoffman-Boston students who were integrated from the all-black Arlington, Va., school in 1964 find their pictures in the Wakefield High School 1965 senior class photo. (Dayna Smith for The Washington Post)

By **Valerie Strauss** Reporter
November 5, 2019 at 12:08 p.m. CST

Surely you've heard it before: Public schools today are a mess, far worse than they used to be. Kids used to learn a lot more than they do now. When exactly that was remains unclear, but people like to say it anyway.

To be sure, there are many troubled public schools today that don't do their job of educating students. But does that make the sentiment expressed above true? Were schools really better in the past?

This piece, written by James Harvey and Jack McKay, asks and answers these questions with the facts, along with [an infographic](#) you can find at the end of the post.

Harvey is the executive director of the National Superintendents Roundtable, a nonprofit organization whose members are superintendents from throughout the country. McKay is executive director of the Horace Mann League, a nonprofit organization created to advocate for the ideas of Horace Mann, the founder of the American public school system.

By James Harvey and Jack McKay

Roland Chevalier, a former superintendent in St. Martin Parish, Louisiana, liked to describe what he called the "piñata theory" of school reform: Keep beating the schools until good things fall out of them.

It's discouraging. A steady stream of censure, carping, derogation and disparagement has been aimed at public schools ever since *A Nation at Risk* intoned in 1983 that school failure meant, "Our nation is at risk."

The denunciations rest on a three-legged stool of poorly documented claims. [Our schools used to be much better](#). Our students used to learn more. And school failure has undermined American competitiveness as, in the words of A Nation at Risk, “one great American industry after another [has fallen] to world competition.” The Mr. and Mrs. Smith’s teaching in American elementary and secondary schools have a lot to answer for.

Most of that indictment is nonsense. No one denies there are problems in our schools. We’ll get to them. But to lay the effects of globalization at the schoolhouse door is a stretch.

Despite that, demoralized school leaders have often deferred to the judgments of powerful people, no matter how thin and poorly documented the critics’ arguments.

Let’s look at the record.

Schools used to be much better

Really? How can anyone with a straight face claim that the legally segregated schools in the Old South were an improvement over today’s schools? Or that it was acceptable for public schools to refuse to enroll children with disabilities? Are we prepared to abandon nearly 3.5 million young women playing high school sports and return to the day when only about 300,000 did so? Each of these inequities lasted well into the 1970s and 1980s.

As late as the 1940s, most students dropped out of school after eighth grade. The infographic accompanying this article, recently published by the National Superintendents Roundtable and the Horace Mann League, shows a rock-hard truth: American public schools have vastly improved the educational levels of all Americans. In 1950, just 34 percent of young adults held a high school diploma; by 2016 that figure had soared to 89 percent.

Students are not learning as much as they once did

Well, maybe we are graduating more students, we can hear someone saying, but we’ve done so by dumbing down the curriculum.

The only real evidence we have on that is from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which between the early 1970s and 2012 regularly assessed the reading and mathematics performance of students at ages 9, 13, and 17. As the infographic makes clear, across the board, whatever their racial or ethnic background, students on average, were scoring higher on NAEP reading and mathematics assessments in 2012 than they had been in the early 1970s. For students of color, NAEP demonstrates 25-, 30- and 36-point increases in reading performance over that period, which some analysts believe represent gains of up to two or three years of additional schooling.

Since the end of October, we’ve had a lot of weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth about declines over the last two years in NAEP reading and math scores in Grades 4 and 8 (on what is known as the “Main NAEP” assessment). It’s true. [Modest declines are detectable between 2017 and 2019](#). But going back to when “Main NAEP” was first introduced in 1990, both reading and mathematics results are higher today than they were then, with particularly impressive improvements in mathematics (27 points in Grade 4 mathematics).

The meme that American students used to learn more turns out to be false.

The threat to competitiveness

Ah, but isn’t “one great American industry after another falling to foreign competition” due to the shortcomings of Mr. and Mrs. Smith? That’s an opinion masquerading as a fact.

A lot of what ails domestic manufacturing can be explained by offshoring in search of cheap labor, tax incentives and less environmental oversight. When *A Nation at Risk* made the foreign competition claim in 1983, the nation's gross domestic product stood at \$7 trillion in inflation-adjusted dollars. By June of this year, the comparable figure was \$19.02 trillion.

Or look at formal competitiveness rankings. The World Economic Forum annually issues a [global competitiveness report](#) on 141 economies. Since 2015, the United States has never ranked below third place. In most years, the American economy is found trading first and second place with either Switzerland or Singapore.

Mr. and Mrs. Smith must have been doing something right.

The challenge of inequality

There is a threat to American well-being. It is the challenge of growing inequality, as the lion's share of the remarkable American economic growth of the 21st century has been consumed by the top one percent. It's a recipe for social unrest. The infographic tries to capture some of this dynamic by cross-indexing rates of childhood poverty in the developed world with support for families with children. The United States is off the charts on both dimensions, with the highest rates of childhood relative poverty and the lowest rates of support for families.

More than 50 percent of students in American public schools are low-income. Segregation and social isolation by race and income have increased in this century. Children are arriving at school each day too traumatized to learn because a variety of social ailments ranging from gun violence and poverty to hunger and homelessness.

All of this is ignored in the public discourse about schools. Educators are somehow expected to pick up the pieces of these larger societal catastrophes. Yet for more than 50 years researchers have documented the powerful relationship between poverty and achievement: Out-of-school factors account for 70 percent or more of variation in tested achievement.

Signs of change

Fortunately, the tide of criticism seems to be turning. The [astonishing "opt-out"](#) movement of recent years in New York and elsewhere revealed that parents had had enough of a bloated testing regime. Teacher strikes around the country have helped [transform public attitudes about the profession](#). Organizations such as the Roundtable and the Horace Mann League have raised serious questions about international school performance rankings and the faulty [benchmarks developed by NAEP](#).

It is gratifying too that some former critics now acknowledge that reform efforts were misguided. [Jay P. Greene](#) of the University of Arkansas and [Rick Hess](#) of the American Enterprise Institute — both prominent critics — have been more open to new ideas of late. Between them, they acknowledge the futility of forcing change from the top and the "wild exaggerations" about what their policy prescriptions would produce. Others, like Michael Petrilli of the Fordham Institute, are even trying to understand how out-of-school issues like poverty relate to school outcomes. Better late than never.

Giving schools an honest grade

These signs of change represent real progress. They hold out the promise that critics and advocates of public education can come together around a fact-based assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the system.

School leaders can't blow an uncertain trumpet. They need to stand up for the enterprise they lead. And they need to insist that schools deserve an honest grade.

But they can't blow false notes, either. Defending public schools does not require sugarcoating real problems. Achievement gaps are real. Our schools remain segregated. Savage opportunity gaps exist. Funding is unequal. The infographic faces up to these challenges by noting the disparities in on-time graduation rates for students of color, the poor and those dealing with disabilities.

We need to address these complicated issues. It is challenging work and more urgently needed today, in our divided nation, than at any time in the recent past.

Public schools: A very special public asset

Public schools represent a very special public asset. Not only do they serve the public, they create the public. Even if our schools do not always live up to their promise, they represent some of the most decent impulses of the American spirit. Ideally, they serve as an instrument for realizing all the possibilities America's "shining city on a hill" promised to the world. Just because the instrument falls short doesn't mean the ideal is not real.

For all of their difficulties, American public schools can demonstrate a record of expansion, of accomplishment and of providing more and more opportunity for more and more people. Public schools made much of the progress of 20th-century America possible.

The task for educators and citizens, for critics and advocates, is to renew this magnificent instrument so that it can help carry American democracy successfully through the 21st.

Giving Schools an Honest Grade

Public schools have done a remarkable job raising education levels of the entire U.S. population.

Percentage of U.S. adults aged 25+ who hold a high school diploma



For every major racial and ethnic group in the U.S., student achievement is higher today than it was in the 1970s.

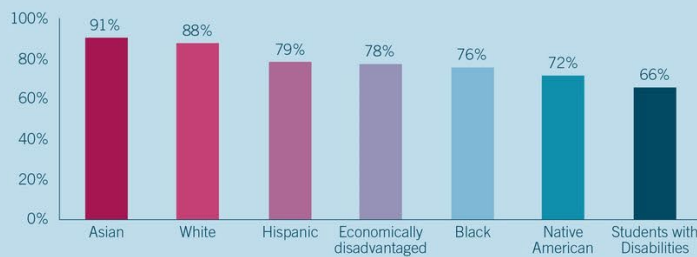


Reading: Changes in NAEP scores by age, 1971-2012*



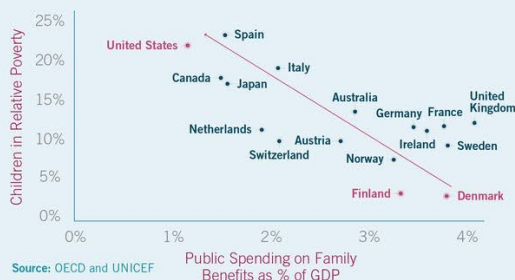
A lot of work lies ahead to equalize outcomes.

Estimated On-Time Graduation Rates, 2012-13



Getting to the next level will require policymakers to address out-of-school factors influencing achievement, including high levels of student poverty and meager support for families.

Child Poverty & Public Spending on Families, by Nation 2016



1,355,821

U.S. public school students were homeless in 2017, as defined by the McKinney-Vento Act

Despite challenges, public schools have achieved great things. It's time to give them an honest grade.

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November 11, 2019

Mike Morath, Commissioner
Texas Education Agency
1701 N. Congress Avenue
Austin, TX 78701-1494

Re: Proposed amendments to §101.4002 concerning end-of-course (EOC) substitute assessments for graduation

Commissioner Morath,

The 40 member districts of the Texas School Alliance (TSA) appreciate the opportunity to comment on the proposed amendments that would modify specific sections of current statute (§101.4002) in order to align with state and federal laws.

With regards to the proposed changes to **§101.4002 STAAR End-Of-Course Substitute Assessments**:

1. TSA **agrees** with the proposed amendment to subsection (d)(2)(B) that would extend the expiration date to September 1, 2023 as required by SB 213, 86th Texas Legislature, 2019.
2. TSA **strongly disagrees** with the proposed amendment to add subsection (c)(1) and offers a possible solution.
 - a. The new subsection (c)(1) is not necessary for federal accountability purposes. The assessment requirement for federal purposes is addressed in section (e) of the proposed rule.
 - i. According to page 39 of the USDE Office of State Support (OSS) Performance Review Report, December 2018, Texas' assessment program must *"Provide evidence that it administers the same, grade-level assessments to all public school students, including those students enrolled in advanced mathematics, reading/language arts, and, if applicable, science courses (except for 8th-graders taking the high school mathematics assessment, which is in the approved Texas consolidated State plan and permitted under ESEA §1111(b)(2)(C))."*
 - ii. USDE **does not require students to take and fail** an EOC assessment at least once before being eligible to use a substitute assessment to meet graduation purposes. It **does not** require Texas to put any conditions on the use of substitute assessments for graduation. Texas need only assure that students who use substitute assessments also take the STAAR EOC for that course.

PRESIDENT

Hurst-Euless-Bedford ISD
Mr. Steve Chapman

PRESIDENT ELECT

Corpus Christi ISD
Dr. Roland Hernandez

VICE PRESIDENT

Dallas ISD
Dr. Michael Hinojosa

SECRETARY

Northside ISD
Dr. Brian Woods

TREASURER

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Mr. HD Chambers

PAST PRESIDENT

Alief ISD
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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dr. Curtis Culwell

MEMBER DISTRICTS

Abilene ISD*	Killeen ISD*
Aldine ISD	Lubbock ISD
Alief ISD*	McAllen ISD
Amarillo ISD*	Mesquite ISD*
Arlington ISD	Midland ISD
Austin ISD	North East ISD
Corpus Christi ISD*	Northside ISD*
Cypress-Fairbanks ISD	Pasadena ISD
Dallas ISD*	Pflugerville ISD
Ector County ISD	Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD
El Paso ISD	Plano ISD
Fort Bend ISD	Richardson ISD
Fort Worth ISD	Round Rock ISD
Garland ISD	San Angelo ISD*
Harlingen CISD	San Antonio ISD
Houston ISD	Socorro ISD
Humble ISD*	Spring Branch ISD*
Hurst-Euless-Bedford ISD*	Tyler ISD
Irving ISD*	United ISD
Katy ISD	Waco ISD

*Board of Directors



Therefore, TSA **recommends eliminating** the new subsection (c)(1) because the assessment requirement for federal purposes is addressed in section (e) of the proposed rule.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on the proposed changes concerning end-of-course substitute assessments. TSA member districts would be happy to serve as a resource to Agency staff as you move through the rule adoption process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Steven A. Chapman". The signature is written in dark ink on a light background.

Steve Chapman, President, Texas School Alliance
Superintendent, Hurst-Euless-Bedford Independent School District

The Texas School Alliance (TSA) comprises 40 of Texas' largest school districts, serving 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. The organization works on issues that will improve educational quality for Texas students, particularly those in large and urban districts.



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*Board of Directors

October 16, 2019

Mike Morath, Commissioner
Texas Education Agency
1701 N. Congress Avenue
Austin, TX 78701-1494

Re: Proposed amendments to §97.1061, §97.1063, and §97.1064, concerning interventions and sanctions for campuses, campus intervention teams, and campus turnaround plans.

Commissioner Morath,

The 40 member districts of the Texas School Alliance (TSA) appreciate the opportunity to comment on the proposed amendments that would modify three specific sections of current statute (§97.1061, §97.1063, and §97.1064) in order to 1) align the agency's current intervention framework and changes from the 85th Texas Legislature, 2017 and 2) clarify intervention activities required in TEC Chapter 39A.

With regards to the proposed changes to **§97.1061 Interventions and Sanctions for Campuses**:

1. TSA **agrees** with the proposed amendment to subsection (a) that would remove the requirement to engage in the Texas Accountability Intervention System (TAIS), as this framework is no longer used by the agency.
2. TSA **strongly disagrees** with the proposed replacement to subsection (h) and offers a possible solution.
 - a. While TEA correctly referenced HB 2263, 85th Texas Legislature, 2017, which removed the requirement for a CIT for campuses that receive an acceptable performance rating the year immediately after receiving an unacceptable performance rating, the proposed replacement to subsection (h) appears to re-instate prior statute that HB 2263 intended to remove. *(See Figures 1 and 2.)*
 - b. **Proposed replacement solution in red text:** (h) If a campus was assigned an unacceptable overall F rating in the prior year but met standard with an overall rating of A, B, C or D in the current year, the CIT will may, but is not required to, continue to work with the campus until the campus meets all the performance standards under TEC, §39.054(e), for a two-year period. (See Figure 3.)
3. TSA **recommends clarifying** 'unacceptable rating' in subsections (e), (f), and (g) and offers a possible solution.
 - a. **Proposed subsection solution in red text:** (e)(f)(g) If a campus is assigned an unacceptable overall F rating under Texas Education Code (TEC), §39.054(e), for...



With regards to the proposed changes to **§97.1063 Campus Intervention Teams:**

1. TSA **agrees** with the proposed amendment to remove a professional service provider professional service provider (PSP) because the new Effective Schools Framework does not utilize a PSP.
2. TSA **agrees** with the proposed new paragraph (b2) to include the campus principal's direct supervisor, if the DCSI is not the campus principal's direct supervisor.
3. TSA **agrees** with the proposed new subsection (c) that an approved education professional, who is not an employee of the campus or district, shall assist with the needs assessment as described in TEC §39A.053

With regards to the proposed changes to **§97.1064 Campus Turnaround Plan:**

1. TSA **recommends clarifying** 'unacceptable rating' in proposed amendment (a) and offers a possible solution.
 - a. **Proposed amendment solution in red text:** (a) If a campus is assigned an ~~unacceptable~~ overall F rating under Texas Education Code (TEC), §39.054(e), for two consecutive years, the campus must develop a campus turnaround plan to be approved by the commissioner of education in accordance with TEC, §§39A.103-39A.107 ~~§39.107~~.
2. TSA **recommends clarifying** 'unacceptable rating' in proposed amendment (d) and offers a possible solution.
 - a. **Proposed amendment solution in red text:** (d) Within 60 days of receiving a campus's preliminary accountability rating the district must notify parents, community members, and stakeholders that the campus received an ~~unacceptable~~ overall F rating for two consecutive years and request assistance in developing the campus turnaround plan. All input provided by family, community members, and stakeholders must be considered in the development of the final campus turnaround plan submitted to the Texas Education Agency (TEA).
3. TSA **disagrees** with the proposed new subsection (h) and offers a possible solution.
 - a. NOTE: Subsection (g) requires that *"the district must submit the campus turnaround plan electronically to the TEA by March 1 unless otherwise specified."*
 - b. TEA's proposed turnaround plan approval or rejection date of June 15 is too late for the budgeting and staffing processes to be implemented effectively for these critical needs campuses. And if the commissioner rejects a turnaround plan, the June 15th date does not provide adequate time before the start of the new school year to modify the plan, seek stakeholder comment prior to board approval, and be approved by the board prior to the 60-day resubmission to the TEA - as outlined in the proposed new subsection (i)(1-4) requires.
 - c. **Proposed new subsection solution in red text:** (h) Not later than ~~June~~ **April 15** of each year, the commissioner must either approve or reject any campus turnaround plan prepared and submitted by a district.
4. TSA **disagrees** with the proposed new subsection (i)(1) and offers a possible solution.
 - a. **Proposed new subsection solution in red text:** (i) (1) The modified plan ~~must~~ **may** be created with assistance from TEA staff, as requested by the district.



5. TSA **recommends clarifying** ‘academically acceptable rating’ in re-numbered amendment (j) and offers a possible solution.
 - a. **Proposed amendment solution in red text:** (j) ~~[(h)]~~ A campus may implement, modify, or withdraw its campus turnaround plan with board approval if the campus receives an ~~academically acceptable rating~~ overall rating of A, B, C or D for the school year following the development of the campus turnaround plan.
6. TSA **recommends clarifying** ‘academically acceptable rating’ and ‘acceptable performance rating’ in proposed new subsection (k) and offers a possible solution.
 - a. **Proposed amendment solution in red text:** (k) A campus that has not received an academically acceptable rating overall rating of A, B, C or D for the school year following the development of the campus turnaround plan must implement its commissioner-approved campus turnaround plan with fidelity until the campus receives an acceptable performance rating overall rating of A, B, C or D for two consecutive school years.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on the proposed changes concerning interventions and sanctions for campuses, campus intervention teams, and campus turnaround plans. TSA member districts would be happy to discuss the possible solutions with you and to serve as a resource to Agency staff as you move through the rule adoption process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Steven A. Chapman'.

Steve Chapman, President, Texas School Alliance
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Figure 1. Source: HB 2263 Enrolled Version, 85th Texas Legislature, 2017, retrieved 10-15-19.

	H.B. No. 2263
1	AN ACT
2	relating to continued monitoring of certain public school campuses
3	that have been assigned a campus intervention team and the approval
4	and modification of a campus turnaround plan submitted by a school
5	district.
6	BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF TEXAS:
7	SECTION 1. Section 39.106(e), Education Code, is amended to
8	read as follows:
9	(e) For each year a campus is assigned an unacceptable
10	performance rating, a campus intervention team shall:
11	(1) continue to work with a campus until:
12	[(A) the campus satisfies all performance
13	standards under Section 39.054(e) for a two-year period; or
14	[(B) the campus satisfies all performance
15	standards under Section 39.054(e) for a one-year period and the
16	commissioner determines that the campus is operating and will
17	continue to operate in a manner that improves student achievement;
18	[(2)] assist in updating the targeted improvement plan
19	to identify and analyze areas of growth and areas that require
20	improvement; and
21	(2) [(3)] submit each updated plan described by
22	Subdivision (1) [(2)] to the board of trustees of the school
23	district.
24	SECTION 2. Section 39.107, Education Code, is amended by

Figure 2. Source: LBB Fiscal Note HB 2263 Enrolled Version, 85th Texas Legislature, 2017, retrieved 10-15-19.

LEGISLATIVE BUDGET BOARD Austin, Texas FISCAL NOTE, 85TH LEGISLATIVE REGULAR SESSION May 25, 2017 TO: Honorable Joe Straus, Speaker of the House, House of Representatives FROM: Ursula Parks, Director, Legislative Budget Board IN RE: HB2263 by Gooden (Relating to the public school accountability system.), As Passed 2nd House No significant fiscal implication to the State is anticipated. The bill would remove the requirement that a campus that had previously been assigned an unacceptable performance rating would continue to work with a campus intervention team (CIT). Under current statute, a campus previously assigned "Improvement Required" (IR) continued to work with a CIT to prepare and submit a targeted improvement plan for one or two years. TEA estimates a reduction in the number of improvement plans submitted annually, and expects a cost savings to result from the bill. However, because these plans are from previously IR campuses, and the agency does not support them as extensively as it does multi-year IR campuses, the cost savings associated with the bill are not expected to be significant. The commissioner would also be required to either approve or reject any campus turnaround plan in writing no later than June 15th of each year. If the plan is rejected, the commissioner must also send the district an outline of the specific concerns regarding the turnaround plan that resulted in the rejection. A district receiving a rejected plan must create a modified plan with assistance from TEA staff. The bill would take effect September 1, 2017. Local Government Impact The bill would reduce costs to districts with a campus that would no longer be required to contract with a Professional Service Provider in the year after the campus meets standard. TEA estimates a minimal local impact for districts currently required to take action to address campus improvement plans. This bill would limit or eliminate interventions at some districts. Source Agencies: 701 Texas Education Agency LBB Staff: UP, SL, THo, AM
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Figure 3. Source: TEA Overview of 2018 Accountability, TEA A-F Resources, as of 7-3-19



The slide features the TEA logo in the top left corner. The title "A-F Accountability: New Labels/Grades" is positioned at the top. A list of performance labels with their corresponding colors is on the left: A (green) for Exemplary Performance, B (blue) for Recognized Performance, C (purple) for Acceptable Performance, D (orange) for In Need of Improvement, and F (red) for Unacceptable Performance. On the right, there is a blue silhouette of the Texas State Capitol building against a light blue sky with clouds. A small number "9" in a circle is located in the bottom right corner of the slide.

TEA Texas Education Agency® **A–F Accountability: New Labels/Grades**

A = Exemplary Performance

B = Recognized Performance

C = Acceptable Performance

D = In Need of Improvement

F = Unacceptable Performance

TEA Overview of 2018 Accountability, <https://tea.texas.gov/A-F/>, retrieved 7-3-19

Source: <https://tea.texas.gov/a-f/>, retrieved 7-3-19



Priority Recommendations from TSA Accountability Experts (Based on Regional Fall Accountability Workshops and October Strategic Staff Meeting)

Issue #1: TEA is eliminating two CCMR indicators: CTE coherent sequence of courses and locally developed Military Ready criteria (beginning in Spring 2020, TEA will use the CCMR bonus definition for accountability purposes → ASVAB cut scores + DoD enlistment records).

The concerns include the following:

- It appears the agency is changing legislative intent from Career 'Ready' to Career 'Proven' and Military 'Ready' to Military 'Proven'
- Unless TEA changes the cut scores...these calculation changes will lower domain scores (and in some cases) ratings for ALL districts and ALL high schools because the CCMRs are used in all three domain calculations. See TEA's data table below.
- The lower domain scores will NOT be due to any change in student performance; instead it will be due to these 2 rule changes.
- Eliminating CTE coherent sequence has been vigorously debated with TEA by both ATAC and APAC.
- Eliminating the locally developed Military Ready criteria was announced in August via a HB 3 in 30 video. It has NOT been discussed with ATAC or APAC or with legislators. It has not been proposed via rulemaking.

Texas Education Agency 2019 College, Career, and Military Readiness State		
Data Table		
	Annual Graduates	
	Count/Credit	Percent
Graduate with Completed IEP and Workforce Readiness Received graduation type code of 04, 05, 54, or 55	5953	2%
Special Ed with Advanced Degree Plan Identified as receiving special education services and earned an advanced degree plan	8882	3%
U.S. Armed Forces Enlisted in the U.S. Armed Forces	14823	4%
Met Non-CTE Criteria Met at least one criteria above	202427	58%
CTE Coherent Sequence Coursework Aligned with Industry-Based Certifications CTE coherent sequence graduate with at least one CTE course aligned with an industry-based certification and did not meet any other criteria (1/2 credit)	25,296.0	7%

NOTE: 50,592 students were awarded ½ point for completing CTE Coherent Sequence Coursework (50,592 x ½ = 25,296 pts.)

Recommendations:

- Keep CTE coherent sequence of courses as a CCMR indicator for campus and district accountability purposes.
- Define 3 or 4 specific 'Military-Ready' criteria such as completing JROTC courses, meeting the ASVAB cut score (but not enlisting in the military), etc.

Issue #2: ESSA Federal Accountability → Closing the Gaps Domain

1. **Graduation Rate Methodology:** High performing high schools with graduation rates already above the state's final goal of 94%, who do not show at least a one-tenth percentage point increase from the prior year, earn 0 points in the Closing the Gaps Domain for the graduation rate category, and can penalize a campus by lowering their numeric score.
 - a. 2019 Accountability Manual, Chapter 4, page 36, states, *"For the Class of 2018, the four-year graduation target is 90 percent of students graduate with regular high school diploma in four years. Student groups that are at or above 90 percent are required to exceed that rate by at least a tenth of a percent in the following year(s)."*
 - b. The state's **final** graduation rate goal (as Texas ESSA Plan Appendix A) is 94%.

Recommendation: TEA and the USDE adjust the requirement for the Four-Year Graduation Rate Target for Closing the Gaps to read: "...Student groups that are at or above 90 percent are required to exceed that rate by at least a tenth of a percent in the following year(s), until they surpass the final graduation rate of 94% for any student group included in the accountability system. Districts and campuses that surpass the final graduation rate of 94% for any student group must maintain a rate equal to or higher than 94% to received credit for the student group in the accountability system for the Closing the Gaps Domain."

2. **Alternative Education Accountability:** ATAC has offered a variety of solutions. To date, the agency has not agreed to implement any of ATAC's proposed solutions.

Recommendation: Redefine AEA campus performance targets in the Closing the Gaps Domain and include the use of extended graduation rates.

3. Recommended Amendments / Waivers to Texas' ESSA Plan:

- a. **"ALL" student group.** Use as a report only indicator. The "All" student group reflects state demographics and performance targets. A campus can meet other student group targets and miss "All" target.
- b. **EL exemption.** ELs who are year one in U.S. schools are excluded from accountability performance calculations. ELs who are in their second year in U.S. schools are included in accountability. TSA wants the EL exemption extended for 3 years. i.e. If the state wants a lower IGC rate for ELs, then extend the EL exemption for high school students and allow them time to learn English.
- c. **SIFE/Asylees / Refugees.** Unschooled asylees, unschooled refugees, and students with interrupted formal education (SIFEs) are not included in **state accountability** until their sixth year of enrollment in U.S. schools. TSA wants this provision extended to federal accountability / ESSA / Closing the Gaps Domain.
- d. **No Double Testing for accelerated students in grades 5 – 7.** USDE /TEA memo propose that hyper-accelerated middle school students be double-tested. Take grade-level STAAR for accountability and EOCs for graduation.
- e. **Expand grades 3 – 8 indicators beyond STAAR.** See next section.
- f. **TSIA.** Designate the TSIA as an approved state test (like EOCs are an approved state test).

Issue #3: The A-F accountability system is a work in progress. It's not yet recognizing effective schools as much as it is recognizing where wealthy students or poor students are located. Here's what we know now:

- a) Commissioner Morath provided SBOE members with the following correlations between the %EcD students and campus ratings:
 - i. Overall A-F ratings = 0.4 (moderate)
 - ii. Student Achievement Domain = 0.6 (strong)
 - iii. School Progress Domain = 0.1 (weak)
 - iv. Closing the Gaps Domain = 0.4 (moderate)

- b) When the 2019 A-F ratings are disaggregated by %EcD students enrolled it looks like this:

0-20% <u>EcD</u>	636 campuses	98.6% A or B 1 D 0 F
20.1-40% <u>EcD</u>	979 campuses	86.1% A or B 15 D 3 F
40.1-60% <u>EcD</u>	1,631 campuses	64.4% A or B 93 D 31 F
60.1-80% <u>EcD</u>	2,235 campuses	50.6% A or B 273 D 145 F
80.1%-100%	2,821 campuses	48.7% A or B 321 D 223 F
NOTE: 87% of D or F campuses enroll 60-100% <u>EcD</u> students		

- c) Legislators created an equitable school finance system that recognizes the differences in educating students of poverty by targeting funding to the most educationally disadvantaged students (with weights attached to Tiers 1 – 5.) The current A-F accountability system does not recognize those same challenges.
- d) HS and Districts have “multi-dimensional” accountability indicators because the system includes CCMR and Graduation rates. Elementary and Middle Schools do not have “multi-dimensional” accountability indicators. A-F accountability letter grades for grades 3-8 are based solely on STAAR.

What are some realistic recommendations to increase equity in the academic accountability system?

1. Limit STAAR to no more than 50% of any domain calculation (the minimum required by ESSA) and expand non-test based indicators.

- a. Possible indicators include:
 - i. ES Growth – Full day Pre-K participation rates → aligns with HB 3 PreK funding
 - ii. ES and MS Growth:
 - 1. Spanish to English Transition proxy for STAAR → aligns with HB 3 Dual Language Program enrollment
 - 2. “Enrichment” course completion or access to the arts /wellness indicators – fine arts, P.E. and second language acquisition (6 states + DC are using this indicator in their ESSA plans.)
 - iii. MS Growth / CCMR:
 - 1. Advanced course completion
 - 2. CTE course completion
 - 3. On-track for high school graduation

iv. HS Growth / CCMR:

1. 9th graders credit accumulation on-track to graduate with cohort
 2. Postsecondary readiness course completions for EcD students (i.e. AVID)
 3. Diplomas with endorsements → aligns with 85th & 86th session discussions regarding Endorsements and Distinguished Level of Achievement by students successfully completing Algebra 2.
 4. Fine Arts course completion
- v. All Levels - Chronic absenteeism (Barbara Bush Literacy Foundation / Attendance Works Definition: a student who misses 18 or more days of school for ANY reason) – 35 states are using this as an ESSA school quality indicator.
- vi. All Levels - School and Student Safety Survey → aligns with 86th session allocation of resources focus on school safety and mental health.
- vii. All Levels – EL reclassification rates (this should align with the EL progress measure plans that are a part of the academic accountability system and NOT promote early exit policies) → aligns with HB 3 Dual Language Program Allotment.

2. Use Spectrum Weights (SES Tiers 1-5 / Weighted average SES Tier) in the A-F accountability system similar to how they are used in the school finance system.

a. Rationale:

- i. Weights would function similar to SES Tiers 1-5 functions in the school finance system.
- ii. This would NOT change any cut score or standard.
- iii. It would provide context to the domain A-F letter grades.

b. Ideas from TSA strategic staff meeting include:

- i. Apply to each domain raw score before scaling
- ii. Apply to the overall raw score before scaling
- iii. Replace % Eco Dis in Domain 2B Relative Performance

3. Eliminate the Overall Letter Grade Rating.

a. Rationale:

- i. Publicly reporting all 3 letter grades increases transparency – which Legislators and the Commissioner has said is one purpose of the A-F accountability system.
- ii. **NOTE:** A 200+ accountability manual filled with rules and raw scores converted to scale scores is not transparent at all.
- iii. Eliminates the 70/30 weight calculations for an overall rating.

4. Align State and Federal accountability systems by only using the Closing the Gaps Domain to determine overall A-F accountability letter grades.

a. Rationale:

- i. Almost all of the metrics used in the Student Achievement Domain (D1) and the School Progress Domain (D2) are also used in the Closing the Gaps Domain (D3). NOTE: Relative Performance (D2b) is currently not included in the Closing the Gaps Domain.

Calculating a Closing the Gaps Domain Score

To calculate the Closing the Gaps domain score, weight each component for which the district or campus has at least the minimum number of evaluated indicators based on the following table.

Component points are rounded to one decimal place. Total points for each component are determined by multiplying the percentage of evaluated indicators met by the corresponding weight and rounding to one decimal place. The Closing the Gaps domain score is the sum of the total points rounded to the nearest whole number.

Closing the Gaps Component Weights		
Campus Types	Closing the Gaps Domain Component	Weight
Elementary and Middle Schools	Academic Achievement STAAR Meets Grade Level on R & M	30%
	Academic Growth Status STAAR R and M	50%
	English Language Proficiency	10%
	Student Achievement Domain Score: STAAR Component Only	10%
High Schools, K-12s, AEAs, and Districts	Academic Achievement STAAR Meets Grade Level on R & M	50%
	Federal Graduation Status or Academic Growth Status ¹	10%
	English Language Proficiency	10%
	College, Career, and Military Readiness or Student Achievement Domain Score: STAAR Component Only ²	30%

¹ If Federal Graduation Status is not available, Academic Growth Status is used.

² If College, Career, and Military Readiness is not available, Student Achievement Domain Score: STAAR Component Only is used.

Source: TEA 2019 Accountability Manual. Red text added.

- b. Eliminate the Student Achievement Domain (D1) and the School Progress Domain (D2).
 - i. If no changes are made to the currently D3 calculations and metrics, the table below shows that if D3 was used to assign 2019 Overall A-F letter grades then 55% of campus overall ratings would remain the same, 43% would be lower, and 2% would be higher.

Research Question: What would happen to campus letter grades if only the D3 Closing the Gaps Domain was used for both state and federal accountability systems?

Answer: 55% would remain the same / 43% would be lower than the overall grade / 2% would be higher than the overall grade

Overall Rating vs. Domain 3 Rating: All

Of the 7,768 included campuses, 4,238 (55%) had the same Overall and Domain 3 rating. Where there was a difference 3,347 (43%) had a higher Overall rating, and 183 (2%) had a higher Domain 3 rating. No campus got an A in one and an F in the other.

Overall Rating	Domain 3 Rating				
	A	B	C	D	F
A	1,120	503	9	2	
B	126	1,165	1,739	44	2
C		15	1,265	679	74
D			16	343	295
F				26	345

Overall vs Domain 3 Rating
 ■ Domain 3 Higher
 ■ Overall Higher
 ■ Same

Source: TSA Accountability by HillCo Partners

- c. Based on the results shown in the table above, the following changes to the Closing the Gaps Domain are suggested:
- Include Relative Performance calculation before assigning overall letter grade.
 - Include SES Tiers in the calculations.
 - Reduce assessments to only what is required by ESSA (i.e. eliminate 8th gr. SS and U.S. History EOC).
 - For Elementary and Middle Schools:
 - Expand achievement and growth indicators beyond STAAR (see previous section)
 - Replace the school quality / student success indicator
 - Texas' ESSA Plan uses Meets GL on STAAR as the school quality / student success indicator for gr. 3-8. High Schools and Districts use CCMRs for school quality / student success indicator.
 - USDE has approved the following options for other states:
 - 35 states are using **chronic absenteeism/attendance measure** as a school quality indicator in their ESSA plans.
 - Nine states plan to use a **school climate/culture measure**.
 - Nine states plan to use a **social studies proficiency/progress measure**.
 - Six states, plus the District of Columbia, plan to use an **art access/participation or well-rounded education measure**.
 - Source: Education Commission of the States.
<https://www.ecs.org/50-state-comparison-states-school-accountability-systems/>

2019 Closing the Gaps Performance Targets

Academic Achievement (Percentage at Meets Grade Level or above)														
Subject	All Students	African American	Hispanic	White	American Indian	Asian	Pacific Islander	Two or More Races	Special Educ.	Econ. Disadv.	EL (Current and Monitored)	Special Ed (Former)	Cont. Enrolled	Non-Cont. Enrolled
ELA/Reading	44%	32%	37%	60%	43%	74%	45%	56%	19%	33%	29%	36%	46%	42%
Mathematics	46%	31%	40%	59%	45%	82%	50%	54%	23%	36%	40%	44%	47%	45%

Subject	Academic Growth Status (Elementary and Middle Schools)													
ELA/Reading	66%	62%	65%	69%	67%	77%	67%	68%	59%	64%	64%	65%	66%	67%
Mathematics	71%	67%	69%	74%	71%	86%	74%	73%	61%	68%	68%	70%	71%	70%

Federal Graduation Status (High Schools, K-12s, and Districts) ¹														
90%	90%	90%	90%	90%	90%	90%	90%	90%	90%	90%	90%	n/a	n/a	n/a

Student Achievement Domain Score: STAAR Component Only (Elementary and Middle Schools)														
47%	36%	41%	58%	46%	73%	48%	55%	23%	38%	37%	43%	48%	45%	

College, Career, and Military Readiness Performance Status (High Schools, K-12s, and Districts)														
47%	31%	41%	58%	42%	76%	39%	53%	27%	39%	30%	43%	50%	31%	

English Language Proficiency Status ²														
											36%			

¹ Ever ELs (EL [Ever HS]) are evaluated in the federal graduation rates. Ever ELs (EL [Ever HS]) are students reported in TSDS PEIMS as ELs at any time while attending grades 9-12 in a Texas public school.

² English Language Proficiency Status evaluates current ELs only.