

Senate Education Committee

Testimony on Senate Bill 3

Houston Independent School District and the Districts in the Texas Urban School Council

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On behalf of the Houston Independent School District and the eight school districts that comprise the Texas Urban School Council, I would like to commend Chairman Shapiro for her time and consideration of this important state issue. We recognize that she, her staff, and all the members of the Joint Select Committee devoted significant personal time and energy to hear from all stakeholders during the interim.

We believe that there are aspects of this important bill that would result in improvements to our state accountability system. We are particularly appreciative of creation of a distinguished tier that would recognize individual campus strengths in certain academic areas, such as fine arts, and the recognition of school districts and campuses that are successful in reducing the achievement gap between different groups of students.

In the area of dropout and completion, we are supportive of provisions in this bill that would change dropout definitions that are currently problematic, particularly for urban districts. For example, the exclusion of students who have been adjudicated or incarcerated as dropouts is a definite improvement. In HISD, we have numerous initiatives in place to find students who have previously dropped out and reenroll them in a traditional high school or other non-traditional programs that we have created for this purpose. However, when we reenroll these students, students are significantly more at-risk of dropping out, and should they drop out once more, we are penalized yet again for the same student. In addition, schools do not get credit for any student recaptured and reenrolled in school after the school start window. Currently, these issues are not addressed in the bill, and we would ask your consideration of changes to address these issues.

Overall, we had hoped for significant changes to the sanctions for low-performing schools. The current version of the bill largely maintains current sanctions, causing large urban schools to experience significant sanctions, such as reconstitution and potential closure for the performance on one performance cell. In HISD, we have had to close a high school that was performing at the recognized level in language arts and social students – despite serving a high poverty and high LEP student population. We would prefer a proportional model for determining whether sanctions are necessary. We would ask that you reconsider the small numbers provisions and align these with the current model used by USDE for determining sanctions for schools not meeting AYP. And, when sanctions are determined as necessary, please consider provisions that would target the sanctions to address those specific areas that need improvement.

Further, it is also important to note that provisions outlined in SB 3 would hold high schools accountable for both dropout and completion rates. Under the proposed accreditation tier in SB 3, we anticipate that many, if not most, comprehensive urban high schools will never make it out of the accreditation tier and will never be able to reach the distinguished level on state accountability. We ask that any changes to the calculations and accountability provisions for dropout and completion be designed with large urban high schools in mind.

We are very appreciative of the consideration of a growth based model to evaluate schools and districts. We have embraced value-added methodology which we believe provides a much more in-depth analysis of teacher, campus, and district effectiveness. The psychometrics used to calculate growth is vitally important so as not to create false and/or inaccurate conclusions. It is not clear in the language of the bill how "necessary annual improvement required each year for a student to be prepared to perform satisfactorily" on a state assessment at the next level will be calculated.

Using a value-added model, the control is the student. Growth is then calculated using all available data on that particular student compared to other students across the state of Texas with similar academic history. Growth for that particular year is then aggregated at the teacher level to ascertain whether or not students made growth that was less than, more than, or about what was expected. This is the only fair way to determine growth. Other, more simplistic models do not typically adjust for students at either end of the performance spectrum where growth could be higher or lower based upon previous academic history. In addition, more simplistic growth to standard models do not typically account for growth above the standard resulting in a lack of focus on accountability/measures for traditionally high achieving students. For these and many other reasons, we strongly implore the committee to consider a value-added model such as EVAAS which is being used for statewide accountability in Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and North Carolina.

I want to thank you for this opportunity. The Houston Independent School District, along with all the other urban districts in Texas, stand ready to assist you in shaping the future of accountability in this state and, ultimately, the education and well-being of all the children in Texas.