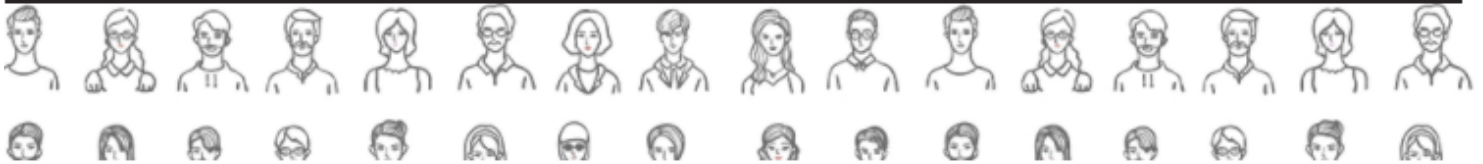


Raise Your Voice

The Future of Testing and School Accountability in Texas



What makes a school great? What are parents really looking for in a high-quality school? What do teachers think is most important? What do students want and need?

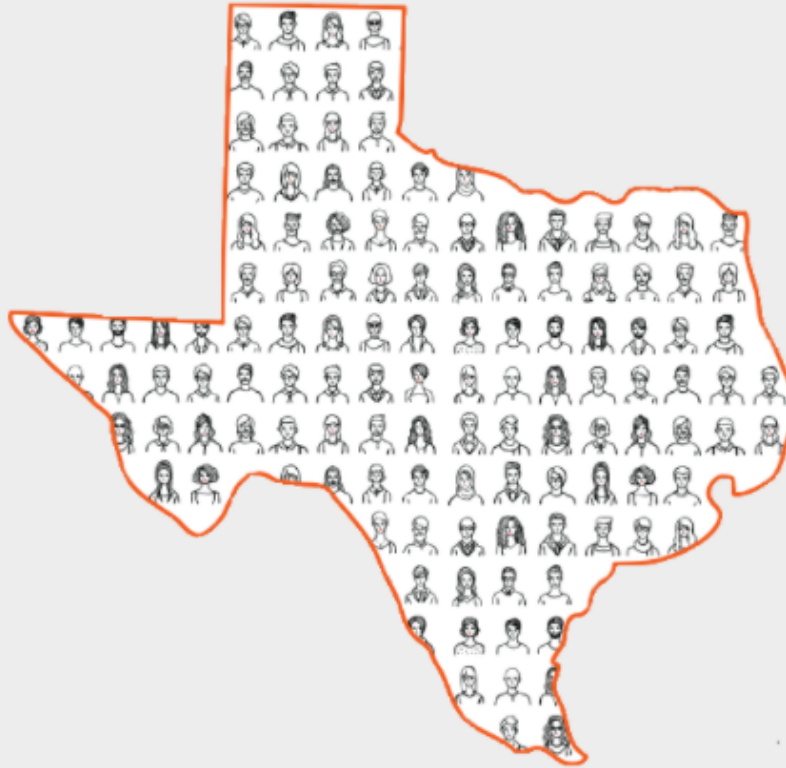
Over the next 12 months, Raise Your Hand Texas will bring experts, researchers, policymakers, and communities together to ask these questions and more as we work to design a stronger and more innovative school testing and accountability system.

The goal? To bring 10,000 voices together with policy expertise to speak to what Texans want most from their schools and impact policy in the 2023 legislative session.

So much has changed about what we know are the best ways to learn, test, and measure all that goes into a world-class education system. And Texas, as a long-standing leader in school accountability reform, is uniquely positioned to lead the way toward a more useful, fair, and holistic approach. We have the opportunity to raise our standards for success and raise student outcomes like never before.

Join us as we chart a course toward the future for our 5.4 million public school students.

10,000 Voices on Testing and Accountability



Beginning in October of 2021 the Raise Your Hand Texas advocacy team will work to meet with ten thousand Texans in small and large group settings to **educate** stakeholders about our current accountability system, **gather feedback** on accountability topics, and **invite** people to join us in the push for legislative change.

Council on Testing and Accountability



In January 2022, Raise Your Hand Texas will convene a Council on Testing and Accountability to sift through existing accountability and assessment research, hear from experts, examine community input, and make legislative recommendations. The event will be held in-person and live-streamed.

Raise Your Hand will also convene a series of accountability panel discussions geared towards legislators, staff, and advocates on topics such as different models for assessments, innovative accountability practices from across the country, federal requirements, and more.

The work of the grassroots advocacy and policy experts tracks will culminate in a series of legislative recommendations presented prior to the 2023 legislative session.

Events

on Testing and Accountability



Leading up to the 2023 legislative session, Raise Your Hand will host a series of events on our report's findings, presenting and explaining them to advocates throughout the state.

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Are you interested in building a better Testing and Accountability system in Texas? We want to hear from you! Connect with your local regional advocacy director to find out how you can get involved.

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Making Sure School Performance Measures Provide the Right Diagnosis to Improve Student Outcomes

"How are the students doing?" is a different question from "What does the school contribute?"



Brian P. Gill

Brian P. Gill is a senior fellow at Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

Measuring school performance has been an important component of state and federal policies for two decades. Measures based exclusively on reading and math proficiency have given way to more complex and sophisticated approaches incorporating growth or value-added data as well as indicators of chronic absenteeism, college readiness, or school climate. Pundits and researchers continue to debate whether high-stakes accountability policies have led to improved school performance—and/or to unintended negative side effects.

As I've argued before, accountability—with a small “a”—doesn't require a formal, rules-based system with explicit consequences tied to results. In particular, transparency can create a form of accountability simply by shining a light on performance. Regardless of whether a measure is used for “small a” or “big A” accountability, though, its success in promoting improved outcomes for students depends on whether it provides good *diagnostic* information, valid and reliable for assessing school performance.

My colleagues and I at the Mid-Atlantic Regional Educational Lab have worked with state and local decision makers to develop, refine, and stress-test measures of school performance that provide useful diagnostic information. Some have been intended as big-A accountability measures, incorporated in state ESSA plans. Others are used for informational purposes, giving decision makers a richer understanding of school performance. Collectively, these projects have highlighted that decision makers need a clear understanding of *what a measure is diagnostic for*. A measure can be diagnostic for one purpose and non-diagnostic for another. For example, a low rate of proficiency in grade 3 reading suggests that students need additional support to read proficiently. It does not necessarily mean the school is underperforming in serving its students, because they might be learning rapidly from a very low starting point. Conversely, a high rate of

proficiency does not necessarily mean a school is enhancing students' learning, if they started out as high performing. Assessing whether a school is underperforming requires isolating its contribution from factors outside its control, thereby assessing whether students would do better if they were at a different school.

More broadly, our work has informed a conceptual framework of school performance measures that are potentially diagnostic for addressing three distinct questions:

1. ***How are students doing?*** Measures include not only traditional reading and math proficiency indicators, but also social-emotional learning ([such as the “loved, challenged, and prepared” measures we developed with the DC Public Schools](#)) and chronic absenteeism. They also include longer-term student outcomes such as graduation, college enrollment, degree completion, workforce participation, and even [civic participation](#)—the [original public purpose](#) of public education. Broad, rich, and robust measures of how students are doing are important for helping decision makers identify differences in student needs across schools. For diagnostic purposes, decision makers—including parents choosing among schools—must recognize that student outcomes are affected by both schools *and* factors outside the school's control. If valid and reliable, these measures diagnose student need but may not reveal a school's effectiveness in promoting the outcomes.
2. ***What does the school contribute to student outcomes?*** Every school serves a unique set of students with different supports and experiences outside of the classroom. Identifying a school's contribution to its students' outcomes requires accounting for out-of-school factors. For test scores, value-added measures or schoolwide aggregates of students' achievement growth over time (such as median student growth percentiles) accomplish this task. In most states, these measures involve only a narrow range of student outcomes—typically reading and math test scores in grades 4–8. But statistical adjustments to measure school contributions can also be applied to any student outcomes. For example, we partnered with Maryland to develop the nation's first [school-level measures of student growth encompassing grades K–3](#) (and examine their validity and reliability). And our newest report describes the measures of [“promotion power”](#) we developed in partnership with the District of Columbia, assessing the contribution of each DC high school to the probability that its students will graduate, demonstrate college readiness, and enroll in college. Similarly, [Mathematica has worked with Louisiana](#) to develop promotion power measures that extend even further, to include each high school's impact on employment and earnings of students in their 20s. These efforts demonstrate that it is possible to apply adjustments to almost any measure of how students are doing (including, for example, social-emotional learning) to better assess what a school *contributes* to that outcome.^[1]
3. ***What happens inside the school?*** Decision makers equipped with rich, broad, and valid ways to measure student outcomes and school contributions can identify high- and low-performing schools, but even the best measures of student outcomes and school contributions provide no

information about *how or why* a school is high or low performing. To provide data on the internal processes that might drive school performance, REL Mid-Atlantic partnered with [Pennsylvania](#), [Maryland](#), and [DC Public Schools](#) to develop, analyze, and interpret measures of school climate based on staff and student surveys. Our analyses have confirmed that school climate survey measures can be sufficiently reliable to [distinguish schools from one another](#)—and even that they can provide a useful window on [the performance of school leaders](#). Beyond climate surveys, other indicators of what is happening in a school might include measures of exclusionary discipline (such as [suspensions](#)), measures of teaching quality, and even reports from [observational inspections](#) like those that are often used in schools in Europe.

Whether any of these measures is appropriate for use in high-stakes accountability systems requires serious consideration of potential trade-offs and unintended consequences. But even if they are not used for high-stakes purposes, all of these measures can helpfully inform policymakers and parents—as long as they understand what they are diagnostic for. Our framework can help stakeholders developing and using measures understand their value for specific purposes and their limitations.

1. *The resulting measures may not be perfect indicators of school contributions, but they will be much closer to identifying a school's contribution than would a raw measure of the outcome such as a proficiency rate or graduation rate. Studies have confirmed that value-added measures can provide valid information about performance (see Chetty et al. 2014 and Bacher-Hicks et al. 2019).*

Brian P. Gill is a senior fellow at Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

This post originally appeared on REL Mid-Atlantic's [RElevant](#) blog

Last updated September 30, 2021

[Enhance District >](#)

Mesquite ISD Wants to Be More Accountable, Just Not to the State



When the state's controversial A-F school accountability system debuted in 2017, Mesquite ISD leadership was less than thrilled. In fact, they emphatically opposed it.

The school board believed the state system was punitive. They believed they could do better. But first, they'd have to ask and answer some hard questions.

The board knew that research shows outstanding, effective school governance is linked with improved student success. But what did that look like in Mesquite? What did the current data say about their schools?

"We said there are some things we're missing as a board, things we're not doing," Mesquite ISD Trustee Robert Seward said. "We had to own up to the fact that we were not understanding the data of where our children were going in the district.

The board was committed to governing effectively and were taking steps to ensure that they were empowering their district and students. They knew that exceptional school district governance in Mesquite ISD meant putting the power of accountability back in the hands of the community.

A local school accreditation pilot in Mesquite

The board set the district to developing a dramatically more comprehensive and locally focused means of measuring school and student accountability.

Following the administration's presentation of an accreditation pilot idea to the board, the trustees undertook some serious reflection, according to Seward. They needed to better understand exactly how their students and schools were performing.

"The only way to accomplish that was the idea of having our own accreditation process, locally developed, locally owned, and locally controlled."

Once the board determined to pursue the concept, there was a lot of excitement, but there was also a lot of apprehension, Seward said.

"As a board, we're very excited about this. We think this is getting us back to where we need to be as a governing board that is accountable to our community. We're taking into account the whole student, not just a test score."

For the past two years, the district has been developing their accreditation pilot as an alternative to the state accountability system, designed to more accurately gauge student progress.

“Having accountability primarily dictated at the state level is a hindrance to true local control of public education,” said Mesquite ISD Superintendent David Vroonland.

Under Mesquite ISD’s proposed accreditation system, district campuses will stay more closely aligned to community needs and values, and the community will set criteria for excellence.

According to the district, this process paves the way for constant improvement, even when a campus reaches accredited status. The system provides accountability scoring across the district’s priority areas:

- Student learning
- Professional learning systems
- Student involvement
- Community engagement
- Safety and well-being
- Fiscal and operational systems

The state’s top-down accountability system disenfranchises a community from its schools, according to Vroonland. He hopes the accreditation pilot will make the district more accountable to the community.

“We’ve got to take that back, he said. “One of the ways you take that back is you develop an accreditation system whereby your local school officials, not state bureaucrats, can determine what it is that the community values.”

How Mesquite ISD is building their alternative to the state’s A-F accountability system

Mesquite ISD started the process by working with the Texas Public Accountability Consortium, a group of 44 Texas school districts working to build community-based accountability systems. From there, the district formed work committees composed of trustees, district administrators, teachers, parents, and community members to create a district-level accountability model.

“We wanted to make sure we had input from all the stakeholders to ensure that we were getting what the community wanted,” said Deputy Superintendent Beth Nicholas.

The district’s plan has three accreditation status levels:

- Accredited
- Distinction
- Accreditation in progress

Rather than using a “not accredited” status label, the system uses “accreditation in progress.”

“We do this because we want the campus that is not accredited in a category to come back and write a plan on how they plan to become accredited,” Nicholas said.

Mesquite ISD piloted its local accountability plan for the first semester of the 2018-19 year, and the district is looking for 12 to 13 districts across the state to partner in the local accreditation process going forward.

“Our end goal is not to have the state adopt our system,” Vroonland said. “Our end goal is to have us be exempted from the state system. We need participating districts to help make this a reality.”

Vroonland said the Mesquite community has enthusiastically embraced the local accountability concept.

“Our community cares deeply about this, and I know this because they’re asking, ‘Where are we on it?’ We’ve been talking about it for a year and a half, and the community wants it to happen,” Vroonland said. “They want to see a deep dive into all the elements.”

Long-term plans for Mesquite’s accreditation pilot

Mesquite ISD still has to abide by the state accountability system for now, but their long-term goal is to pilot their accreditation system over the course of a few years and create a platform that other districts can consider. Their goal is to get 12 or more districts to participate in the pilot over the next few years, and with successful implementation, take it to the Texas Legislature.

“We don’t want them to adopt our tool,” Vroonland said. “What we want from the Legislature is an exemption. The reason I think we can get it is because we included in this process state testing. For credibility’s sake, we knew we had to include it to approach the Legislature.”

According to Vroonland, exemption from state assessments could actually enhance students’ ability to succeed. He noted that a typical US student takes more than 100 standardized tests from prekindergarten to 12th grade, while most countries that outperform the United States on international exams test students an average of only three times.

“We believe the only meaningful form of accountability is conducted locally, not by the state. What you want to get at is an accounting of all the components that we should be looking at as it relates to a school’s performance—not just that standardized test. The standardized test is included in our system, but it can’t be the only driver.”

Is your district doing something to build a local accountability system? Let us know at board.dev@tasb.org so that we can share your story with other school districts.

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The XG Project helps school boards build exceptional governance skills to help you make an impact on student success.

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An Educational Contrarian

Divergent thoughts about education and other pertinent matters

Monday, September 20, 2021

Why test-based accountability must be replaced with something better

It is inexplicable to me how the failed policies of test-based accountability continue to be championed as if they have worked in the past and will continue to work into the future. The position of those espousing the effectiveness of test-based accountability can only be valid if at some point in the past all schools were essentially equal, and then good or bad educators created the disparities between what are now labeled "good" and "bad" schools. Then, the current accountability systems might reflect the efforts of those educators and the judgments would be warranted.

Of course, that is a joke. Schools never started at a level playing field. The first time anyone administered a standardized test to the universe of students in America what it showed were the effects of an inequitable society as well as the size and scope of a problem. But it was much easier for Americans to ignore the problem and instead declare that poor children were just dumber than rich children and that the cause of that was the educators in their lives. Pretending that at some point everything had been equal and then it just so happened that all the bad educators migrated towards the bad schools now serving poor children was easier than admitting the truth—that we were a society rooted in inequity and that our approach to schooling reflected that fact.

Reality is a good bit different than the test-based accountability crew would have you believe. The Coleman report pointed out way back in the 1960s that an effective, research-based approach to creating a great educational system for all students required two major policy efforts: address the ravages of generational poverty and make teaching into a position as revered as medicine and the law. So far, more than half a decade later, we are 0/2.

Now, instead, we look askance at the schools that serve students who are the victims of generational poverty and who are as a result behind their wealthier peers. We pretend that what we are seeing in these schools is not the consequences of ignoring Coleman, but of laziness and incompetence on the part of the educators in them.

And because test scores of the types used by states are designed to order students from the furthest below to the furthest above average within a content area as of a certain date (that's a mouthful—sorry), they make for a beautiful tool for confirming the bias that schools serving poorer children became bad because of bad teachers that just need to try harder. That denies the reality that student exposure to academic content occurs in two places: inside and outside school, and that exposure differs a great deal as a direct result of generational poverty. Make no mistake—schools and teachers matter, as they will account for about 1/3 of the difference in test scores between students (and could account for more with the right supports that do not now exist). But what happens outside of a school will account for almost 2/3 of the difference. Any judgment based on a test score that fails to acknowledge that very real fact is unethical and needs to be dismissed as specious.

As Americans, we have done little to elevate the profession and maximize what can be done when we have students in our schools. The statistics on that are overwhelming.

And almost all our policy efforts regarding generational poverty have addressed the symptoms of poverty, but not its cause. That approach continues unabated to this day.

And yet what is the response of the pro-test-based accountability crew? More of the same and continue to pretend that Coleman never put out his findings. Teachers are the issue and good teachers just happen to mostly be in schools that serve wealthier students and bad teachers just happen to mostly be in schools that serve poorer students.

But what the test-based crew also conveniently ignore is that we have in the world a whole host of organizations that do accountability in a way that focuses on an organization's primary stakeholders, is good for those stakeholders, helps the organizations get better at what they do, is high stakes, gives policy makers what they need to make great policy, and, put simply, works. What they ignore is the fact that no other profession or organization has ever used or even

Advocacy for public schools...

...is critical. Education is a complex undertaking. Understanding it often requires new perspectives which can be placed next to the original and show us what we might otherwise have missed. Generating these perspectives is the purpose of this site.

See Tweets @testsensejt

About Me



John Tanner

San Antonio, Texas, United States

[View my complete profile](#)

John Tanner is a writer, educational thinker, and a passionate advocate for public schools. He is the founder and executive director of Test Sense which is now [bravEd](#), an organization committed to supporting educators in the conversion to a true educational accountability.

The Pitfalls of Reform

My book, *The Pitfalls of Reform*, is available through Amazon and the other online retailers or directly from the publisher, which you can access by clicking [here](#).

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Just because someone offers you a snake oil cure for how to improve the quality of

attempted compliance-based metrics-driven accountabilities for their organizational accountability like what we have in schools. None. My organization has searched now for years and cannot come up with a single example where the model of accountability used in schools has been used to help any business, hospital, non-profit, etc., become great. Zero. None. Zilch.

The reasons for this are easy to see. I'll list two. First, compliance is always in our rearview mirror, and the best way to be compliant this year is to do whatever you did the last time you were compliant. To repeat the past. If compliance is to a privacy or some other limited requirement, repeating the past in a limited way won't harm the organization. But if the entire organizational accountability is based upon compliance with a metric, the entire job of a non-complying organization is to do this year whatever it was you did the last time you were compliant. Not change. Not improve. Not shape your organization for the future. But rinse and repeat the past. Over and over. Which, business owners tell me, is a recipe for irrelevance and obsolescence.

Second, such a model would create a chasm between those businesses who were first deemed compliant and those who were deemed non-compliant that would be hard to overcome. The compliant businesses would be allowed to excel, focus on the needs of their clients, and do what they could to shape themselves for the future. The non-compliant businesses would have a different job: repeat the past until compliance occurred. A few years down the road you can imagine what would happen: the gap between the compliant and the non-compliant would grow until it became unmanageable and untenable, hurt competition, and make the professions represented in the organizations less respected and less attractive as a career choice. Which is why this model isn't used for organizational accountability in the business or any other world. It would create lots of problems and solve none.

And yet some continue to double down on this very model in schools. But to what effect? The compliant schools are free to focus on their students, while the non-compliant must hammer away on compliance, which means hammering away on test scores.

Only the test score game is one the schools serving impoverished children will never win. I said a minute ago that the tests are designed to order students from the student furthest below average to the student furthest above average. And that the differences between students (as well as differences in what states currently label "growth") are due about 1/3 to what happens in school and 2/3 to what happens outside school. So long as what happens outside schools is left to chance, schools that serve poorer children will continue to be at a disadvantage, score lower than their wealthier peers, be declared non-compliant, and told that their job is to get compliant. While schools that serve wealthier students will continue to be declared compliant and be released to do what they think is best for students.

The gap that results—the education gap as it is referred to in much of the current literature—is real, but by seeing it as artifact of bad teaching it allows us to ignore the underlying truth, that it is an artifact of an underlying inequity many would rather not admit to. The harsher reality is that the way we do educational accountability, as seen in the business example above, makes the whole thing worse than it needs to be, exacerbating, supporting, and sustaining the gap rather than doing something about it.

The solution to such a massive problem is surprisingly simple.

1. End the era of test-based accountability once and for all. The evidence of its harm is now well documented, overwhelming, and incontrovertible.
2. Begin an era of accountability based on how effective organizations of all types run their accountability systems. We now have these frameworks available to us. We ignore them at the risk of the future of public education.
3. Admit that generational poverty is a societal problem and that all of America and its democratic and economic future is dependent on solving it in this era of continued globalization and completion.
4. Begin a long-term systemic professionalization of the teaching profession.

The sooner we begin, the sooner we'll get there. But in the meantime, if all we do is stop pretending that test-based accountability is designed to help all schools be great and all children excel, that will at least be a step in the right direction.

Posted by [John Tanner](#) at [8:16 AM](#)

2 comments:



Unknown September 22, 2021 at 4:59 AM

As usual John, you are spot on!
Keep up the great work!
KA

public schools doesn't mean you have to swallow it. In fa...

A testing glitch on STAAR--and a response to a question

Texas experienced some computer glitches today administering the state testing program (the system shut down for a little more than an hour...

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Items are selected for tests according to the test's purpose. If a teacher is building a unit test from scratch he/she will build items that...

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Several people forwarded a Seth Godin blog on forced rankings. See it here . I'll add two cents to the conversation. A forced ranking in edu...

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- [Gene Glass](#)
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EQUITY

The Equity Of Accountability

13 September 2021

Our state's accountability and assessment system was created to provide transparency and critical information to students, parents, and community members across Texas. This system, sometimes referred to as “A-F” in reference to the letter grades campuses and districts receive, is an opportunity to identify trends and areas to better support student learning, as well as expose inequities in access to a high quality public education.



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highest court, to effectively dismantle this system by rendering it toothless. With this in mind, it's more important than ever to take stock of what the data tells us about student achievement and equity. In reality, that data contains many glaring warning signs we should immediately act upon, rather than ignore and excuse.

Students experiencing economic instability are 35% more likely to attend an F-rated campus than their relatively affluent peers. Even worse, Black students are 62% more likely to attend an F-rated campus than students of any other race. This stark inequity would remain largely hidden were it not for our state's accountability framework, and it has meaningful consequences for the educational experience of the students in our state.

Take, as one example, teacher experience. **Research demonstrates “large returns to experience for teachers in the form of both higher test scores and improvements in student behavior.”** Given the clear impact teacher experience has on overall student learning objectives, we should strive to concentrate effective educators on struggling campuses, or at least evenly distribute them. By looking at data provided by the state's accountability framework, we know that this is not the case.



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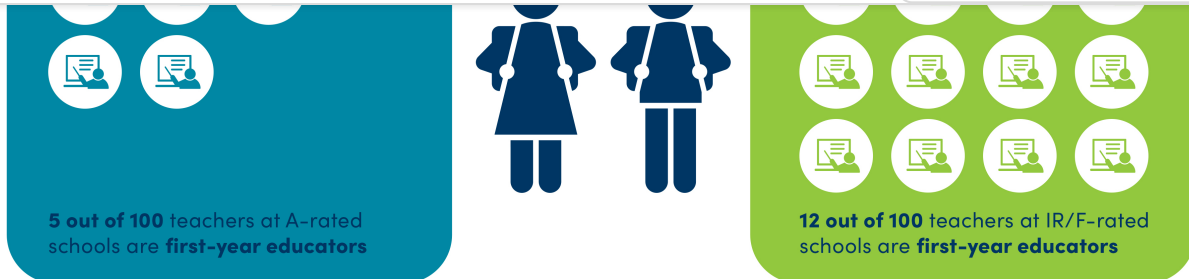
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Instead, as demonstrated above, a student at an F-rated campus is 2.4x more likely than a student at an A-rated campus to be taught by an educator in their first year of teaching. Overall teacher experience on the “failing” campuses is 20% lower than on A-rated ones.

Districts across the state have been able to use this information to implement evidence-based programs designed to bring the best teachers to underperforming campuses. By strategically staffing effective educators at historically underserved campuses, **Crowley ISD improved reading and math achievement by double digits in the course of a year, Lubbock ISD dramatically decreased disciplinary referrals, and Dallas ISD was able to bring its number of F-rated campuses down from 43 to 4 in only a few years,** tangibly improving the educational experience of over 17,000 students. This type of systemic change would not have been possible without the actionable information our accountability system provides.



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the results of which make up one factor in the final “A-F” grade campuses and districts ultimately receive. (**[See this page of the Texas Education Agency’s website for breakdowns of each of the system’s domains.](#)**)

So does this particular assessment accurately assess student knowledge and readiness to succeed at the next level? To determine that, we can look outside of the exam at other measures of student success and see how they relate to a campus’ ultimate accountability grade.

College, Career, and/or Military Readiness (or CCMR) is arguably the ultimate goal of all PreK-12 education. It is also a technical term defined not by one standardized test but satisfactory achievement on any one of a variety of metrics: SAT, ACT, achievement of an Associate degree, achievement of an industry-based credential, and/or successful enlistment in the armed forces.

If the STAAR test were a faulty measure of student success, there would be no correlation between campuses and district accountability ratings and the rate at which their students graduate College, Career and/or Military Ready. Instead, as demonstrated below, there is a clear positive relationship between campus rating and CCMR rates.



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B	2,240,107 (42%)	88%	82%		
C	1,329,137 (25%)	53%	51%		
D	351,230 (7%)	44%	40%		
F	193,950 (4%)	19%	17%		
TOTAL	5,349,640	68%	61%		

The differences in CCMR rates on A- vs. F-rated campuses are stark: over 60%. This data not only elucidates the devastating impact of attending a failing campus, but reveals that the letter-based grades in our state's accountability system contain a great deal of meaning at each level. Students generally, and students experiencing economic instability specifically, are more likely to graduate ready for the next life stage at an D-rated campus than an F-rated one, but more likely still at a C-rated campus, and so on all the way up to A.

As with the disparities in teacher experience, these are inequities we can assess and address only because our state's accountability system provides us with the data to do so. The unequal racial and socioeconomic demographics across differently-rated campuses make leveling the playing field a moral imperative. Dismantling oversight won't solve these problems; it'll only make them harder to find.