

SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Public Testimony HB 4545

May 24, 2022



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House Bill 4545 made essential, positive changes in the state's approach to standardized testing by eliminating the requirement for a student to pass the STAAR exam in order to be promoted to the next grade. This change will greatly benefit students by substantially lowering the pressures associated with high-stakes testing. However, the unintended consequences resulting from the specific requirements outlined in HB 4545, and further exacerbated by TEA rule, have placed a significant logistical burden on students, teachers, and campus administrators when school districts across the state, including Frisco ISD, already have mechanisms in place to provide such instruction.

Educators have no concerns with providing remediation. In fact, providing remediation, intervention, and enrichment is at the core of everything educators do. According to the progress of prior year non-proficient students on the 2019 TAPR, almost half of all students across the state who failed to perform satisfactorily on the previous assessment passed the following year (*this measure is not provided on the most recent TAPR*).

Accelerated Learning Committees and Supplemental Instruction Requirements

While HB 4545 provides that school districts must create Accelerated Learning Committees (ALC) for students who did not perform satisfactorily on STAAR testing, TEA rule prescribes the specific actions and practices a district must take with regard to these students, drastically overcomplicating implementation. As a result, instead of each ALC adopting individualized plans that best meet the needs of the specific student, ALCs are required to meet and adopt a state-prescribed, one-size-fits-all plan with limited flexibility based on minimal input of parents and teachers.

For example, Frisco ISD has students who excel academically on every local assessment, but whose parents chose not to allow their student to take STAAR; those students are required to have the same 30-hour remediation plan as a student two years below grade level. In some cases, an otherwise successful student, who excels according to all other academic data points but struggles in a standardized testing environment, or misses "success" by a question or two, is also given the same one-size-fits-all plan. Instead of allowing the teachers who know that student best to develop a more appropriate individualized remediation plan, all students are given an identical plan.

While HB 4545 requires an accelerated learning committee to determine why a student failed and consider modifications to the educational plan if a student fails to perform satisfactorily for a second year, TEA's rules still require the same response for each student. Furthermore, if the plan is prescriptive and final, it is unclear why an accelerated learning committee or meeting is needed. TEA

also interpreted the law to require 30 hours per subject, so some students who are behind grade level in multiple subjects could be required to receive up to 120 hours in supplemental instruction.

TEA Rule also requires an accelerated learning committee to include the principal and the teacher from both the sending and receiving campus. This rule applies any time a student advances from elementary to middle school or from middle school to high school. Frisco ISD has over 66,000 students spread across 73 campuses. A single elementary campus may feed into multiple middle school campuses, and a single middle school may feed into multiple high school campuses. In Frisco ISD, a grade 8 teacher will likely have to coordinate meetings with grade 9 teachers at three separate high school campuses. This increases the number of required meetings exponentially, adding an unnecessary burden to teachers and campus administrators.

Currently, the law requires supplemental instruction to be provided in groups of no more than three unless the parent or guardian or each student in the group authorizes a larger group. This creates a significant logistical burden and requires a considerable number of hours from teachers outside of class, especially when schools are prohibited from removing a student from recess or instruction in enrichment curriculum. Districts should be allowed to determine not only which students are in need of remediation but also which students need an individual, small group or large group setting.

Parent Input

The state-prescribed, one-size-fits-all plan with limited flexibility and minimal input of parents creates contentious relationships with parents. A number of parents in the Frisco ISD community have voiced their desire to “opt out” of the required remediation or out of taking STAAR altogether, despite District communications informing them that state law does not give that option. Many parents disagree with or do not understand the requirement for their student receiving a standardized response. While TEA initially made this clear in its guidance, subsequent updates significantly muddied the waters by refusing to directly answer whether parents have the right to opt out of such instruction.

Recommendations

The law should be amended to allow ALCs to determine the need and develop individualized plans that are designed for the specific student with input from the student’s teacher and parents. The law should also be amended to eliminate the requirement that the principal and teacher of the sending campus participate in ALC meetings, except at the request of the receiving campus.