

Testimony Before the
Select Committee on Public School Accountability

Presented by:
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Introduction

Madame Chair, Mister Chairman, members of the committee, I am Jim Windham, Chairman of the Texas Institute for Education Reform. Thank you for inviting me to testify this afternoon. As you recall, I testified at your April hearing in San Antonio and outlined TIER's recently-published accountability paper which highlighted ten principles we believe are vital to a successful accountability system. The committee staff asked me to testify today and explain how these principles can be incorporated into the State's accountability system.

Before I begin my testimony, I think it would be timely to preface it with some remarks to put it in proper context.

There are a number of well-designed and well-intentioned solutions that are being offered to overhaul the Texas public school accountability system. In your approach to these proposals, we believe that the ultimate product of the Select Committee should be about much more than revisions to the existing school accountability system within the status quo of standards and assessments. It should be much more transformative in the sense of addressing the context with which the revisions should be aligned, and this will necessarily involve value judgments beyond structural issues.

In particular, we hope you will fully address the following questions:

1. What should be the ultimate objective in terms of the postsecondary readiness standard to be tracked by the accountability system?
2. What are the assessments that will be required to evaluate the attainment of this standard as well as the tracking progress, trajectory, or growth to this standard?
3. How do we transition the Texas education community to this greatly enhanced standard for the value of a high school diploma?

We are fully aware that there will be offered any number of plausible reasons not to go to these lengths, but we believe that this Committee has a timely window of opportunity here, and that any product without this depth will result in the high probability of returning to this issue very soon.

In addition, please keep in mind that there may be more than one way to achieve each of our core accountability principles. While we believe that our suggestions are solid, viable, and will

produce the results we wish to achieve, we are open to working with other models as long as they are in line with our overriding principles.

To review, TIER's principles are as follows:

- Make Postsecondary Readiness the Goal of Accountability
- Connect Postsecondary Readiness with Closing the Achievement Gap between Student Groups
- Sound Statistical Design is Essential
- State/Local Partnerships Can Enhance Public School Accountability
- All Stakeholders should be Involved in Public School Accountability
- Public School Accountability must be Based on Sufficient Capacity and Resources to Enable Schools to Succeed
- Public School Accountability should be Primarily Based on Final Educational Outcomes and Secondarily Based on Intermediate Education Outcomes
- Consequences are Essential
- Multiple Means and Measures Enhance Fairness
- Full, Transparent, and Accessible Information is Essential

Recommendations

1. School Rating and Accreditation

TIER's overriding and organizing accountability principle is the standard for postsecondary (P.S.) readiness--defined as *“The range of academic, workforce & social proficiency students should acquire to successfully transition from high school to skilled employment, advanced military training, associate's degree, bachelor's degree or technical certification—without the need for remediation.”*

As such, a Texas high school diploma should be evidence that each student who holds one has the knowledge and skills necessary to: 1) begin college, career and technology training, or advanced military training without the need for remediation, 2) enter the workforce with a job that pays a living wage without the need for remedial training.

To achieve this goal, we need to establish one state accountability system for all schools—including charter schools, schools with large populations of disadvantaged students, and dropout prevention/recovery programs. We should eliminate the Alternative Accountability System and assess our districts, schools, and students based on progress towards postsecondary readiness.

Adopting postsecondary readiness as our primary goal will help close the achievement gap. “Growth” models can be incorporated to recognize and give credit for significant student progress and ensure that all students are on pace to graduate college or career-ready.

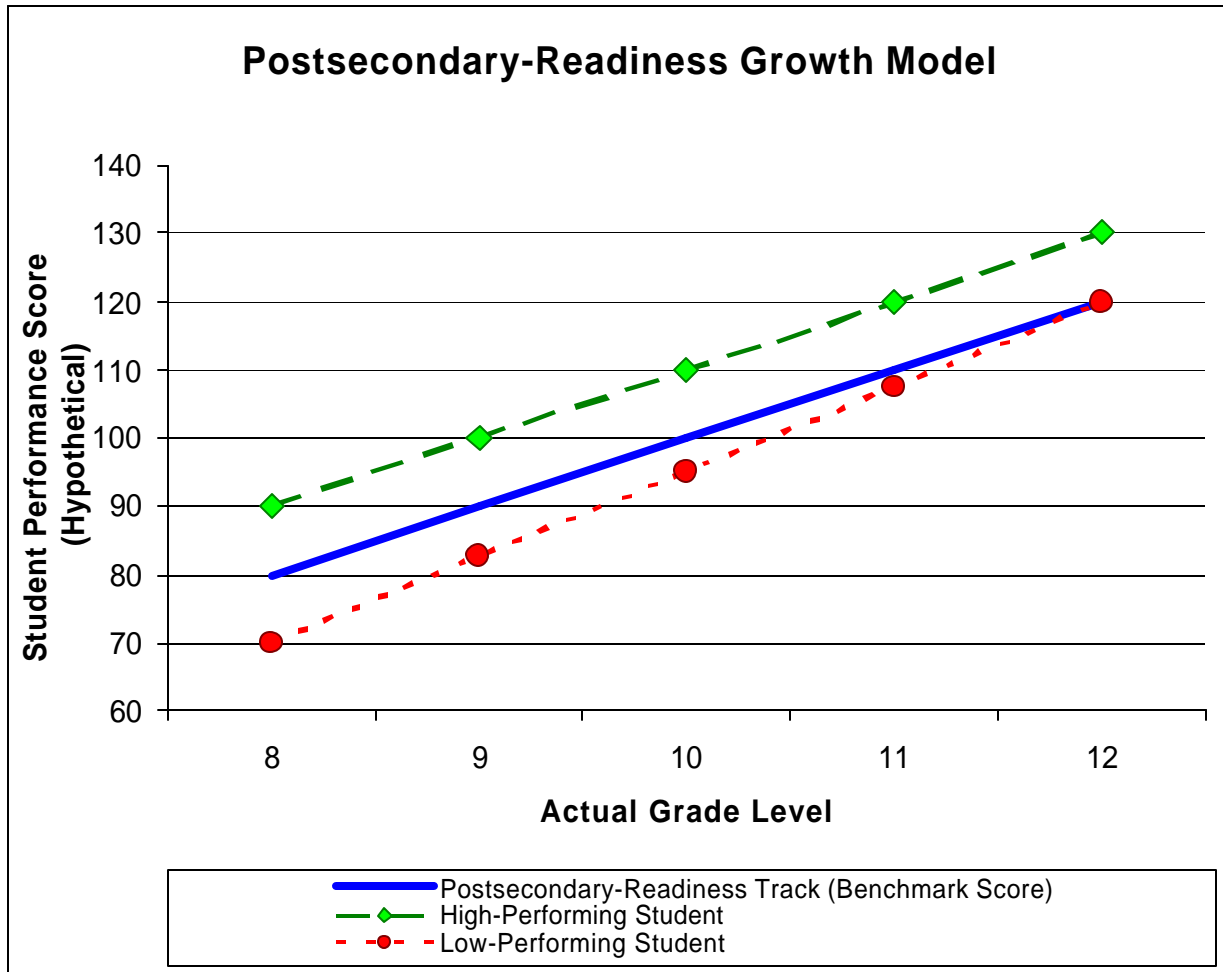
Once we have established specific academic standards that define P.S. readiness, the curricula and assessments for each grade level and each subject area should be aligned to move students progressively toward the graduation standard. In essence, we start with P.S. readiness standards

and work backwards through grades K-12 defining the specific knowledge and skills that students must master at each grade level. Once completed, we should have a set of standards that increases in rigor from year-to-year and culminates in postsecondary readiness. (See our paper on Academic Standards on our web site for a more complete description of our recommendations).

Annual assessments would be tailored to measure progress toward the graduation standard (P.S.-readiness standard) and benchmark scores would be established. Student test results would be measured against these benchmarks to indicate the progress that students are making each year.

Individual districts and schools would be rated both on a *status model* (the average absolute performance against the benchmark) and a *growth model* (the year-over-year improvement as it tracks toward the P.S. readiness standard). Ratings would be based on the outcomes demonstrated by students during their final year on campus (high schools should be held accountable for graduation results, middle schools for grade 8 or 9 results, and elementary schools for grade 5 or 6 results). The *status model* would measure the percentage of students who met or exceeded benchmark scores during their last year on campus. The *growth model* would measure the percentage of students who made satisfactory progress during their time at the school. For students who are meeting or exceeding the benchmarks, the *growth model* would require them to continue to meet or exceed them by at least the same amount each year. Students that score below the benchmark would be required to make up ground each year so that they are on track to meet the graduation standard by the 12th grade. School and district performance would be judged based on the percentage of students that make satisfactory annual progress towards P.S.-readiness.

For example, assume that our hypothetical assessment goal is that 12th-grade students score 120 points (analogous to vertical scale points) on the applicable assessments to be P. S. ready (see figure below). For simplicity, our example requires students to gain 10 points per grade. Let's say that an 8th grade student exceeds the benchmark score of 80 and scores a 90. For that student to make satisfactory progress, he or she would have to score 100 the next year. For an 8th grade student who scores a 70, he or she would have to improve 12.5 points per year until graduation (i.e. 82.5 in 9th grade, 95 in 10th grade, 107.5 in 11th grade, and 120 in 12th grade). While that student would not have to eliminate the entire deficit in one year, he or she would have to make sufficient progress to be on track for graduation to be considered "satisfactory".



Once each student's benchmark scores are established, we should group students for accountability (not instructional) purposes in each grade and each subject area into the lowest 25% and the highest 25%, in addition to disaggregating data by race and economic status, as required by *No Child Left Behind*.

Schools should be accredited annually if they are meeting/exceeding the following criteria or demonstrating annual gains to meet benchmarks in growth to the P.S. standard. Additionally, schools would be rated "A" through "F" depending on their success in reaching benchmarked goals related to these criteria, as follows:

High Schools:

- 90% of students achieve the P.S.-ready benchmark score and graduate within 4 years;
- 80% of graduates demonstrate postsecondary readiness by achieving satisfactory scores on the ACT, THEA, or SAT;
- 80% of graduates immediately transition into post-secondary education (including career and technology training or advanced military training); and
- 80% of graduates do not require remedial education in the state system of public universities and colleges.

Middle Schools:

- 90% of students achieve the appropriate benchmark score (either under the *status model* or the *growth model*) and complete middle school on time;
- 80% of 8th grade students successfully complete Algebra I; and
- 80% of students have 5 or fewer absences during the school year.

Elementary Schools

- 90% of students achieve the appropriate benchmark score (either under the *status model* or the *growth model*) and complete elementary school on time;
- 80% of students demonstrate proficiency on 5th grade reading and math assessments; and
- 80% of students have 5 or fewer absences during the school year.

To measure district and school performance and to fully satisfy the need for diagnostics and tools for educators to address achievement deficiencies, the state should adopt a highly-reliable, longitudinal statistical data system for grades K-20, much as was proposed by House Bill 2238 in the 80th Legislature. The system should provide real-time data for individual students, schools, and districts. It should include information on classes, instructors, student-teacher linkages, teacher preparation programs, attendance, disciplinary actions, assessment results, and a dropout risk assessment. It should also provide quarterly statewide monitoring and annual reporting of student performance that includes absolute scores against the benchmark, tracks year-over-year progress against the benchmark, and tracks overall progress towards the graduation standard.

2. District and Campus Report Cards

A vital element of any accountability system is its transparency for parents and other stakeholders. Each year, districts should be required to produce a public report card that is published on the district's website and each campus bulletin board. The report should identify the district's performance in relation to each accreditation goal and the ratings of each school. This report card should also include the following information:

- Average results of student assessments by school, grade, and subject that is disaggregated by highest and lowest quartile of performance and the student groups identified by *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB);
- Average annual academic growth and progress relative to the benchmarks for students by grade, subject, class, and school that is disaggregated by the highest and lowest quartile of performance and the student groups identified by NCLB;
- Time-based performance trajectories for student groups, classrooms, and schools;
- Average dropout rates for cohorts of students in each school for grades 9 through 12 that is disaggregated by highest and lowest quartile of performance, and the student groups identified by NCLB;
- Average attendance by grade and subject for each school, disaggregated by highest and lowest quartile of performance, and the student groups identified by NCLB;
- A list of subject areas, grade-levels, and schools taught by teachers who are teaching outside their area of certification; and

- Check registers that identify payment type according to the following classifications for each school: (a) regular academic programs, (b) state-mandated academic programs, (c) special education programs, (d) academic interventions, (e) sports activities, (f) non-academic student services, (g) legal services, (h) lobbying activities, and (i) dues for professional associations.

3. Sanctions and Interventions

- Release districts from all state law and regulation, with the exception of safety requirements, when all of the schools in the district meet state standards or are meeting state standards for improvement;
- Require all districts to have a plan for dropout identification, prevention, and intervention that is approved by the Commissioner of Public Education and linked to the school accountability system;
- Require schools to provide year-round academic intervention for students who do not demonstrate proficiency on reading, math, social studies, and science assessments (during the school day, after school, and during the summer) or provide scholarships to a provider approved by the Commissioner of Public Education (such as Kumon or Sylvan Learning Center);
- Adopt consequences for school and district performance that are closely connected with annual school ratings (A, B, C, D, and F, as proposed previously): (1) the first phase of intervention, the prevention phase, should be promptly initiated whenever an annual school or district rating drops to a lower alphabetic grade (such as from A to B), even if the school's or district's performance remains within the acceptable range of A, B, and C; (2) the second phase of intervention, should begin at the end of the first year that a school or district has been given the annual rating of D for unacceptable performance; and (3) the third phase of intervention, should be initiated after a failing school or district completes a second year of intervention without earning an acceptable rating (A, B or C) and is assigned an annual rating of F. (The particular intervention steps and proposed turnaround options available to the district and/or Commissioner of Education are presented in more detail in our accountability paper.)
- Research suggests that the key to school reconstitution lies more in changing teachers and leadership rather than instructional methods or professional development, particularly in phase three, when it becomes clear that new management must have complete control over all human resource decisions with full authority to set aside employment contracts.
- TIER recommends that schools and districts lose accreditation and state funding if the third phase of corrective action does not result in an acceptable accountability rating – either by performance growth or absolute scores – after two years (completing the total of five years of unacceptable performance).

Conclusion

We believe this system meets the criteria and components we emphasized in our previous presentation and the principles we outlined in our paper. It also provides balance among the attributes of diagnostics and tools, transparency, and consequences.

Most important, as I indicated in my preface today, it recognizes the need for the enhancement of standards and assessments as a prerequisite for a viable accountability system while also acknowledging the need for an allowance of a reasonable transition period for educators to adapt to the more rigorous standards for the value of a high school diploma.

Thank you again. I would be pleased to respond to your questions.