

**SELECT COMMITTEE
ON PUBLIC SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY**



December 2008

***Co-Chairs:** Senator Florence Shapiro and Representative Rob Eissler
Members: Senator Tommy Williams, Representative Diane Patrick, Commissioner Robert Scott, Commissioner Raymund Paredes, Salem Abraham, Dalia Benavides, Beto Gonzalez, Larry Kellner, Sandy Kress, Susan Lewis, Dr. Thomas Randle, Dr. David Splitek, Ronald Steinhart*

SELECT COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY

SENATOR FLORENCE SHAPIRO, Co-Chair
REPRESENTATIVE ROB ESSLER, Co-Chair

SENATOR TOMMY WILLIAMS
REPRESENTATIVE DIANE PATRICK
COMMISSIONER ROBERT SCOTT
COMMISSIONER RAYMUND PAREDES



December 2008

SALEM ABRAHAM
RONALD STEINHART
SANDY KRESS
LARRY KELLNER
SUSAN LEWIS
DALIA BENAVIDES
DR. DAVID SPLITEK
DR. THOMAS RANDLE
BETO GONZALEZ

The Honorable Rick Perry
Governor of the State of Texas
P.O. Box 12428
Austin, Texas 78711

The Honorable David Dewhurst
Lieutenant Governor of the State of Texas
P.O. Box 12068
Austin, Texas 78711

The Honorable Tom Craddick
Speaker of the House of the State of Texas
P.O. Box 2910
Austin, Texas 78768

Dear Governor Perry, Lieutenant Governor Dewhurst, and Speaker Craddick:

The Select Committee on Public School Accountability is pleased to submit its final interim report for consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Handwritten signature of Florence Shapiro in cursive.

Senator Florence Shapiro,
Co-Chair

Handwritten signature of Rob Eissler in cursive.

Representative Rob Eissler,
Co-Chair

Handwritten signature of Tommy Williams in cursive.

Senator Tommy Williams

Handwritten signature of Diane Patrick in cursive.

Representative Diane Patrick

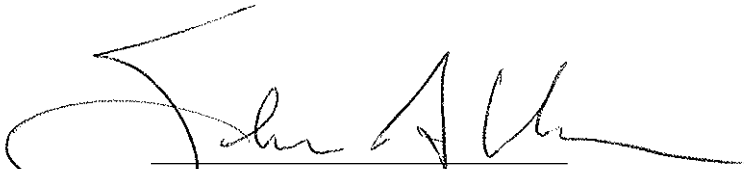
Handwritten signature of Robert Scott in cursive.

Commissioner Robert Scott

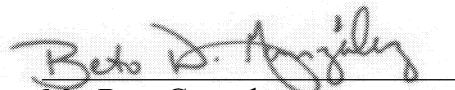
Handwritten signature of Raymund Paredes in cursive.

Commissioner Raymund Paredes





Mr. Salem Abraham

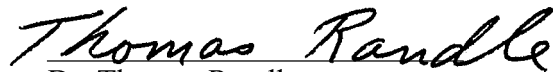

Ms. Dalia Benavides


Mr. Beto Gonzalez


Mr. Larry Kellner


Mr. Sandy Kress


Ms. Susan Lewis


Dr. Thomas Randle


Dr. David Splitek

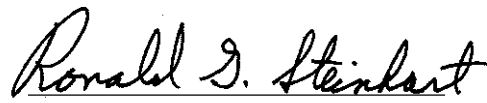

Mr. Ronald Steinhart

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Charges to Select Committee on Public School Accountability---	2
Issues with Current System-----	4
Points of Consensus-----	5
Committee Recommendations	
Proposed Framework-----	6
Accreditation Tier-----	7
Distinction Tier-----	8
Efficiency in Resource Allocation-----	9
Assessments-----	10
Reporting Requirements-----	11
Letters from Members-----	12

CHARGES TO THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY

Education Code § 39.005. OBJECTIVES OF STUDY.

- (a) The committee shall conduct a comprehensive review of the public school accountability system. In conducting its review, the committee shall study the mission, organizational structure, design, processes, and practices of similar accountability systems in other states and the requirements established by federal law.
- (b) A review under this section must include a thorough study of:
 - (1) each element of the accountability system prescribed by this chapter, with special emphasis on:
 - (A) the indicators used to determine accreditation status;
 - (B) rewards and incentives for campus excellence; and
 - (C) the responsibilities of the commissioner in assisting and, if necessary, imposing sanctions on districts that do not meet state performance standards;
 - (2) the extent to which the accountability system is aligned with the requirements prescribed by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (20 U.S.C. Section 6301 et seq.);
 - (3) the extent to which the accountability system reflects the public education mission, objectives, and goals provided by Chapter 4;
 - (4) the extent to which the accountability system meets public expectations;
 - (5) the extent to which the accountability system fairly and accurately reports the effectiveness of educators, instructional programs, support services, and financial expenditures and the impact of these elements on student achievement;
 - (6) the methods available to monitor the progress of each public school student, with special emphasis on methods to monitor demonstrable growth in academic achievement;
 - (7) the performance indicators that would successfully measure the effectiveness of the campus teaching and learning environment, including the effect of student discipline on that environment;
 - (8) the effectiveness of the accountability system in reporting the performance of open-enrollment charter schools and alternative education programs;
 - (9) the implementation of statewide assessment instruments, including specifically end-of-course assessment instruments;
 - (10) the extent to which the accountability system measures the performance of districts and campuses on important indicators and aspects of the educational process, other than student scores on standardized assessment instruments;
 - (11) the extent to which the accountability system clearly and accurately reports to parents and interested persons the overall performance of districts and campuses; and

- (12) the extent to which the accountability system considers the different student demographics of districts and campuses.

ISSUES WITH CURRENT SYSTEM

- **Overemphasizes minimal performance on one test.**
 - Students face excessive pressure to pass tests.
 - Disregards students performing above minimum.
 - District/campus can fail due to performance of one student on one test in one year.

- **Fails to recognize/reward growth.**

- **Narrows scope of curriculum and instruction.**

- **Focuses on minimum passing standard.**
 - Tests fail to diagnose students on the higher- and lower-end of academic achievement.
 - Lacks long-term goals linked to state workforce needs.

- **Reports do not provide easily understandable information for parents, educators, or the public.**

POINTS OF CONSENSUS

- **Focus on individual student achievement.**
- **Educate students to a postsecondary readiness standard.**
- **Promote the efficient use of resources.**
- **Recognize excellence in individual campuses.**
- **Provide robust, meaningful, and relevant reports of student, campus, and district performance.**

PROPOSED FRAMEWORK

ACCREDITATION TIER

Campus and district accreditation based on:

- Student achievement in terms of postsecondary readiness or growth in individual student achievement.
- Completion and dropout rates.
- Financial integrity (districts only).

DISTINCTION TIER

- Districts may earn distinction for financial efficiency.
- Campuses may earn distinctions for excellence, especially in areas valued by the local community.

ACCREDITATION TIER

- **Accreditation based on three-year rolling averages of student achievement.**
- **Credit for growth, especially growth that is on target to meet standards within three years.**
- **Disaggregate by major subpopulations.**
- **Incrementally increase standards so that within ten years Texas will perform among the top ten states in postsecondary readiness.**

DISTINCTION TIER

- **For districts, state distinction for the top quartile of districts demonstrating outstanding efficiency in resource allocation.**
- **For campuses, state distinction for the top quartile in terms of overall individual student growth.**
- **Campuses may also earn distinctions for** (these additional distinctions will consider multiple indicators of success, including but not limited to standardized test performance):
 - Outstanding academic achievement.
 - 21st century workforce development.
 - Second language learning.
 - Fine arts.

EFFICIENCY IN RESOURCE ALLOCATION

Estimates of district efficiency should:

- Consider student achievement versus expenditures, taking into account variations in student and district characteristics.
- Give credit for campuses that have received additional state distinctions.
- Give credit to districts that use weighted student funding.

ASSESSMENTS

- **New state tests should measure broader range of achievement.**
- **Standards should be vertically aligned across grades.**
 - Benchmark passing standards for end-of-course assessments to student success in college courses.
 - Periodically benchmark against other countries.
- **Supplemental instruction for students in grades 3, 5 and 8 who fail to meet standards.**
 - Promotion decisions determined locally, based on more than test scores.

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Easily understandable, relevant reports:

- Parent and educator reports include specific diagnoses and recommendations to improve student achievement.
- Administrator reports include detailed academic and financial information, with comparisons to similar districts and campuses.
- Public reports include district and campus academic and fiscal performance, with comparisons to similar districts and campuses.

LETTERS FROM MEMBERS



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November 21, 2008

Dear Co-Chairs Shapiro and Eissler,

Thank you for your dedicated leadership as the Co-Chairs of the Interim Select Public School Accountability Committee. As the House member on the Committee, I consider it a privilege to have served with 14 other individuals who care deeply about the future of public education in this state. We received meaningful input concerning school accountability issues from many stakeholders: parents, students, teachers, administrators, business persons and other elected officials. Our ten public hearings held in Dallas, Brownsville, El Paso, San Antonio, Houston, Lubbock, and Austin provided the Committee with a wide range of opinions representing the geographic and ethnic diversity of this state.

As we listened to testimony from hundreds of witnesses, one theme became clear: we need a new fair and equitable public school accountability system that will result in improved academic achievement for all students. This new system must educate students to rigorous postsecondary readiness standards. This new system must reward and recognize achievement and improvement, rather than the current system that punishes districts, campuses, and students, based on at little as one indicator. This new system must have reports that are transparent and easily understood by the public.

The Interim Report from this Committee provides a framework for resulting legislation to address these concerns in the upcoming 81st Session. Clearly, we must act now, and I look forward to working with you on behalf of millions of Texas public schoolchildren. Further delay of the implementation of an improved system will deny opportunity to all of those children who deserve immediate access to the best public school system in the nation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Diane Patrick".

Diane Patrick, Ph.D.

Lawrence W. Kellner
Chairman of the Board
Chief Executive Officer

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November 21, 2008

The Honorable Florence Shapiro
Chair
Senate Committee on Education
P.O. Box 12068
Austin, TX 78711

The Honorable Rob Eissler
Chair
House Committee on Public Education
P.O. Box 2910
Austin, TX 78768

Dear Co-Chairs Shapiro and Eissler:

I appreciate the opportunity to have served with both of you on the Select Committee on Public School Accountability over the last year. Your leadership is the key reason the Committee made so much progress on this critical issue. I strongly support the Committee's report and have two supplementary comments, as follows:

1. I agree that we need to replace the TAKS test in grades 3 through 8 with a new test. I believe the new test should have a norm referenced section that allows us to measure a broader range of skills and provides us a tool for national comparisons. We need to make sure the new test can provide the inputs we need for a growth model and allows us to accurately compare our progress in Texas to other states.
2. The accountability ratings should adjust for English Language Learners who join the Texas public school system at age 12 or older. These students should be tracked separately and required to show significant growth, but districts should not be penalized for these students' failure to meet grade-level performance standards.

In addition, I strongly support the Committee's recommendation that we return promotion decisions in Grades 3, 5 and 8 to local districts. I believe we should consider the results of statewide tests, but a single test should not be the sole basis for deciding whether to promote or retain a student in these grades. I trust our teachers and have faith in their judgment to make the best promotion decisions. We should work to provide additional tools to assist our teachers in making these decisions.

Please let me know how I can be helpful as the process moves forward. It has been an honor to serve with you and observe your dedication to the children of Texas.

Sincerely,



Sandy Kress

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November 21, 2008

The Honorable Florence Shapiro
and the Honorable Rob Eissler
P.O. Box 12068
Austin, Texas 78711

Dear Chairwoman Shapiro and Chairman Eissler:

Thank you for your superb leadership of the Select Committee on Public School Accountability. I am proud to have served with you and the other fine members of the Committee.

I believe there is great merit to the report. I particularly like the strong emphasis on post secondary readiness. We are promoting a new cornerstone for the accountability system – that we hold ourselves to the standard that our students – on a disaggregated basis – are on path, or growing quickly to the path, each grade to post secondary readiness. This is a remarkable and worthy policy which, if implemented properly and supported with proper resources, will significantly benefit our students and the future of our state.

I also like the recommendations encouraging greater financial efficiency and effectiveness in our districts, better data and transparency in reports of performance, stronger and more aligned standards, and more robust assessments.

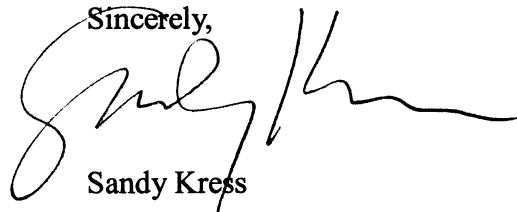
There are a few areas of important concern that I hope will be clarified when this outline is converted into more specific language. Specifically, I would suggest:

1. Within the accreditation tier, there should be three, not two, ratings: accredited, accredited advised, and unaccredited. If there are only two groups, there will be huge pressure against classifying any schools as unaccredited. Furthermore, there are schools that miss important goals and have serious problems but don't merit being unaccredited. As witnesses have testified to the Committee, ratings should not be pass/fail. There should be a rating category for schools that have serious problems but should not lose accreditation.
2. The draft is silent on the consequences for a campus that is unaccredited or that has serious shortcomings in getting students to standards. Surely, some regime like that in HB 1 should be maintained.

Madame Chair Shapiro and Chairman Eissler
November 21, 2008
Page 2

3. It is unclear how the system will transition in the 3 year rolling average policy. Presumably, schools that are currently academically unacceptable or are otherwise identified along the HB 1 consequences timeline will be in the same place in the new system. Also, a school that performs poorly in the first year of the new system ought at least to be warned, as is currently the case. After the second year, the two years' results could be averaged with appropriate consequences. And, then, after the third year, the system with 3 year averages could be fully operational.
4. The draft implicitly calls for eliminating the current state policy discouraging social promotion. This policy should be fixed, not eliminated. Schools that promote students who later continue to fail tests or drop out should be sharply penalized in the accountability ratings. Plus, if the state permits promotion irrespective of failure on state tests, it should specify very clearly and concretely the sort of showing of mastery of knowledge and skills that must be demonstrated in order to trump failure in the tests.

Again, many thanks for your leadership. And I look forward to working with you to move education forward in Texas.

Sincerely,

Sandy Kress

**Comments on Final Report of
Select Committee on Public School Accountability**

Susan Lewis

I am pleased with many of the concepts contained in the report, and its representation of months of work. The report largely mirrors the framework that the Select Committee discussed in our final meeting. There are, however, a few points we talked about that were not addressed in the framework but deserve reiteration. They are as follows:

A point made repeatedly in public testimony, and that many believe to be key to a successful revision, is that the **overemphasis on testing** under our current accountability system must be addressed. Certainly the elimination of a ranking system will help in this regard. However, the accreditation of a school/district remains primarily based on student test performance. **The weight given to tests under the current system could and should be lessened considerably by including other indicators**, such as the research-based indicators cited in several reports.*

One indicator in particular that should be considered is some type of “organizational health” or climate survey. This is one of the leading indicators identified in *Beyond Test Scores: Leading Indicators for Education*. A compelling example of the usefulness of including such an indicator in the accountability system is illustrated by recent news accounts of the success of a low-income elementary school in Austin, which achieved an exemplary accountability rating this year. In the description of factors accounting for the

* (*Beyond Test Scores: Leading Indicators for Education*, Annenberg Institute, 2008 <http://www.annenberginstitute.org/pdf/LeadingIndicators.pdf>); and *Good measures for good schools: At-a-glance*, Center for Public Education, 2008 <http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/site/pp.aspx?c=kjJXJ5MPIwE&b=3501683&printmode=1.>)

school's success, the story references the favorable climate survey the school received from its teachers, stating: "High marks for campus climate are more closely correlated with high student test scores than a host of other factors, including family income level, according to a district study released last week." (Austin American-Statesman, October 23, 2008)

Incorporating as a baseline element a climate survey or organizational health measure would go a long way toward providing important information about schools that are potentially headed for problems, as well as ensuring a better level of compliance than TEA, with its limited staff and resources, is able to do.

Since we will continue to use state assessments in Texas, we must ensure that the use of test results for any specific purpose is scientifically validated. For far too long, we have attempted to use measures that are not validated for purposes for which they are not intended.

While I support eliminating the prerequisite for promotion aspect of the Student Success initiative, we need to be sure that students are still aware that they ultimately share responsibility and accountability for their results. **As the bill is drafted, perhaps a less high stakes way to assure there is still some mechanism in place for student accountability on assessments can be identified.**

With the elimination of the required passage to advance to the next grade level, we still need **policies that insulate teachers from outside pressures to promote students unjustifiably.** It was a strong message from our committee that teachers should be able to use their professional judgment to do what is best for their students.

If we are going to move to a higher performance standard (postsecondary readiness), **we need to make sure the state invests significant resources in a supportive infrastructure to allow educators and students to gear up for the increased standards.** This infrastructure would include comprehensive educator training.

Also, if we are going to significantly increase standards, my greatest concern is that the system and students have sufficient time to incorporate and adjust to new expectations. **A possible moratorium on rankings under the current accountability system while we transition into the new system would seem to be a reasonable concept to incorporate in the final proposal, and has a historical precedent.**

“Postsecondary success” needs to be clearly defined and **should be reflective of the full range of student pathways to success in the workforce, postsecondary education or training.** There is no “one size fits all” path to success.

And finally, I would like urge **periodic overview evaluations of how the system is working and what criteria need adjustment.** There will be unanticipated bumps in the road that will need smoothing.

Thank you for all of the time, energy, and dedication that have been demonstrated by the members of this committee and the staff. It has truly been an honor and privilege to serve on this committee.