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Testimony of the Texas School Alliance on House Bill 500

Senate Committee on Education

May 10, 2011

Room E1.028

The Texas School Alliance comprises 37 of the largest school districts in the state. Though we represent 4 percent of all districts in the state, TSA districts serve 38 percent of the state's total student enrollment, 43 percent of Texas' economically disadvantaged students, 43 percent of Texas' at-risk students, and 59 percent of the state's LEP students.

Based on a cursory understanding of the Senate substitute for House Bill 500, we find that there are several elements to the bill that are important for students. For example, we are encouraged by the exploration of test delivery mechanisms that will accommodate atypical instructional schedules, such as those used in self-paced credit recovery programs. We appreciate the provisions that would hold Minimum plan students harmless for attempting more rigorous programs of study, and we also appreciate the opportunity to be efficient in the delivery of accelerated instruction to 5th and 8th grade students who fail SSI tests.

At the same time, the Senate language apparently leaves out some of the most important provisions of the House bill relative to how students are supported in the transition to end-of-course requirements for graduation. Educators understand that in any shift to a new testing program, initial passing rates are likely to be low; in the transition from TAAS to TAKS, exit-level requirements were phased in more slowly than they were for the balance of the grade levels tested. With end-of-course testing, incoming 9th graders are going to be taking tests that count for graduation purposes *right off the bat*. On the current Algebra I end-of-course test, which is the only one with an established passing standard, only 26% of at-risk students are passing the test – and it's taken since 2005 for performance to improve by 7 percentage points



to reach that level. TEA also has indicated that it will be adjusting the passing standard on this test to a more rigorous level under STAAR.

What this means is that the students with the least resilience and the greatest academic need will be the very ones who are most likely to experience failure at the end of their first year in high school (see Attachment 1). These students comprise the majority of our enrollment (see Attachment 2). Early high school failure presages an increased likelihood of dropping out before graduation. Without a better transition in testing requirements for students, there is a real risk that the entire testing program ultimately will be undermined by virtue of having too many test failures accruing statewide in the first two years of implementation. That is not in anyone's best interests.

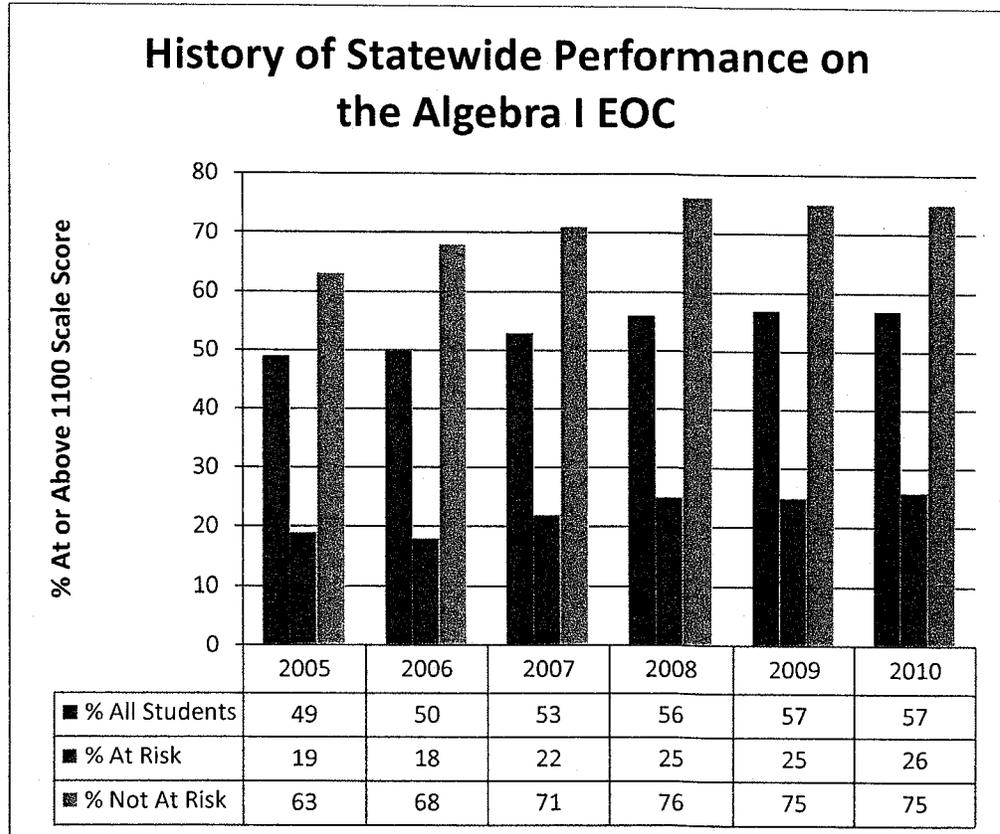
In light of this overriding concern, we find it important to maintain HB 500's approach on the following issues:

- Restore local control in the determination of how, and how much, EOC scores are to contribute to students' final grades
- Eliminate the cumulative score requirements that are difficult for students and parents to understand, and overly complex for counselors to monitor
- Maintain graduation requirements that call for students to pass four, rather than 12, EOCs that are aligned with the students' programs of study and with college readiness in the two areas that are most clearly supported by research (English language arts and Algebra)
- Maintain a permissive rather than mandatory approach to retesting on EOCs, so that students can strive for college readiness standards
- To the extent permitted by USDE, eliminate "double testing" for students in any enrolled grade level below grade 9 who are completing courses for high school credit
- Maintain all accountability requirements for the adults in public education at the same time that students are given a better transition to meet their new requirements; doing so keeps the pressure where it



belongs – on educators – thereby serving the system’s purpose of driving continuous improvement in teaching and learning.

TSA districts have always embraced accountability and actively use assessment data to inform professional development and instruction. We want to continue in that tradition by supporting on-time implementation of the new testing program and keeping the accountability system’s focus on college readiness. But we urge that this be done in a way that better supports students’ progress through to graduation.



Attachment II

DISTRICT	District Name	Number of At-Risk Students	Total Enrollment
221901	ABILENE ISD	6437	17161
101902	ALDINE ISD	41911	63154
188901	AMARILLO ISD	14279	32682
227901	AUSTIN ISD	41821	85697
123910	BEAUMONT ISD	5686	19893
031901	BROWNSVILLE ISD	32211	49879
178904	CORPUS CHRISTI ISD	20101	38409
101907	CYPRESS-FAIRBANKS ISD	43353	106097
057905	DALLAS ISD	104327	157162
068901	ECTOR COUNTY ISD	15318	28126
071902	EL PASO ISD	34923	64330
079907	FORT BEND ISD	28456	68948
220905	FORT WORTH ISD	39407	81651
057909	GARLAND ISD	28193	57833
031903	HARLINGEN CISD	10375	18422
101912	HOUSTON ISD	130829	204245
101913	HUMBLE ISD	10842	35913
220916	HURST-EULESS-BEDFORD ISD	7775	21046
057912	IRVING ISD	22021	34243
101914	KATY ISD	20489	60803
014906	KILLEEN ISD	20598	40231
152901	LUBBOCK ISD	9489	28905
108906	MCALLEN ISD	16270	25622
057914	MESQUITE ISD	18215	37747
165901	MIDLAND ISD	9016	21736
015910	NORTH EAST ISD	23747	66604
015915	NORTHSIDE ISD	35781	95581
108909	PHARR-SAN JUAN-ALAMO ISD	23050	31508
057916	RICHARDSON ISD	15670	36070
246909	ROUND ROCK ISD	14250	44776
226903	SAN ANGELO ISD	5843	14696
015907	SAN ANTONIO ISD	37554	55116
071909	SOCORRO ISD	21675	42569
101920	SPRING BRANCH ISD	17421	32948
212905	TYLER ISD	11408	18549
240903	UNITED ISD	26272	41876
161914	WACO ISD	10381	15305



	Number of At-Risk Students	Total Enrollment
Statewide Totals:	2276858	4933617
Totals for TSA Districts:	975394	1895533

% of TSA Enrollment Identified At Risk: 51%
% All TX At-Risk Students Served by TSA Districts: 43%
% of Students in Texas Identified At Risk: 46%



Misconceptions about HB 500

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HB 500 is one of the most important and most misunderstood education bills of the 82nd Legislative Session. It lessens the unfair burden placed on students by last session's HB 3 that will inevitably lead to parent and student frustration and probable increases in dropout rates. The Texas School Alliance supports HB 500 and wants to help others understand the myths and truths associated with this bill. The bill was passed out of the House on a 138 to 5 vote.

Myth: HB 500 undermines the accountability system put in place by HB 3 before we've even implemented it.

Truth: *HB 500 does not modify the accountability system requirements in any way.* Districts and campuses will still be held accountable for student performance in four ways: passing rates, growth to passing, college ready rates, and growth to college readiness.

Myth: HB 500 will reduce the required number of tests from twelve to four.

Truth: HB 500 still requires students to take *every* exam that is offered and applicable to their course work. In addition, students seeking to graduate on the Recommended Plan must pass English/Language Arts III, Algebra II, one science, and one social studies exam to graduate. Those who intend to graduate on the Minimum Plan must pass English/Language Arts III, Algebra I, one science, and one social studies exam to graduate. Students who intend to graduate on the Distinguished Plan still must demonstrate additional accomplishments (for example, high scores on AP exams, successful completion of dual credit courses, etc).

Myth: In this economic climate, it's probably better just to postpone the tests altogether.

Truth: TEA already has spent the money needed to develop the new tests. Both schools and the state need the data from each of the twelve end-of-course exams (regardless of whether any particular test is required for graduation) to understand student performance and progress, and to develop improvement plans that will help assure college readiness of public school graduates.

Myth: The bill reduces math and science content in the state tests (or reduces math and science requirements for graduation).

Truth: The bill does NOT reduce science and math content in state tests, nor does it make changes in the state-required "four-by-four" curriculum. STAAR and end-of-course exams will be more closely aligned to classroom instruction than any prior state assessment program in Texas, and will examine the most critical concepts in the TEKS more deeply and thoroughly than before. Remember, students will take *every* test that is offered and applicable to their course work, and students must successfully complete four credits in each of the four core content areas to graduate on the Recommended Plan.

Myth: By taking away the requirement that test scores comprise 15% of final course grades, students won't care about the tests.

Truth: The bill eliminates the 15% requirement but permits districts to adopt whatever weight they wish to assign to end-of-course scores. Making these decisions closest to the point of instruction ensures a stronger connection between instruction and state assessment.