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Testimony of Eric Hartman
on behalf of Texas AFT
Before the Senate Committee on Education
Regarding SB 2087
April 7, 2009

Texas AFT supports both SB 2087 as introduced and the proposed committee substitute for SB 2087. The animating idea behind both versions is to move away from “automatic” application of sanctions for low-rated campuses. Current law triggers reconstitution or closure of a campus without sufficient consideration of all facets of school performance. CSHB 2087 would require a more considered judgment of the whole picture of what’s going right and what’s going wrong at a campus before these major sanctions could be imposed. We appreciate the note struck in SECTION 1 of the substitute, which asserts legislative intent to avoid school shutdowns if less drastic interventions, with additional time and tools provided, could turn around an academically struggling campus.

Too often under the current system we see campus ratings that do not fairly reflect the complicated reality of what is actually occurring on a struggling campus. This bill would have the commissioner of education take a close look at the multiple dimensions of school improvement before imposing major sanctions.

Texas AFT believes that the public and parents and teachers all are looking this session for a common-sense overhaul along these lines of the punitive provisions of the current accountability system. This overhaul should comprehensively shift the emphasis from sanctions to supportive interventions, should give parents and teachers a strong voice in the redesign of low-rated schools, and should guarantee schools the resources needed for a real opportunity to carry out the redesign program developed by the school community. CSHB 2087 makes an important contribution to this accountability reform agenda.

A further word about the bill as introduced: We support its provision requiring necessary assistance and time to take advantage of that assistance before a school can be reconstituted or closed. We believe that this language or something close to it is an essential ingredient of a fair and effective overhaul of the current law on sanctions. We encourage the author and the committee to include this provision in their further work on the reform of the accountability system.