



Individual Graduation Committees Should be Available to All High School Students

IDRA Testimony for House Bill 999, Submitted by Ana Ramón, to Texas Senate Education Committee, May 18, 2021

Dear Chairman Taylor and Honorable Members of the Committee:

IDRA (Intercultural Development Research Association) is an independent, non-partisan, education non-profit committed to achieving equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college. We support HB 999, which would allow individual graduation committees (IGCs) to be an option for all high school students for graduation during 2020-21, 2021-22 and 2022-23 without having to first take and fail STAAR end-of-course exams.

Individual graduation committees allow students who have completed all high school coursework but not met passing rates on up to two STAAR end-of-course exams to still be able to graduate with the approval of their committee. Committees are comprised of educators familiar with the student's academic work and success, as well as a parent or guardian. These committees create equitable options for graduation, especially for Black students and Latino students, and students from households with low incomes. In the 2016-17 school year, 17% of IGC graduates were Black, 68% were Latino, and 76% were economically disadvantaged. Overall, schools used individual graduation committees for 3% of Texas high school graduates.

This bill would extend the opportunity for students affected by the pandemic to graduate high school without the pressure, expense and stress of first failing a STAAR end-of-course exam.

Recommendations

- Expand individual graduation committee eligibility criteria for students who have faced instructional and assessment disruptions throughout the pandemic by supporting HB 999;
- Remove the expiration date of 2023 for used individual graduation committees by supporting (per HB 1603); and
- Consider removing the passage of STAAR end-of-course exams from high school graduation requirements permanently.

Texas students who have worked hard to complete their high school graduation requirements should not be blocked by a test. Individual graduation committees should be an available option to all high school students affected by the pandemic.

IDRA is available for any questions or further resources that we can provide. Thank you for your consideration. For more information, please contact Ana Ramón, IDRA Deputy Director of Advocacy, at ana.ramon@idra.org.

Resources

IDRA. (March 5, 2019). Don't Block Graduation Because of a Test, Policy Brief. Intercultural Development Research Association. <https://idra.news/IGCbrie19>

IDRA is an independent, non-profit organization led by Celina Moreno, J.D. Our mission is to achieve equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college. IDRA strengthens and transforms public education by providing dynamic training; useful research, evaluation, and frameworks for action; timely policy analyses; and innovative materials and programs.