

Regarding the Implementation of House Bill 3 of the 81st Session of the Texas State Legislature

During the 81st Session of the Texas State Legislature, our center monitored and responded to the many iterations of House Bill 3 (H.B. 3) from a research-based perspective. Specifically, the Center brought to light the complexities and consequences of accountability policies regarding high-stakes testing, end-of-course exams, college readiness, growth models, interventions and sanctions, school capacity and resources, limited English proficient youth, and curricular tracking. Based on our research and ongoing observation of the course of the bill and its implications, we respectfully submit the following background information, points of concern, and questions regarding the implementation of H.B. 3. We intend for these questions to lead to a public and more thorough discussion of H.B. 3 and its effects.

Background

The passage of H.B. 3 continues Texas' transition away from minimum skills educational standards to a framework of college-readiness that equates participation in a high-school academic track and passing scores on select end-of-course exams to postsecondary preparedness. Major sections of education policy that H.B. 3 has amended are as follows: graduation requirements, end-of-course exams, school performance growth models, school accountability ratings/statuses and distinctions, graduation/completion/dropout rate exclusions, and intervention and sanction timelines. In addition, the bill promoted career and technology education as an alternative to foundation area curriculum. By the fall of 2014, H.B. 3 is expected to be in its full implementation with a new system of school ratings and distinctions, twelve end-of-course assessments in operation, and a new intervention and sanction timeline in place.

House Bill 3 presents a convergence of accountability and college readiness frameworks, discussions that may have wide reaching implications beyond those currently discussed by the education policy community. For example, we know that the student outcomes on the Algebra 1 pilot end-of-course exams for 2005-2009, as reported by TEA, reveal large percentages of students (primarily those who are African American and Latino/a) have very low pass rates. Given these dismal passing rates on the state's pilot, it is concerning that the state has adopted changes to recommended diploma requirements that call for students to meet a cumulative score threshold on 12 end-of-course exams, as well as meeting the college-readiness threshold on the Algebra II and English III exams.

Points of Concern

High-stakes Testing. TEA has suggested that the following three performance standard categories for students based on their end-of-course: minimum, proficient, and college readiness. During the first House Public Education Committee hearing on H.B. 3, several representatives and organizations raised concerns about the implications of labeling students' transcripts as college- or workforce- ready based on the results of a high-stakes exam score. Subsequently, the labeling was removed from the bill, but pertinent questions remain:

- Are the performance standards being proposed for implementation in effect a label for students? If so, who can we expect to be most impacted by the use and weight of these standardized, test-based indicators?
- What message do these labels convey to tertiary education institutions?
- What is the intent of these categories and how are each defined in practical terms?

To understand the impact that test-based labels will have on students as outlined by TEA, consider the following scenario: A cohort of three students simultaneously enroll in a Texas high school as freshmen. They take all of their core subject area courses together (English, math, science, and social science), complete the same quality homework, perform identically on all classroom assignments, have equal attendance and grade point averages, but each of their performance scores on their end-of-course exams are different. Student A performs at a score that categorizes them as "minimum," student B performs at a score that categorizes them as "proficient," and student C performs at a score that categorizes them "college ready." So regardless of all the other indicators previously listed, the final outcome and labeling of this student becomes focused on their performance on their end-of-course exams. TEA does allow for students to re-take these exams although we must question the resources that are expended to do so, especially when research shows that only a 7-8% chance of actual change in test performance can be expected even after taking increased instruction into account.

If our goal is college readiness and our core subject area coursework has been aligned to meet those needs, and the completion of those courses have meaning in the definition of preparedness, then the following questions might be considered:

- How does the THECB view EOC scores as readiness indicators?
- Will the end-of-course exam scores be given the same weight in admissions decisions as other standardized exams?
- What does the end-of-course score, or performance label, represent in relation to the institutions of higher education's own definition of college readiness?

College Readiness definition

Within the context of H.B. 3, college readiness is defined as "the level of preparation a student must attain in English language arts and mathematics courses to enroll and succeed, without remediation, in an entry-level general education course for credit in that same content area for a

baccalaureate degree or associate degree program at: (1) a general academic teaching institution, as defined by Section 61.003, other than a research institution, as categorized under the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's accountability system; or (2) a postsecondary, educational institution that primarily offers associate degrees or certificates or credentials other than baccalaureate or advanced degrees" (House Bill 3, Section 39.024a).

Put differently, the state's academic standards under H.B. 3 will be aligned with preparation standards for community college or a teaching university, and does not include our state's flagships. The omission of research institutions from this standard raises interesting questions regarding the definition of college readiness for enrollment in these institutions. Further, given that the institutions (1) and (2) outlined in Section 39.024a present very different educational settings, how does the agency justify a standard that corresponds to widely divergent contexts?

Accountability Ratings

As the state transitions from its current system to the system outlined in H.B. 3, TEA will suspend performance ratings for the 2011-2012 academic year. School and district ratings and accreditation statuses for the 2010-2011 and 2012-2013 academic years will be considered consecutive years. In 2013, school and district accreditation statuses and performance ratings will be issued for the first time. These ratings will only be based on the percent of students scoring in the "proficient" category. For this same year, the percent of students that are scoring in the "college-ready" category will be reported but not used for accountability purposes. In 2014, school and district accreditation statuses and performance ratings will be based on the performance of students scoring in the "proficiency" and "college ready" categories.

A few points of concern regarding this issue:

- How are schools that are in the fifth or sixth year of the intervention timeline (i.e., final stage), according to the current system, responded to in 2013?
- What is the agency's position on consecutive years being based on two different systems of accountability?
- When will decisions be made regarding the defining college-readiness thresholds?
- During the implementation of H.B. 3, what resources will be utilized to support school and district efforts to ensure that all students are college ready?