

Houston Independent School District
Supporting Testimony for SB 4
March 29, 2011

Good morning, senators. My name is Julie Baker, and I'm the Chief Major Projects Officer at the Houston Independent School District. I am testifying today in support of SB 4.

We know from decades of research that teachers have a greater impact on student success than any other school factor. If we want to prepare all our students to be successful adults, we need to put an effective teacher in every classroom, and we need to make sure our teachers have the support they need to do their best work.

In HISD, we've committed to doing just that as part of our district's Strategic Direction, which was adopted by our visionary Board of Education last year. Our Strategic Direction consists of five core initiatives, including placing an effective teacher in every classroom. Working with national experts on teacher effectiveness, we're already well into implementing our Effective Teachers Initiative.

As a first step, we've been working to build a new appraisal and development system for our teachers to replace the current system of PDAS and MPDAS afforded to us by the state. Our proposed system will incorporate student performance measures and provide teachers and principals with valuable information necessary to increase teacher effectiveness. The current system does not allow for differentiation of teacher performance. Therefore, it is difficult for us to differentiate the supports teachers need and deserve. In fact, we surveyed our teachers and principals last year, and many of them told us that PDAS and MPDAS do not give them information that helps them increase student achievement, and that our professional development does not meet their individual needs.

SB 4 would take some important steps to address these problems. We strongly support the bill's effort to make measures of student learning a significant part of teacher appraisals. As you work to set rigorous standards for teacher appraisal systems statewide, we encourage you to include the use of multiple measures of student performance, such as academic growth, and to allow districts to include an expanded set of student achievement measures beyond state standardized tests.

We also support the SB 4's provision that would require principals to create individualized development plans for their teachers based the results of appraisals. All teachers deserve support that helps them take their professional skills to the next level.

HISD's teacher appraisal and development system that is currently being designed incorporates these key principles. Our new system would provide our teachers with a comprehensive picture of their classroom performance based on multiple measures – including student academic growth. We've designed this proposal over the course of the past six months in collaboration with thousands of teachers, principals, parents and community members across HISD.

We're planning to present our proposed new appraisal and development system to the HISD Board of Education this month. With the Board's approval, we would implement the new system in every school this fall.

Once again, I want to commend you for your vision and leadership on this important issue. Like all professionals, teachers deserve regular, useful feedback on their performance that helps them improve. Principals deserve information about their teachers that helps them build strong instructional teams. And most importantly, students deserve to learn from effective teachers every day. SB 4 represents an important step towards these goals.

Thank you, and I look forward to answering your questions.