

Texas Performance Measure (TPM)

The Texas Education Agency's TPM has drawn its share of controversy lately. But what is the TPM and what is it supposed to measure?

Before we get into that, let's look at the recent history that led to the creation of the TPM. Since the state's accountability system was created in the early 1990s, critics have pointed out that the system only measures the percentage of students that pass tests and gives no credit for improvement or academic growth. For example, take an immigrant student that enters a Texas school in the 5th grade but tests at the 1st-grade level in English. Even if the school helps the student to reach the 3rd-grade reading level by the end of the year (a two-year improvement), the school is penalized under the accountability system if that student fails the 5th-grade TAKS test.

To address this, the legislature instructed the TEA to adopt a "growth" measure. Ideally, this is a measure that looks at student improvement over time and gives credit for academic growth towards proficiency by the time the student graduates. In other words, the student is counted as passing if he or she is making enough academic progress to perform at grade level in the near future. This is referred to as a "growth-to-standard model".

The TEA looked at several models before adopting the TPM. At the time, TIER suggested that the model address the following:

1. Base projections on student data from multiple years. Research indicates that multiple years of performance are required for validity and reliability.
2. Secure multiple independent validations of the growth measure by nationally-recognized test experts.
3. Adopt the TAKS Commended Level as the standard for showing a student is ready for postsecondary pursuits.
4. Pair a growth-to-standard model and a value-added model. This will allow schools to get credit for students meeting state standards, improving so that they are on track to meet state standards, or exceeding expectations.

Unfortunately, the TPM did not include all of these recommendations. Instead of predicting student achievement by looking at the student's performance over time, the model takes a student's test scores from a single year, and predicts future achievement based on how other students—who had similar test scores—performed on future tests.

While the TPM is advertised as an accurate forecaster over 90% of the time, this includes results from high-performing students (who are highly likely to pass the next test) and low-performing students (who are very likely to fail the next test). As a result, the accuracy rate for marginal students is quite a bit lower.

Criticism of the TPM reached a peak during a recent legislative hearing when Rep. Scott Hochberg pointed out that a student could get no questions correct on the writing portion of the TAKS and still be projected to pass writing based on his or her scores in other subjects. While this is an extreme example, it underscores the flaws with the TPM.

These flaws are important because the TPM projections were used to raise the accountability ratings of 331 school districts and 2,560 campuses. Of these, 79 districts and 358 campuses used TPM to move to a rating of "academically acceptable" and avoid sanctions that come with underperformance. In all, 61% of campuses were rated as "recognized" or "exemplary" under the TPM.

The good news is that the TEA has promised to either stop using the TPM or radically retool it. TIER and our partner organizations will continue to work with the TEA to develop growth-to-standard and value-added measures that accurately predict student growth and give credit for students who are moving toward postsecondary readiness.

HB 3 Update

With the focus on the TPM, many people forget that HB 3, if properly implemented, will fix many of the problems with not only the TPM, but with the current accountability system. HB 3 shifts the focus of the public education system to postsecondary (college and career) readiness.

To review, HB 3 requires that the TEA and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board align the high school graduation standards with the standards students need to succeed in college or career training. Once this graduation standard is established, the curricula and assessments for each subject and each grade level will be aligned and vertically-scaled. This will allow us to tell whether students—at every grade level—are on track to graduate or how much they need to improve over time to reach the graduation standard.

TEA Commissioner Robert Scott recently took an important step in realigning the accountability system towards postsecondary readiness. Starting in 2011, Scott announced that schools and districts must have a certain percentage of their students score at the TAKS Commended Level (a proxy for postsecondary readiness) in order to earn the “recognized” or “exemplary” ratings. This decision means that, for the first time, a school’s rating will be based on the degree to which it is successful in preparing students for success after high school.

Most of the major provisions of HB 3 do not go into effect until the 2011-2012 school year. The TEA is currently working on plans to implement these provisions and they expect to have a draft plan in place by the end of the year. TIER and our partners in the Texas Coalition for a Competitive Workforce (TCCW) have been invited to participate in drafting the plan. We are working on our recommendations and will present them to the TEA staff in the coming months.

National Education Experts Visit Austin

In the past few months, TIER has hosted two nationally-recognized education experts in Austin. First, along with our TCCW partner the Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce, we hosted author and researcher Rick Hess. Mr. Hess is the Director of Education Policy Studies at the American Enterprise Institute and a member of the TIER Policy Advisory Board. He was in town to discuss his book, *“Education Unbound: The Promise and Practice of Greenfield Schooling.”*

TIER also hosted Kate Walsh, the President of the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ). Ms. Walsh discussed the NCTQ’s recent publication, *“Evaluating the Fundamentals of Teacher Training Programs in Texas.”*

The innovation and deregulation that Mr. Hess discusses in his book as well as the educator quality

issues explored in Ms. Walsh’s report are central to TIER’s ongoing mission. For more information on Mr. Hess and his work, please visit www.aei.org. To learn more about Ms. Walsh and her work, go to www.nctq.org.

State Board of Educator Certification Tackles Educator Effectiveness

Last session, the legislature passed SB 174. This bill authorizes the State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) to, “propose rules establishing standards to govern the approval and continuing accountability of all educator preparation programs based on . . . achievement, including improvement of achievement, of students taught by beginning teachers for the first three years following certification, to the extent practicable” (*V.T.C.A., Education Code, Section 21.045*). The SBEC must create a new state accountability system for all educator preparation programs that is based on annual assessments of the performance of novice teachers which identify the value added to student performance--particularly in the areas of reading, math, and progress towards postsecondary readiness. To accurately measure performance, it is imperative that the state’s public education data system include the important linkages from students to teachers to the teacher preparation and professional development programs.

At the request of SBEC member Laurie Bricker of Houston, the TEA staff will update the board on the progress with the implementation of SB 174. TIER has asked the board to consider the following:

Improving Outcomes for Public School Students

In 2009, the Texas Legislature, in HB 3, defined postsecondary readiness (college and career readiness) as the goal of the public education system. HB 3 requires the Commissioner of Education to raise standards so that Texas, “ranks nationally in the top 10 states in terms of college readiness . . . with no significant achievement gaps by race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status” (*VTCA, Education Code, Section 39.053*). In order for us to achieve this goal, all facets of the public education system must be aligned toward student achievement. We must revise educator preparation programs and professional development to support the state’s goal of preparing all students for postsecondary success. Teacher preparation programs must also reflect the findings of empirical research—particularly with regard to eliminating the disproved learner-centered practices and expanding scientific reading instruction and interventions. This will require reviewing the

formative standards at our colleges of education and realigning them so that we are producing teachers who are equipped with the knowledge and skills to drive student performance.

Certification Requirements

To properly align certification requirements with the desired result requires us to define the qualities of “highly-effective” teachers and establish educator preparation programs that replicate them. The first step is to develop state certification requirements modeled on the credentials recommended by the American Board of Certification for Teacher Excellence, the National Council on Teacher Quality, and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. The goal is to ensure that certification is associated with educator effectiveness as defined by state standards for the knowledge, personal qualities, and performance that are empirically linked to advancing student performance. Other resources include the Haberman Foundation and the qualities identified by YES Prep founder, Chris Barbic, who selects teachers based on student-achievement data and personality traits such as a short rebound time, an active energy mode, strong leadership skills, a focus on success, perfectionism, a willingness to share opinions, and a high professional drive. In short, the standards we adopt must be based on a combination of clearly defined quantitative and qualitative goals that have been proven to positively impact student achievement.

Rewarding Excellence and Driving Improvement

In order to impact teacher quality, we must first have an accurate measure of individual teacher performance. We must develop a state performance evaluation system that is based on an evaluation instrument which is administered annually for all educators, measures educator effectiveness (particularly in the area of reading, whenever relevant), and assesses the annual value added to student achievement. However, individual teacher evaluations are just the first step as evaluations, by themselves, rarely reinforce positive results or improve negative results. To change behavior, we must expand “pay for performance” programs at both the state and district level to reward our best teachers. For teachers who are struggling, we must identify deficiencies and adopt specific professional development activities to address these needs. The state should require schools to use such systems to identify ineffective educators, establish a schedule for improvement, provide remedial training, and remove the educator from the classroom after an established period of intervention. The Houston ISD’s ASPIRE program is a good model to emulate.

Expanding the Pool of Teachers

As statewide enrollment continues to grow, our documented teacher shortage—especially in the areas of math, science, and career and technical education—will continue to be an obstacle to improving our education system. We must immediately expand alternative routes to traditional training and certification that have proven successful, such as American Board of Certification for Teacher Excellence, Teach for America, U Teach, and The New Teacher Project. SBEC should incorporate components of the Temporary Teacher Certificate into the alternative routes, and remove the onerous, restrictive guidelines for districts and unnecessary barriers for aspiring teachers.

Attracting Management Talent

There are many similarities between running a business and running a school. However, the private sector businesses do not limit the pool of management prospects by requiring each to have extensive experience in the specific industry. In fact, companies often hire executives from non-related industries because the focus is on attracting management talent rather than industry experience that may not translate to the board room. The state could attract more dynamic school leadership by waiving the certification requirements for principals to have teacher certification and classroom experience and expanding state funding for grants to help districts develop programs to recruit and train principals and administrators from non-traditional backgrounds.

Enhancing Local Control of Personnel Decisions

While we hold district and school administrators responsible for results, we do not give them the freedom to manage personnel decisions as they see fit. We must enable districts to remove ineffective teachers by emulating the ASPIRE program in the Houston ISD. To complement its performance-based compensation plan, ASPIRE is introducing a high-quality professional development and remediation program for teachers that provides for non-renewal of the contracts of those who remain ineffective after a reasonable period of time. At a minimum, teachers should be subject to the same employment termination policies as state employees.

TIER welcomes your questions and comments. Please visit the “contact us” section of our website, www.texaseducationreform.org and let us know what you think.