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Education Leaders: Delaying End-of-Course Exams Fails Students ***Implementing Existing Education Reforms Will Not Drive Costs***

Austin, TX – Education and business leaders gathered at a news conference today to urge lawmakers to protect Texas’ world-class assessment and accountability system. Education policy experts from the Texas Institute for Education Reform, the Governor’s Business Council, and the Texas Association of Business express discussed a series of proposals they say will undo the promise of existing education reforms. Specifically, the group cited the perils of lowering graduation standards and delaying use of 12 end-of-course exams, which are to replace the TAKS test in high school.

The group applauded Senator Shapiro and her subcommittee for their recommendation to the state to spend an additional \$5.6 billion on public education in the next biennium to pay for the textbooks, training, and human resources necessary to implement the STAAR and end-of-course exams and other readiness standards embodied in House Bill 3 passed in 2009. On Thursday, the Senate Finance Committee voted to adopt the subcommittee's recommendations, although the additional money is contingent on the legislature approving changes to the current school finance system.

The end-of-course exams, the new State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR), and the transition away from the high school TAKS test are scheduled to phase in beginning in the 2011-2012 school year. The State Board of Education adopted new standards and educator training to the new standards has been underway for five years. Under pending proposals, end-of-course exams would not count as part of students’ grades and students could fail two-thirds of the exams and still graduate with the Recommended High School Plan diploma.

“Texas has made tremendous strides to better prepare our students for college and the 21st century workplace. In fact, the Texas assessment and accountability system was rated as the best in the United States by Achieve for 2011,” said Bernie Francis, chairman and CEO of Business Control Systems and chairman of the Governor’s Business Council Education Task Force Chairman. “But now, on the eve of the implementation of historic education reforms, there are several proposals are circulating the Capitol will gut accountability and completely stall our progress.

“If these proposals become law, graduation standards would be dramatically lowered. Students would be able to fail as many as eight of the key course exams and still get the recommended diploma, which is supposed to prepare students for postsecondary education. Students would have no motivation to take seriously English I or II, Geometry, two of the science exams, and two of the social studies exams,” said Jim Windham, chairman of the Texas Institute for

Education Reform. “These proposals fail our students and rob Texas of the well-rounded graduates the modern workplace demands,” he said.

Bill Hammond, president and CEO of the Texas Association of Business, explained that opponents of end-of-course exams are using a hollow argument about costs of remediation, or special course work for students who fail certain exams.

“There are administrative tools to address concerns with end-of-course exams and other reforms that don’t require scrapping the whole thing,” said Hammond. “For example, history shows us that the education commissioner is likely to set the passing rate for the exams low in the beginning so we can transition up, avoiding significant failure. This means that re-takes and remediation costs will be minimal.”

“If districts are effective at keeping students on grade level as they get to and through high school, remediation will be unneeded, or at least minimal,” said Hammond. “Districts will benefit from the state's paying for the end-of-course exams. All will save in the time and money that went into ‘teaching to the TAKS.’ Now teaching can efficiently be geared to the content of the courses.”

“The field is right to expect reasonable funds for instructional materials needed to educate students to the new standards,” said Hammond. “Senator Shapiro’s work to find an additional \$5.6 billion in the Senate’s proposed budget will go a long way in meeting this need.”

“Texas has spent a lot of money and effort to prepare for the implementation of existing education reforms. Now it's time to move ahead. There is no excuse to delay,” said Sandy Kress, senior counsel for Akin Gump Strauss Hauer and Feld.

Kress urged lawmakers to look at the costs of delaying implementation of existing education reforms. “What are the costs of high dropouts? To the young people themselves and their parents? To our economy?” said Kress. “What are the costs of huge remediation expenses in higher education? What are the costs of college dropouts? What are the costs to the economy of this failure?”

“Delaying the implementation of education reform creates a public school system with no meaningful accountability at all,” said Kress. “That’s a grave disservice to our students and our state.”

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