



Testimony of the Texas School Alliance On Senate Bill 1483

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The Texas School Alliance comprises 37 of the largest school districts in the state, representing 38 percent of the state's total student enrollment, 43 percent of Texas' economically disadvantaged students, and 59 percent of the state's LEP students. Many of our members use virtual school options for students and are interested in expanding these offerings as a way to improve services for students and increase efficiency.

We have a number of specific comments regarding SB 1483. First, we think that changes in the bill that expand access to the virtual school network are beneficial. However, we believe that school districts should retain authority to create and adopt agreements with virtual course providers that are in the best interests of the students in the district. The state should not force districts into agreements that districts do not deem beneficial. Second, it appears that the new virtual high schools would be diploma-granting institutions. We would like the bill language drafted to ensure that these entities would be held to the same academic accountability standards as are other public schools, and we understand that this is the author's intent. Third, we want to ensure that the same graduation requirements (course credits and graduation examinations) would apply to students in virtual schools as apply to students in traditional public schools, and we also understand that this is the author's intent. Finally, we would like to see the definition of "eligible entity" established in the bill so that it is clear what kinds of qualifications should be in place for an entity to become a virtual high school.

Although we think that virtual education offers significant promise for improving educational opportunities, we want to ensure that legislation is crafted in such a way as to ensure quality, efficiency, fairness and rigor as this new technology is incorporated into the educational process.