



Texas Latino Education Coalition Testimony
Testimony Regarding the A-F Letter Grading System for Schools
Before the House Public Education Committee, March 21, 2017

Dear Chairman Huberty and Committee Members,

Thank you for hearing our testimony today. The Texas Latino Education Coalition (TLEC) is a collaborative of organizations that advocates for the rights of Latino students at the local, state and national levels. The coalition was organized to focus on critical educational issues in Texas and to improve the state of education for Latino students in public schools.

Accountability systems can hold schools responsible to the local communities that they serve without using punitive and dysfunctional consequences for individual students. Research shows that a strong accountability system must be: fair, meaningful, transparent, effective and supportive.

HB 22 takes some steps in the right direction by de-emphasizing the role of testing in a school's or district's rating, adding student surveys, expanding college readiness factors, and rolling back on the A-F letter grading system.

However, there are also some major civil rights concerns TLEC has with the bill as follows.

1. Section 3, TEC 39.053(b) changes the requirement to include disaggregated data on the accountability measures from "must" to "should." The committee should not accept this change. Holding schools accountable for student achievement with data disaggregated by sub-groups, such as race, national origin, socioeconomic status and students classified as English learners and special education, is essential to having a fair and effective accountability system for all students in all schools. It is also required under the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA).
2. Various sections authorizing the inclusion of "completion rates" as a performance indicator should be struck. *Completion rates* are not synonymous with graduation rates and misrepresent data to the community as students having completed school when they fail to graduate with a high school diploma.
3. Section 5, TEC 39.054 a-1 should be amended to ensure that the commissioner does not have the authority to "adjust the performance rating for a domain disaggregated by race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status or other factors." Allowing the commissioner to exercise such authority would undermine the civil rights protections built into ESSA.
4. Section 5, TEC 39.054 a-1 should be further amended to return to the prior rating system of "met standard" and "requires improvement." Rather than promoting transparency and efficiency, the A-F letter grading system continues the punitive accountability system under the previous *No Child Left*

Behind Act's provisions. Importantly, research shows that assigning overly simplistic A-F letter grades to school campuses and districts obscures any real assessment of actual student performance and campus improvement (Tanner, 2016; TASA.net.org).

5. Section 5, TEC 39.054 b-1 should be changed to not allow the commissioner to give greater weight to the results of students who have been enrolled for at least four consecutive years in the same school or district. Low-income students and students of color tend to have higher mobility rates, but their education is equally important as other students. Eliminating this provision would allow for a fairer, more meaningful system.
6. Amendments should be added to ensure that struggling campuses and districts receive the support and resources from the state to ensure all children have access to learning opportunities. Texas can also help our schools improve by including “opportunity-to-learn metrics,” including resource allocation, college preparation and teaching quality.

Rather than locking struggling schools into a failing status through blunt assessments and an unfair accountability system, Texas should focus on an asset-based approach that weighs all the various areas of progress in Texas schools.

For more questions, please contact David Hinojosa, J.D., at david.hinojosa@idra.org.

Resources

Texas Latino Education Coalition website

http://www.idra.org/education_policy/texas-latino-education-coalition/

“Accountability that Doesn’t Hurt Students” by Dr. Albert Cortez, Intercultural Development Research Association (November-December 2010)

<http://www.idra.org/resource-center/accountability-that-doesnaet-hurt-students/>

“The A-F Accountability Mistake,” by John Tanner, Texas Association of School Administrators (November 2016)

<http://www.tasanet.org/cms/lib07/TX01923126/Centricity/Domain/393/A-F-Essay.pdf>

Texas Association of School Administrators website

<http://www.tasanet.org>

The Texas Latino Education Coalition (TLEC) is a collaborative of organizations and individuals who advocate for the rights of Latino students at the local, state and national levels. The coalition was organized to focus specifically on critical educational issues in Texas and to improve the state of education for Latino students in public schools.