



## **ATPE Input on SB 3 and HB 3 Regarding Public School Accountability**

**Written Testimony Delivered by Jerry  
Bonham, State President, March 17, 2009**

### **Part One – Review of the Legislation and Discussion of Critical Needs**

The Association of Texas Professional Educators offers the following input on House Bill 3 and Senate Bill 3. We applaud the efforts of the bills' authors, as well as the members of the Select Committee on Public School Accountability, to address some of the limitations of our current accountability system. In general, ATPE is pleased with the following proposals:

- Standards for graduation requirements and passing state assessments will be directly linked to postsecondary success. Elementary and secondary education should be a beginning for students, not an end.
- The system will look not only at snapshots of an individual student's performance, but at growth over a period of time.
- Students will benefit from more flexibility in designing their own curriculum. ATPE believes that graduation requirements should reflect the need for a well-rounded curriculum that gives students choices and flexibility.
- Campuses will have opportunities to earn distinctions for excellence in a variety of areas.
- District and campus accreditation will include considerations of multi-year growth, rather than focusing on a single year's performance.
- Districts are given more local control to decide the appropriate criteria for promoting or retaining students.
- Students who fail state assessments will benefit from more prompt interventions and accelerated instruction.
- Graduation and dropout rates will be calculated uniformly, based on national standards.
- More sophisticated data about student progress and achievement will be available to educators, parents and the general public.

While these bills are in many ways a step in the right direction, more work is needed to create an accountability system that will truly maximize student learning. ATPE believes that in order for an accountability system to succeed in this regard, the system must be designed to include not only the measurement of outcomes such as standardized test scores, but also input-based measures such as teacher quality.

Ensuring that a qualified, certified and well-supported teacher leads every student's learning is the single most important factor in improving and maintaining student achievement. In other words, recruiting, training and rewarding high-quality teachers is essential to our success. We acknowledge that it is an

*After all, what is the point of measuring student growth if there is no concerted state effort to ensure that the necessary underlying structure of a high-quality teaching work force is put in place to enable each and every student to achieve growth?*

## Part Two – Supporting Research

### Research Supporting the Inclusion of Teacher Quality Measures in the New Accountability System

In 2008, ATPE commissioned Dr. Ed Fuller of the University of Texas to conduct a *Study on Teacher Quality and School Improvement in Secondary Schools*. The purposes of the study were to examine, through qualitative and quantitative analysis, the effect of teacher qualifications (quality measures) and teacher distribution on academic achievement in Texas secondary schools and to document the correlation between teacher quality and gains in achievement at high-improvement schools.

The methodology included the following:

- Examining the distribution of teacher quality across Texas secondary schools.
- Examining the relationship between changes in teacher quality and school outcomes on TAKS.
- Investigating the strategies used by “turnaround” schools to increase TAKS passing rates.

The study looked specifically at the following measures of teacher quality:

- Percentage of teachers assigned out of field;
- Percentage of teachers not fully certified;
- Percentage of beginning teachers;
- Distribution of teacher experience;
- Teacher turnover; and
- Initial passing rates on teacher certification tests.

ATPE previously presented the findings of our teacher quality study to the Select Committee on Public School Accountability. We reiterate those findings here in support of our plea to the Legislature to include teacher quality measures as indicators in the new accountability system:

1. There is a ***positive association between the measures of teacher quality in this study and student achievement on TAKS***. Indeed, in every case, high-performing schools had a far greater aggregate teacher quality than low-performing schools.
2. Not only was teacher quality positively associated with levels of performance on the TAKS, but ***changes in teacher quality were also positively associated with increases in performance on the TAKS from 2003 to 2007***.
3. As previous analyses in Texas have shown, we found that ***teacher quality continues to be inequitably distributed across schools***, with high-poverty, high-minority, and low-performing schools having much lower teacher quality than low-poverty, low-minority, and high-performing schools. In fact, on almost every single measure, we found significant differences in teacher quality between these sets of schools.

- ✓ The state should allow appropriate accommodations or modifications to standardized assessments for English Language Learners and students with special needs that will still hold schools accountable for the progress of those students.
- ✓ All students who choose to take the ACT or SAT should have opportunities to do so, including financial assistance for students who cannot afford the testing fees. However, the ACT or SAT should not be mandated for all students.
- ✓ The state should explore the use of alternative methods of assessing the progress of students, including the possibility of using locally developed alternative assessment instruments. If locally developed tests are used, the state and school districts should closely monitor and limit, if necessary, the workload demands on teachers who design such tests.
- ✓ Any requirements for online testing should ensure that districts have the full capability of complying with the technological requirements and receive the necessary funding to prepare their facilities and train personnel prior to the administration of any online tests used in the accountability system.
- ✓ Teachers should have sufficient access to released state assessments.

#### CHARTER SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY

- Do not lower the accountability standards for charter schools. As stated in ATPE's Legislative Program, which is written and approved by our members, we support safeguards to ensure that charter schools operate effectively and efficiently and are subject to the same regulations as traditional public schools. Furthermore, the state should require charter schools to meet minimum performance standards before allowing them to continue their operations and before considering any expansion of charter schools.

#### GOVERNANCE

- Private entities, and especially for-profit businesses, should not be allowed to take over the operations of low-performing schools.

#### TRANSPARENCY

- Just as the state imposes financial accountability measures on school districts, there must be transparency in the state's development and implementation of the new accountability system. The Legislature should insist that all state agencies, individuals and private entities involved in any way in the implementation or administration of the accountability system be required to disclose any conflicts of interest and subject their system-related financial transactions to full public scrutiny.

#### EDUCATOR INPUT

- Incorporate the input of classroom teachers and other educators who are currently employed in public schools in all stages of the creation and launch of a new accountability system, including the development of new tests, researching and setting performance standards, building staff development programs, designing and implementing data systems, putting in place high standards for educator preparation and certification, and raising awareness of the new system among educators, parents, and other community stakeholders.

educators with more than 20 years of service. Another type of retention incentive is a state-funded buyback or reimbursement plan for unused state personal leave accumulated by educators.

- Mentoring is undoubtedly one of the best strategies for improving teacher retention rates. ATPE supports mandatory state-funded, research-based mentoring programs for all beginning educators. The state should compensate mentors and give them sufficient training and resources for their efforts to be successful.

### CURRICULUM AND GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

- The state should expand and fund career and technology programs so that all students have the chance to pursue coursework that is relevant to their unique interests and long-term goals. CTE courses should be rigorous enough to allow students to substitute them for more traditional math and science courses without compromising their pathway toward college and career readiness. Stated differently, it is critical that the rigor of career and technical courses that may be substituted for academic courses be equivalent in skill level so that the student who makes this choice can easily switch back to a college-readiness track later if he so chooses.

### EVALUATION

- Publish an annual report that documents distribution of teacher quality across the state, within Education Service Centers, and within school districts.
- Implement a statewide working conditions survey that could be used to identify schools with poor working conditions, and provide assistance to improve the working conditions.

### FUNDING

- Fully fund all state mandates related to the new accountability system.
- Ensure that low-performing schools facing progressive sanctions are given the financial resources they need in order to comply with recommendations for improvement.