



TEXAS COALITION FOR A COMPETITIVE WORKFORCE

October 26, 2011

Members of the State Board of Education
1701 North Congress
Austin, Texas 78701

Dear Members of the State Board of Education,

It has come to our attention that the board may consider changes to the passing standards for high school core courses at its November meeting. The undersigned groups worked closely with the legislature during the 2009 session on HB 3 and we wanted to share our perspective on the goals and intent of the legislation—especially as it pertains to the STAAR and EOC exams.

The overarching purpose of HB 3 was to create a public school system that produces graduates that are ready for postsecondary success without remediation—whether through a bachelor's degree, an associate's degree, an industry certification, or other qualification that prepares them for the 21st century workforce. To achieve this, HB 3 requires that we align our high school graduation standards with the entrance requirements for higher education. Additionally, our K-12 curricula, standards, and assessments must be aligned so we know if students at each grade level are on track to reach the postsecondary readiness level.

The board has done an admirable job of adopting the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) standards and the curricula to move us in this direction. It is vital that we ensure that students are learning the TEKS in each grade, and the STAAR and EOC exams are the best way to measure this progress.

In reviewing the provisions of Board Member Ratliff's proposed amendment, we are concerned that it might detract from purpose of HB 3 for the following reasons:

- In HB 3, the legislature provided that there will be performance standards for the STAAR and EOC exams to determine the extent to which students are on the path to postsecondary readiness at graduation. The law requires the results to be used for the accountability system and, in the case of EOC exams, for graduation requirements. The legislature has spelled out the details of how the system is to be implemented. The commissioner and the board have certain responsibilities, but overriding legislative intent is not one of them. The law intends that all players know whether students are on path and that students show proficiency in these courses to be ready for postsecondary education and training without need of remediation. If districts want to add or have other measures that are important locally, they are certainly free to do so. However, the state has set minimum expectations that it expects to be fulfilled so that all young Texans can meet these goals.

- HB 3 does not eliminate local control. In fact, since only 15% of students' grades are determined by the EOC exams, 85% of students' grades are determined locally. Given that the state has a constitutional responsibility to provide for our students' education, this seems like an equitable balance between state and local oversight. Additionally, we understand that there is some confusion as to how the 15% is to be calculated. During our work on HB 3 in 2009, there was general consensus that the EOC exam would count for 15% of the grade for the entire course and we continue to support that position.
- The EOC exams were put in place to give teachers and students more instructional time by reducing the number of tests, practice tests, and TAKS review sessions that have been administered. First, by replacing the 11th grade TAKS test with EOC exams, students are tested on fresh material each year and do not have to review material they learned in previous years. Secondly, the EOC exams were designed to replace final exams—not be given in addition to final exams. By allowing school districts to set their own grading policies, it is likely that several of them will choose to give both a final exam and the EOC exam—which takes class time away from instruction.

Our view is that the state is responsible for setting education standards and ensuring that students meet them. We also support giving school districts additional flexibility to meet state goals as they see fit—whether that is through the use of innovative instructional delivery systems, more flexible workforce management, and a reduction in the non-instructional mandates the state places on districts and schools. However, the bottom line is that the state has an obligation to students and taxpayers to ensure that our students graduate with a meaningful diploma that prepares them for success going forward.

Please oppose any efforts to dilute the importance of the TEKS and curricula that the board has adopted by allowing districts to choose what they want to teach our students. Thank you for your consideration and please contact me at andrew.erben@texaseducationreform.org or at 512/215-9105 if you have any questions or need additional information.

Sincerely,

Andrew Erben on behalf of:

Texas Institute for Education Reform
Texas Association of Business
Texas Public Policy Foundation
Texas Business Leadership Council
Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce

cc: Robert Scott, Commissioner, TEA