



Suspending Nonessential Testing and High-Stakes Accountability During Disaster Supports Students and Communities

TLEEC Written Testimony for HB 3668, Submitted to the House Education Committee by Ana Ramón, April 13, 2021

Dear Chairman Dutton, Vice Chair Lozano, and Honorable Members of the Committee:

The Texas Legislative Education Equity Coalition (TLEEC) is a collaborative of over 20 organizations and individuals with the mission to improve the quality of public education for all children, with a focus on racial equity. We advocate at the local, state, and national levels for high-quality teaching, curriculum, and instructional practices, for bilingual education for English learners, for fair funding, and for enhanced college access and success.

TLEEC supports House Bill 3668 because it enables the commissioner to be flexible in his approach to standardized assessments following a disaster and reduces the high-stakes accountability consequences for students.

Community Concerns Over Standardized Testing

Community demands to reduce unnecessary standardized tests and their high-stakes consequences are not new to the Legislature. Texas school districts have long denounced the excessive use of standardized tests with high-stakes consequences for students and schools. Texas requires five additional assessments that are not required under federal law, including the English II and U.S. History end-of-course exams that can jeopardize students' eligibility for high school graduation and disparately affect students of color.

In March 2021, the National Education Association urged the federal government to suspend testing to allow flexibility and trust in the expertise of educators during the pandemic. A 2021 poll by Raise Your Hand Texas found that 56% of Texans lack confidence in the ability of the STAAR exam to effectively measure student learning. The same poll found that student preparation for standardized testing ranked lowest in considerations of teaching quality. Numerous studies demonstrate rises in stress-induced illness in children and educators in response to test pressure, and more recent research has shown a physiological stress response in students approaching the administration of assessments with high stakes for students. Testing during disasters exacerbates harmful stress to students and educators.

Meaningful Paths Forward

A more accurate reflection of a student's learning is teacher-developed formative assessments. Teachers can work collaboratively across grade levels, schools or districts to create authentic modes of assessment that uplift student learning over performance on the current flawed, inaccurate and harmful set of STAAR examinations. The \$388 million paid to corporations for multi-year test administration contracts could be redirected to these initiatives and to much needed mental health and student support resources at the school level.

TLEEC makes the following recommendations:

- Support HB 3668, the reduction of assessments and the removal of high-stakes consequences for students; and
- Support initiatives that promote meaningful, equitable alternatives to standardized assessments with high-stakes consequences for students at all grade levels.

The COVID-19 pandemic has spotlighted inequities and inefficiencies in our current educational system. This bill provides steps in the right direction to support students and communities in disasters and through recovery. We urge you to support House Bill 3668. Thank you for your time and consideration of our testimony and recommendations.

For questions, please contact TLEEC either through Ana Ramón (ana.ramon@idra.org) or Dr. Chloe Latham Sikes (chloe.sikes@idra.org) at IDRA, or Fátima Menéndez at MALDEF (fmenendez@maldef.org).

Resources

- Scott, L.L. (December 12, 2012). Area civic leaders, school districts sign resolution opposing high-stakes testing: STAAR was to require students to take 15 end-of-course exams to graduate from high school. *Lubbock Avalanche Journal*. <http://lubbockonline.com/education/2012-12-10/area-civic-leaders-school-districts-sign-resolution-opposing-high-stakes>
- National Education Association. (2021, March 19). #Cancel the Tests. National Education Association. <https://www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/new-from-nea/cancelthetests-sign-open-letter>
- Raise Your Hand Texas. (2021) Perceptions in a Pandemic: Texans’ Support for Public Schools Grows. Austin: Raise Your Hand Texas. <https://www.raiseyourhandtexas.org/2021poll>
- Counsell, S.L., & Wright, B.L. (2018). High-stakes Accountability Systems: Creating Cultures of Fear. *Global Education Review*, 5(2), 189-202. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1183858>
- Lobman, C. (2013). “I feel nervous... very nervous” Addressing Test Anxiety in Inner-city Schools through Play and Performance. *Urban Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085913478621>
- Heissel, J.A., Adam, E.K., Doleac, J.L., Figlio, D.N., & Meer, J. (2019). Testing, Stress, and Performance: How Students Respond Physiologically to High-Stakes Testing. *Education Finance and Policy*, 1-26. https://doi.org/10.1162/edfp_a_00306
- Au, W. (2016). Meritocracy 2.0: High-stakes, Standardized Testing as a Racial Project of Neoliberal Multiculturalism. *Educational Policy*, 30(1), 39-62. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904815614916>
- DeMatthews, D., McFarland, M.G., & James, L.D. (2021, April 4). Alternatives to Standardized Tests During a Pandemic Year. *Education Week*. <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/opinion-alternatives-to-standardized-tests-during-a-pandemic-year/2021/03>
- Swaby, A. (2021, January 4). Texas hires two companies to run STAAR, moving toward statewide online testing. *The Texas Tribune*. <https://www.texastribune.org/2021/01/04/texas-staar-tests/>

The Texas Legislative Education Equity Coalition (TLEEC) is a collaborative of organizations and individuals with the mission to improve the quality of public education for all children, with a focus on racial equity. The coalition convenes organizations and individuals who advocate in the interest of public school students at the local, state and national levels.

TLEEC Member Organizations

- | | |
|---|---|
| ARISE Adelante | Texas American Federation of Teachers |
| Breakthrough Central Texas | Texas Association for Bilingual Education (TABE) |
| Coalition of Texans with Disabilities (CTD) | Texas Association for Chicanos in Higher Education (TACHE) |
| Dr. Hector P. García G.I. Forum | Texas Association of Mexican American Chambers of Commerce (TAMACC) |
| Easterseals Central Texas | Texas Center for Education Policy, University of Texas – Austin |
| Every Texan | Texas Hispanics Organized for Political Education (HOPE) |
| Houston Community Voices for Public Education | Texas League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) |
| Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) | Texas NAACP |
| McNeil Educational Foundation for Ecumenical Leadership | The Education Trust |
| Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF) | UnidosUS (formerly known as NCLR) |
| Mexican American School Board Members Association (MASBA) | |
| National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS) – Tejas Foco | |
| San Antonio Hispanic Chamber of Commerce | |