

# **Creating the Schools We Need for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The Next Generation of Accountability**

**Executive Summary  
March, 2008**



**Texas Institute for Education Reform**

*"Every child a high school graduate ready for college, the workplace and citizenship."*

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The Next Generation of Accountability*

**Executive Summary**

**Introduction:**

Texas has been a leader in public school accountability since the 1980s. Researchers have consistently credited the state's accountability system for improving student performance and closing the achievement gap between student groups in Texas public schools.

Despite this success, there is broad agreement that the system should be significantly revised—if not overhauled—because it has become cumbersome and overly complicated, it is inconsistent and overlaps with the federal No Child Left Behind Act, it doesn't properly reflect the expectations we have for our students or our educators, it produces perverse incentives, it doesn't measure student achievement growth, it produces an undue burden of preoccupation of testing with teachers and students, or it unduly pressures and stigmatizes educators.

The Texas Institute for Education Reform (TIER), a strong advocate for public schools, believes that a strong accountability system is vital to help schools prepare our students for the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Instead of watering down accountability, as some critics have suggested, Texas needs to use this opportunity to strengthen and streamline (a) standards for student learning, (b) student assessments, (c) data systems, (d) school and district ratings, and (e) the rewards, sanctions, and interventions for student, school, and district performance.

To accomplish this, TIER proposes ten principles for designing the next generation of state accountability for Texas public schools and suggests how the principles can be translated into policy. Underlying these principles is the belief that state accreditation of public schools should be contingent on educational results and that the state system of public school accountability is essential for improving Texas public schools.

**Principle 1: Make Postsecondary Readiness the Goal of Accountability**

The purpose of public school accountability should be one and the same as the state goal for classroom learning: postsecondary readiness—whether that includes higher education, vocational training, or skilled employment. When a student graduates from a Texas high school, they should have the knowledge and skills to advance immediately into further education or the workforce. This set of knowledge and skills needs to be precisely defined and woven into the curriculum and assessments for all grade levels—advancing the level of rigor in each grade and culminating in a level of academic proficiency associated with nationally-recognized standards. Additionally, schools and districts should be rated and accredited annually on the basis of increasing the percentage of students progressing toward and reaching postsecondary readiness.

**Principle 2: Connect Postsecondary Readiness with Closing the Achievement Gap between Student Groups**

TIER recognizes the importance of “value-added” measures for disadvantaged students when it comes to assessing charter schools, performance-based compensation plans, and teacher evaluations. However, we owe it to all children—regardless of race or economic status—to prepare them for a productive life after high school. To allow more accurate measurement of progress, we should group students in each grade and subject area into the lowest 25% and the highest 25% in addition to disaggregating data by race and economic status. This allows us to shift our focus from race and economic status to educational outcomes for each student. Our goal is to close the performance gap among all groups by assigning the most effective teachers to students in the lowest performing groups and creating incentives for teachers to accept these challenging assignments. In addition, schools and districts should be rated and accredited annually on the basis of decreasing the achievement gap between student groups.

**Principle 3: Sound Statistical Design is Essential**

It is difficult to assess performance without reliable, complete, and statistically significant information. Our current system leads to school and district ratings that do not accurately reflect their performance because the size of schools, the number of student groups within schools, the demographics of the student population, and the imprecision of student assessments strongly affect ratings. Texas should adopt a more accurate measurement system that is sophisticated enough to measure the full range of student performance for each grade level/course, the “value added” to each student during each year, and each student's progress toward the exit standards for elementary school, middle school, and high school. Assessments should be carefully aligned to ensure that standards are increased evenly from grade to grade to increase the likelihood of successful advancement. School and district ratings should be based on absolute performance (test scores or passing averages) and value-added measures that are calculated on a basis that accounts for the differences in data consistency between small and large schools and school districts.

**Principle 4: State/Local Partnerships Can Enhance Public School Accountability**

Public school accountability should represent a collaborative effort between local communities and the state instead of a centralized, top-down system. Under such a collaborative system, the state would set minimum standards for educational outcomes, work with districts to design locally-tailored plans to reach the state educational goals, and provide seed money for the plans. Districts and schools would also be encouraged to tap into the unique community resources they have—such as local businesses, community-based programs, and institutions of higher

education—to enhance academic and financial efficiency and effectiveness.

**Principle 5: All Stakeholders should be Involved in Public School Accountability**

Involving community stakeholders in substantial, meaningful ways can strengthen accountability for educational results. The state should set guidelines for districts to create advisory bodies composed of parents, business leaders, higher education representatives, and taxpayers to help design local accountability systems. Students, teachers, principals, and superintendents should also play key roles in the design, implementation, management and monitoring of the system.

**Principle 6: Public School Accountability must be based on Sufficient Capacity and Resources to Enable Schools to Succeed**

In order for schools and districts to meet state education goals, the state must provide necessary resources including financial, informational, and human resources. A new state K-20 information system should provide real-time data for individual students, schools and districts. The system should include information on classes, instructors, programs, attendance, disciplinary actions, assessment results, and a dropout risk assessment. It should also provide quarterly statewide monitoring and correction and annual reporting of student performance that includes absolute scale scores, gain from the previous year (“value-added” score), and on-track progress toward intermediate goals and graduation proficiency. Human resources should be enhanced by strengthening standards for educator preparation programs—both traditional and alternative, teacher certification, and seed funding for value-added, performance-based compensation plans for our educators.

**Principle 7: Principle Seven: Public School Accountability should be Primarily Based on Final Educational Outcomes and Secondarily Based on Intermediate Education Outcomes**

State evaluation, rating, and accreditation of schools and districts should be primarily based on meeting three goals: achieving prescribed graduation rates, progressing students towards postsecondary readiness, and closing the achievement gaps between student groups. Secondary indicators could include test and assessment results, “value-added” growth rates, retention rates, and overall progress towards graduation. Other factors such as attendance, literacy, and maintaining safe environments could be included. Ratings should be easily understood but flexible enough to accurately classify schools and districts—such as an “A”, “B”, “C”, “D”, and “F” standard.

**Principle 8: Consequences are Essential**

Incentives offer an effective way to increase performance. Educators and educational leadership who meet or exceed standards should be rewarded with annual bonuses or other incentives. Schools and districts that perform well should be excused from complying with certain state regulations, receive financial awards, and receive local publicity for their achievements. However, there must be consequences for districts and schools that fail to meet their obligations to

educate students. The state’s accountability system should flag early signs of faltering performance and provide these schools with expert assistance to help them improve. If assistance fails, two additional phases of intervention and corrective action should be provided by the state before the loss of accreditation and state funding.

**Principle 9: Multiple Means and Measures Enhance Fairness**

Using several methods to measure performance and growth—such as curriculum-based tests, national norm-referenced tests, diagnostic and summative assessments, end-of-course tests, and computer-adaptive technology—offer ways to increase the accuracy and thoroughness or student assessments and discourage curriculum narrowing and “teaching the test”. Scores of multiple assessments, combined with a student’s grades and courses taken, provide a holistic approach to student evaluation. Adopting a school and district rating system that is based on two models—a “status” model measuring absolute performance against proficiency standards, and a “growth” model measuring improvement toward graduation requirements—offers a holistic approach to assessing institutional performance. The use of two accountability models—a “consequences” system designed to stimulate educational improvements through a combination of rewards and sanctions and a “reporting” system that gives the public an accurate measure of school and district performance designed to stimulate improvements through public knowledge and pressure for success—offers a way to strengthen accountability.

**Principle 10: Full, Transparent, and Accessible Information is Essential**

The state system of public school accountability should be simple and easily understood by Texans inside and outside the educational community. Because the best decisions are made when the best data is available, it is imperative that the information the state receives be accurate, honest, and complete. This is particularly true for identifying the true dropout rate, proficiency in relation to national and international standards, students’ test scores in both absolute and value-added terms, and students’ periodic progress towards meeting graduation standards that prepare them for postsecondary excellence.

**Conclusion:**

Texas needs a comprehensive reform of the state system of public school accountability to align with the new state goal of postsecondary readiness. The need for far-reaching improvements in educational outcomes requires the state to drastically change public school accountability and comprehensively reform all of the elements of public school accountability. These elements include new curriculum standards, new assessments, new rating and accreditation, and new rewards and interventions for educational results.

We ask that the interim committees studying these issues and the 81<sup>st</sup> Legislature consider these recommendations and take action to ensure that the Texas public school system is again recognized as a national and world leader.

## Who is TIER?

TIER is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, non-partisan organization of community and business leaders throughout the state who have organized themselves to raise public awareness and educate Texas opinion leadership on the current status of public education in Texas, the progress of our standards and accountability-based reforms to date, the prognosis for achieving the essential universal educational proficiency of the children of Texas, and the daunting challenges that we face in doing so.

Through its leaders and advisors, TIER has access to the nation's leading education policy experts and will use these resources to provide the best available research-based strategies, benchmarked practices, and policy innovations.

For more information, to order a copy of the complete report, or to learn how you can become involved in TIER's mission, contact Andrew Erben at (512)477-1006 or visit our website at [www.texaseducationreform.org](http://www.texaseducationreform.org).

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