

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY

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April 14, 2008

Texas has been a national leader in public school standards and accountability-based reform for over 20 years, and our system has been properly credited for significantly improving student performance and closing the achievement gap between student groups.

This system has served us well, but it is now time to step back, take a long look at our needs for the new century, and create the next generation of accountability for Texas that will keep it in the forefront of student achievement growth.

We should use this opportunity to strengthen and streamline standards for student learning, student assessments, data systems, school and district ratings, and the rewards, sanctions, and interventions for student, school, and district performance.

TIER believes that the benefits of a good public school accountability system break down into three essential components:

- Transparency – for parents and communities to know in simplest terms how their schools are serving their children so that they can make the right choices for their benefit.
- Diagnostics and tools – for educators so that they can make the necessary adjustments to correct underachievement in student outcomes.
- Consequences – for students in terms of promotion and graduation; for educators in terms of compensation and employment; for schools and districts in terms of accreditation.

Various groups and advocates would weight these factors differently. For TIER, it seems that they should have approximately equal weight. Some believe that the current system is much too punitive and that high stakes consequences should play a much smaller role. But we believe that this is a high stakes world, and that without real consequences there is no accountability.

TIER has recently completed a comprehensive paper outlining our views on the next generation of accountability for Texas. We have brought copies with us today for members of the Committee, and it is available on our web site.

Our vision for the next generation of accountability is built upon ten principles outlined in an executive summary of our paper, which is in your binders. I won't cover them all, but will briefly touch on the more important ones.

1. Most important and possibly most revolutionary – Make postsecondary readiness for all students the goal of accountability. Let me make this clear: postsecondary success for all,

measure the full range of student performance, the value-added to each student's achievement during the year, and each student's progress, or growth toward the exit standard of postsecondary success.

3. The accountability system must be based on sufficient capacity and resources to enable schools to succeed. This encompasses, for example, the data system enhancements contemplated by HB 2238 from the 80th legislative session, but also entails more investment at the district level. And in case you think I am completely out of character, I don't have in mind across the board formula increases, but rather targeted programmatic funding that is designed to meet the technological and human resource needs of districts as well as enable innovation so that they can meet much higher standards of performance.
4. I have already touched on consequences, which are an absolutely essential principle, so I won't belabor the point.
5. Accountability must be a state/local partnership. We must have the involvement of all

Finally, although not directly a component of your work, I want to comment on curriculum standards, the enhancement of which is an absolute prerequisite for its success. Everything we are doing here in enhancing accountability systems will be useless if we do not get our TEKS standards right. We all know that they are not nearly rigorous enough, not objective enough, not measurable, and not well aligned from grade to grade. And they are the platform for the entire edifice—the curriculum, the assessments, the accountability. So I would simply urge this body to send a message to the current TEKS revision deliberations underway at the SBOE to get it right, and very soon; otherwise, very little else matters.

We at TIER look forward to working with the Select Committee on your deliberations and I hope you will call on us if it appears we can be helpful as a resource in any way. Thank you.

Creating the Schools We Need for the 21st Century: The Next Generation of Accountability

Executive Summary

March, 2008



Texas Institute for Education Reform

"Every child a high school graduate ready for college, the workplace and citizenship."

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Creating the Schools We Need for the 21st Century

The Next Generation of Accountability

Executive Summary

Introduction:

Texas has been a leader in public school accountability since the 1980s. Researchers have consistently credited the state's accountability system for improving student performance and closing the achievement gap between student groups in Texas public schools.

Despite this success, there is broad agreement that the system should be significantly revised—if not overhauled—because it has become cumbersome and overly complicated, it is inconsistent and overlaps with the federal No Child Left Behind Act, it doesn't properly reflect the expectations we have for our students or our educators, it produces perverse incentives, it doesn't measure student achievement growth, it produces an undue burden of preoccupation of testing with teachers and students, or it unduly pressures and stigmatizes educators.

The Texas Institute for Education Reform (TIER), a strong advocate for public schools, believes that a strong accountability system is vital to help schools prepare our students for the challenges of the 21st Century. Instead of watering down accountability, as some critics have suggested, Texas needs to use this opportunity to strengthen and streamline (a) standards for student learning, (b) student assessments, (c) data systems, (d) school and district ratings, and (e) the rewards, sanctions, and interventions for student, school, and district performance.

To accomplish this, TIER proposes ten principles for designing the next generation of state accountability for Texas public schools and suggests how the principles can be translated into policy. Underlying these principles is the belief that state accreditation of public schools should be contingent on educational results and that the state system of public school accountability is essential for improving Texas public schools.

Principle 1: Make Postsecondary Readiness the Goal of Accountability

The purpose of public school accountability should be one and the same as the state goal for classroom learning: postsecondary readiness—whether that includes higher education, vocational training, or skilled employment. When a student graduates from a Texas high school, they should have the knowledge and skills to advance immediately into further education or the workforce. This set of knowledge and skills needs to be precisely defined and woven into the curriculum and assessments for all grade levels—advancing the level of rigor in each grade

Principle 2: Connect Postsecondary Readiness with Closing the Achievement Gap between Student Groups

TIER recognizes the importance of “value-added” measures for disadvantaged students when it comes to assessing charter schools, performance-based compensation plans, and teacher evaluations. However, we owe it to all children—regardless of race or economic status—to prepare them for a productive life after high school. To allow more accurate measurement of progress, we should group students in each grade and subject area into the lowest 25% and the highest 25% in addition to disaggregating data by race and economic status. This allows us to shift our focus from race and economic status to educational outcomes for each student. Our goal is to close the performance gap among all groups by assigning the most effective teachers to students in the lowest performing groups and creating incentives for teachers to accept these challenging assignments. In addition, schools and districts should be rated and accredited annually on the basis of decreasing the achievement gap between student groups.

Principle 3: Sound Statistical Design is Essential

It is difficult to assess performance without reliable, complete, and statistically significant information. Our current system leads to school and district ratings that do not accurately reflect their performance because the size of schools, the number of student groups within schools, the demographics of the student population, and the imprecision of student assessments strongly affect ratings. Texas should adopt a more accurate measurement system that is sophisticated enough to measure the full range of student performance for each grade level/course, the “value added” to each student during each year, and each student's progress toward the exit standards for elementary school, middle school, and high school. Assessments should be carefully aligned to ensure that standards are increased evenly from grade to grade to increase the likelihood of successful advancement. School and district ratings should be based on absolute performance (test scores or passing averages) and value-added measures that are calculated on the basis of rolling three-year averages to increase the overall reliability and minimize the volatility of results.

Principle 4: Local Control Can Enhance Public School Accountability

Public school accountability should represent a collaborative effort between local communities and the state instead of a centralized, top-down system. Under such a collaborative system, the state would set minimum

education—to enhance academic and financial efficiency and effectiveness.

Principle 5: All Stakeholders should be Involved in Public School Accountability

Involving community stakeholders in substantial, meaningful ways can strengthen accountability for educational results. The state should set guidelines for districts to create advisory bodies composed of parents, business leaders, higher education representatives, and taxpayers to help design local accountability systems. Students, teachers, principals, and superintendents should also play key roles in the design, implementation, management and monitoring of the system.

Principle 6: Public School Accountability must be based on Sufficient Capacity and Resources to Enable Schools to Succeed

In order for schools and districts to meet state education goals, the state must provide necessary resources including financial, informational, and human resources. A new state K-20 information system should provide real-time data for individual students, schools and districts. The system should include information on classes, instructors, programs, attendance, disciplinary actions, assessment results, and a dropout risk assessment. It should also provide quarterly statewide monitoring and correction and annual reporting of student performance that includes absolute scale scores, gain from the previous year (“value-added” score), and on-track progress toward intermediate goals and graduation proficiency. Human resources should be enhanced by strengthening standards for educator preparation programs—both traditional and alternative, teacher certification, and seed funding for value-added, performance-based compensation plans for our educators.

Principle 7: Principle Seven: Public School Accountability should be Primarily Based on Final Educational Outcomes and Secondarily Based on Intermediate Education Outcomes

State evaluation, rating, and accreditation of schools and districts should be primarily based on meeting three goals: achieving prescribed graduation rates, progressing students towards postsecondary readiness, and closing the achievement gaps between student groups. Secondary indicators could include test and assessment results, “value-added” growth rates, retention rates, and overall progress towards graduation. Other factors such as attendance, literacy, and maintaining safe environments could be included. Ratings should be easily understood but flexible enough to accurately classify schools and districts—such as an “A”, “B”, “C”, “D”, and “F” standard.

Principle 8: Consequences are Essential

Incentives offer an effective way to increase performance. Educators and educational leadership who meet or exceed

educate students. The state’s accountability system should flag early signs of faltering performance and provide these schools with expert assistance to help them improve. If assistance fails, two additional phases of intervention and corrective action should be provided by the state before the loss of accreditation and state funding.

Principle 9: Multiple Means and Measures Enhance Fairness

Using several methods to measure performance and growth—such as curriculum-based tests, national norm-referenced tests, diagnostic and summative assessments, end-of-course tests, and computer-adaptive technology—offer ways to increase the accuracy and thoroughness or student assessments and discourage curriculum narrowing and “teaching the test”. Scores of multiple assessments, combined with a student’s grades and courses taken, provide a holistic approach to student evaluation. Adopting a school and district rating system that is based on two models—a “status” model measuring absolute performance against proficiency standards, and a “growth” model measuring improvement toward graduation requirements—offers a holistic approach to assessing institutional performance. The use of two accountability models—a “consequences” system designed to stimulate educational improvements through a combination of rewards and sanctions and a “reporting” system that gives the public an accurate measure of school and district performance designed to stimulate improvements through public knowledge and pressure for success—offers a way to strengthen accountability.

Principle 10: Full, Transparent, and Accessible Information is Essential

The state system of public school accountability should be simple and easily understood by Texans inside and outside the educational community. Because the best decisions are made when the best data is available, it is imperative that the information the state receives be accurate, honest, and complete. This is particularly true for identifying the true dropout rate, proficiency in relation to national and international standards, students’ test scores in both absolute and value-added terms, and students’ periodic progress towards meeting graduation standards that prepare them for postsecondary excellence.

Conclusion:

Texas needs a comprehensive reform of the state system of public school accountability to align with the new state goal of postsecondary readiness. The need for far-reaching improvements in educational outcomes requires the state to drastically change public school accountability and comprehensively reform all of the elements of public school accountability. These elements include new curriculum standards, new assessments, new rating and accreditation, and new rewards and interventions for

Who is TIER?

TIER is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, non-partisan organization of community and business leaders throughout the state who have organized themselves to raise public awareness and educate Texas opinion leadership on the current status of public education in Texas, the progress of our standards and accountability-based reforms to date, the prognosis for achieving the essential universal educational proficiency of the children of Texas, and the daunting challenges that we face in doing so.

Through its leaders and advisors, TIER has access to the nation's leading education policy experts and will use these resources to provide the best available research-based strategies, benchmarked practices, and policy innovations.

For more information, to order a copy of the complete report, or to learn how you can become involved in TIER's mission, contact Andrew Erben at (512)477-1006 or visit our website at www.texaseducationreform.org.

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**Texas Public Schools Today and Tomorrow:
Call to Action and Agenda for Success**

*Creating the Schools We Need for the 21st Century:
The Next Generation of Accountability*

Policy Series, Issue 7
April 2008

INTRODUCTION

Every public school in the United States is governed today by a state system of public school accountability. The leadership and much of the framework for these systems can be traced to Texas, where the nation's first statewide accountability system was established by policymakers in 1993. Almost ten years later, the Texas system served as a model for public school accountability at the federal level in the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) and the 2002 re-authorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* and, as states complied with federal requirements, key elements of Texas-style accountability were planted throughout the nation. This national leadership in standards and accountability-based education reform has been accomplished by the dedication of a statewide coalition of educators, administrators, and legislative and business leaders in a steady effort over a period of more than 20 years.

Texas' commitment to public school accountability started early in the 1980's when the state legislature predicated graduation on a high-stakes test and required school districts to produce an annual report card publicizing results of student assessments. Shortly thereafter, Texas developed one of the nation's first statewide public education data systems which disaggregated student performance according to income, race, and ethnicity, and provided Texans with the means to create a statewide accountability system for public schools.

Over the past 15 years, the state system has evaluated and rated the annual performance of schools and districts, holding them accountable for meeting state standards related to attendance, passing averages on the state's standards-based assessments, and high school completion. The system levies consequences, rewards and sanctions, for how well schools and districts meet these standards according to the performance of different student groups.

Researchers have consistently credited the state accountability system for improving student performance and closing the achievement gap between student groups in Texas elementary and middle schools.ⁱ The success of strong state accountability in Texas and other states has been documented by numerous national studies examining student performance gains on the National Assessment of Education Progress.ⁱⁱ Additionally, the positive impact of strong, centralized government accountability on schooling in industrialized nations has been documented by researchers who examine international assessments.ⁱⁱⁱ

However, not all the research and feedback is positive. Some studies, particularly those produced by the education community, assail the Texas system of public school accountability and other state accountability systems for unintended, adverse consequences: inappropriate triaging of students,^{iv} depressed academic growth,^v and lower graduation rates.^{vi} But these studies must be considered in light of the well-designed studies that persuasively challenge their findings, frequently criticize the methodologies employed, and suggest skepticism toward advocacy research.^{vii}

Today, many Texans believe that strong state accountability has served public schools well, but many also believe it is time to be introspective, and to update and strengthen the means by which Texans hold public schools accountable for results. This belief was succinctly expressed by Bill Hammond, President of the Texas Association of Business, in a commentary widely disseminated by newspapers throughout Texas in late 2007.

"In 1983 the National Commission on Excellence in Education issued a report on the quality of education in the United States, stating, 'If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might have viewed it as an act of war. As it stands, we have allowed this to happen to ourselves.' Unfortunately, the same could be said of Texas today, and state government has only compounded the situation with a series of ineffective accountability measures."

"As a result, Texas high school graduates remain ill prepared for college or the workforce. And while Texas employers require a higher level of skills due to advanced technology and increased competition, our educational system is embracing mediocrity rather than raising the bar. It's this dichotomy that is putting Texas at risk."^{viii}

Responding to these and other concerns expressed by opinion leaders, the 80th Texas Legislature, in Senate Bill 1031, created a select committee to perform a comprehensive review of the current school accountability system and report its findings to the legislature by December 1, 2008, with recommendations for redesigning the system.

As 2008 unfolds, the public debate on accountability expands, with input from a range of opinion and advocacy groups. The Texas Public Policy Foundation, an organization that promotes free market principles, recently published a commentary that cautioned, *"Texas taxpayers deserve a better and more accurate accountability system; one that is easy to understand, transparent to parents and the community, and drives higher student*

achievement.”^x Soon afterward, Raise Your Hand Texas, a group that promotes support for public schools, followed with a commentary that suggested: *“It is now time for the state to seriously discuss how we can create a better system that will more effectively serve schools and stakeholders. We need a new system that is both rigorous and easier for the public to understand, one that is fair and one that recognizes growth and gains.”*^x A rally organized by the Houston A+ Challenge and The Metropolitan Organization organized busing for parents from 10 schools to meet with Houston ISD leadership in late February to *“tell stories and share ideas”* for a better school accountability.^{xi}

These statements show how concern about public school accountability crosses the political divide in Texas. There is apparent broad agreement that the accountability system should be significantly revised if not overhauled, for a variety of reasons depending on each point of view — it has become cumbersome and overly complicated, it is inconsistent and overlaps with the federal NCLB, it doesn’t properly reflect the expectations we have for our students or our educators, it produces perverse incentives, it doesn’t measure student achievement growth, it produces an undue burden of preoccupation of testing on teachers and students, or it unduly pressures and stigmatizes educators. Some groups now call for the end of accountability, blaming high stakes for the shortcomings of public schools today.

The Texas Institute for Education Reform (TIER), a strong advocate for Texas public schools, refutes these drastic criticisms, but endorses the urgent need to reform public school accountability. To assist state policymakers in this effort, TIER posed a series of questions about public school accountability in June 2007 that were designed to identify the key issues which should be addressed by reform (Appendix I). TIER believes the answers to these questions and the deliberations of the Select Committee on Public School Accountability will have a significant impact in determining the future of Texas public schools, the opportunities for our children to succeed in the 21st Century, and the future prosperity of all Texans.

This report, the seventh of a series of education policy papers produced by TIER to address key challenges in Texas public schools, suggests ways to strengthen and revise the state system of public school accountability

TIER addresses public school accountability as a state system that consists of five components: (a) standards for student learning, (b) student assessments, (c) data systems to collect, analyze, and report information, (d) ratings of school and district performance that relate to state accreditation, and (e) rules that pertain to rewards, sanctions, and interventions for student, school, and district performance. State accountability systems are generally designed to hold students, schools, and districts responsible for improving performance and meeting specific state goals for public education.

In this report, TIER identifies ten principles for designing the next generation of school accountability. Underlying these principles is the belief that state accreditation of public schools should be contingent on educational results, and that the state system of public school accountability is essential for improving Texas public schools. The belief is

founded on evidence that the power of accountability is unrivaled by any other education reform of this century. Our challenge is to harness this power wisely, and to create the next generation of accountability that will focus on postsecondary success and build the capacity for comprehensive, systemic reform of public education.

Principle One: Make Postsecondary Readiness the Goal of Accountability

TIER suggests that the purpose of public school accountability should be one and the same as the state goal for classroom learning: postsecondary readiness. As stated in the Texas Education Code (Section 28.001), the public school curriculum should prepare all students to continue to learn in postsecondary education, training, and employment settings. In other words, Texas public schools should prepare all students to graduate with the knowledge and skills needed for success in postsecondary endeavors that include skilled employment, vocational training, or higher education.

This goal is slightly, but significantly, different than the purpose presently established for the state system of public school accountability – which is to “improve student achievement.”^{xii} Postsecondary readiness represents an explicit range of student performance that has been defined by state and national entities, such as the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board^{xiii} and ACT.^{xiv} These standards can be objectively evaluated, and have been proven necessary for high school graduates to be successful in both college and skilled vocational training.^{xv}

To make postsecondary readiness the purpose of school accountability, TIER suggests that standards for postsecondary readiness should be fully integrated into the state accountability system and all of the state education systems, particularly those that directly serve as the foundations for accountability – state curriculum standards, the state assessment program, and the state education information system – and are statutorily required components of public education in Texas.

The 79th Texas Legislature initiated the process of defining and introducing postsecondary readiness with House Bill 1 which required the State Board of Education to integrate standards for postsecondary readiness into the high school curriculum by September 1, 2011 (Sec. 5.01) and to incorporate a measure of postsecondary readiness into high school end-of-course assessments (Sec. 5.05).^{xvi}

TIER suggests that state policymakers can strengthen this process by extending the goal of postsecondary readiness throughout the entire public school curriculum and state assessment, kindergarten through grade 12, advancing the level of rigor and expectations for postsecondary readiness with each grade level, to culminate in a level of academic proficiency associated with nationally recognized standards (such those produced by the American Diploma Project) and empirically proven standards (such as those developed by ACT).

TIER also suggests that this process can be strengthened by collecting, reporting, and using information about postsecondary readiness to rate schools and districts, and by establishing incentives and interventions to help students and schools achieve this standard.

TIER recommends that the next generation of state accountability recognize postsecondary readiness in two distinct ways: by absolute scores and by academic improvement (measures of both growth and value-added gains). Recognizing that postsecondary readiness is a far higher standard than the state currently sets for student and school performance, TIER suggests standards for postsecondary readiness should be phased in over time and clearly identified as progress towards proficiency.

This approach is slightly, but significantly, different than historical practice in which standards were incrementally raised and described as proficiency even though those standards were far below the level of performance that most other states identified as proficiency. Allowing schools and districts with large populations of economically disadvantaged students to meet accountability standards with either absolute scores or a rate of academic improvement or growth provides state policymakers with a means to level the playing field. It would also eliminate the need for an alternative accountability system, a system that Texas currently uses to evaluate and rate schools that primarily serve educationally disadvantaged students, such as charter schools and schools devoted to dropout recovery.

Principle Two: Connect Postsecondary Readiness with Closing the Achievement Gap between Student Groups

TIER suggests that state policy should pair closing the achievement gap between student groups with postsecondary readiness as the twin goals of public school accountability. This principle is certainly implicit in statutory language that requires all students to be prepared for postsecondary success (Texas Education Code 28.001). Based on the research that shows the educational disadvantages presently associated with family income, race, and ethnicity can be erased by highly qualified teachers and intensive, rigorous instruction,^{xvii} TIER recommends that state policymakers set explicit goals for Texas public schools to close the achievement gap.

To accomplish this goal, TIER suggests that state policy establish one standard – postsecondary readiness – for all students and all schools as part of the required curriculum (the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills) delivered by all schools, and the system of state accountability that governs all schools.

Coupling measures of academic growth, particularly value-added measures (see Appendix II), to absolute standards (either specific passing scores or passing averages) offers Texans a way to recognize the different challenges faced by schools, and the academic contributions that teachers and schools make to all students, both disadvantaged and advantaged.

This approach represents a significant departure from current practice in Texas public schools today. Schools with large concentrations of disadvantaged students can elect to opt out of the state accountability system and can be governed, instead, by the Alternative Accountability System which imposes less rigorous standards for performance.^{xviii}

In addition to establishing one performance goal for all schools, TIER suggests that Texans establish explicit policy to hold schools directly accountable for closing the achievement gap between the racial, ethnic, and economic groups of the student population that are recognized by NCLB. This suggestion represents a slightly, but significantly, different approach to public school accountability and educational equity than is practiced in Texas today.

Texas requires public schools to demonstrate that Hispanic, African-American, and economically disadvantaged students meet the same standards of performance that are set for White/Anglo students (in such things as passing rates on state assessments and high school graduation rates).

This policy has attempted to hold schools indirectly or secondarily accountable for closing the achievement gap. Over the past 15 years, this policy has produced a marked reduction of the achievement gap between student groups in Texas elementary and middle schools, according to state assessments and the National Assessment of Educational Progress.^{xix} However, this policy has shown itself unequal to stimulating the rate of improvement necessary to close these achievement gaps within the next 50 years.^{xx} Nor has this policy demonstrated any success in closing the gaps between student groups in Texas high schools, as measured by independent tests of postsecondary readiness (such as the SAT and ACT).^{xxi}

There are numerous strong arguments for modifying and strengthening the state's efforts to close the achievement gaps. These arguments are strengthened by expanding knowledge about the statistical imperfections associated with school accountability ratings and disaggregation of test scores in Texas and throughout the nation.

A growing body of research indicates that disaggregating test scores for student groups often produces flawed information about school performance.^{xxii} This is because test scores for small groups are likely to change greatly from year to year for reasons that have little to do with the schools themselves, but instead reflect such things as changes in the student population and imprecision in the test,^{xxiii} a problem described as "volatility" in the research. Schools with larger numbers of student groups are at a larger statistical disadvantage than schools with smaller numbers of student groups;^{xxiv} in other words, homogenous schools and large schools experience less volatility and enjoy a significant statistical advantage in school accountability when student performance is disaggregated.

TIER suggests the state's new school accountability system should address the dual challenges of improving statistical reliability of school ratings and closing K-12 achievement gaps by developing two standards related to disaggregating student

performance. The first standard should continue to hold schools and districts accountable at each grade level for the academic achievement of each of the student groups identified in NCLB. The second standard should hold schools and districts accountable for school-wide progress made in closing the achievement gaps between the lowest and highest quartile of performance in each grade or courses/subjects.

The second standard should reduce the impact of volatility and enhance the reliability of school ratings, and provide Texans with broader information about educational equity. It could also stimulate academic growth in both high-performing and low-performing student groups, and shift the focus of educators from race, ethnicity, and family income to the educational outcomes of individual students relative to standards and their classroom peers.

Use of value-added performance standards that measure annual growth in student performance could also reduce volatility and increase reliability of school ratings. TIER believes that value-added measures offer an essential tool for Texans to connect high academic standards with educational equity and success. There is a growing body of research that indicates the most effective way to improve the reliability of measuring the performance of schools and students, particularly low-performing students, is to incorporate value-added measures in state accountability.^{xxv} Some states, such as Tennessee, have pioneered the use of value-added measures for assessing key human resources in schools, and are using value-added measures for purposes of accountability, particularly to inform professional development and placement. TIER is a proponent of the addition of value-added methodology to the Texas accountability system and believes that it has a particularly significant role to play in the assessment of charter school performance, performance based compensation plans, and evaluation of teacher preparation programs (See TIER Policy Series, Issue 5, Assessments for the Schools We Need).^{xxvi}

With value-added measures or without, TIER suggests that state accountability can strengthen efforts to close the achievement gap by encouraging districts to assign the most effective teachers (those that have academic qualifications and demonstrated high instructional impact) to students performing in the lowest quartile of performance and to create incentives for teachers to accept challenging assignments. Research indicates that this is the most powerful way to close the achievement gap.^{xxvii}

Principle Three: Sound Statistical Design is Essential

Improving the reliability of current performance measures for both students and schools is essential for improving the state's public school accountability system. Over the past decade, researchers have vastly increased our knowledge about testing – the data generated by testing and the use of data for high stakes decisions – and this information should be put to use in redesigning the school accountability system.^{xxviii}

As noted previously, studies show that the imprecision of student assessments, either as a result of design or the inconsistencies of human performance, can produce imprecise information about student performance that, when used to evaluate schools, does not accurately capture their performance, and, consequently, cannot properly guide reform. Studies of our state assessments, the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), indicate that TAKS tests are not designed to, nor do they, measure the full range of student performance or growth, particularly at higher levels.^{xxxix} Worse, the studies also show that the difficulty of TAKS tests is uneven from grade to grade, with the bar set lower for elementary grades, and, as a result, provides the false impression that elementary students are on track for success in middle school.^{xxx}

Studies also show that school test scores vary greatly from year-to-year, and changes in performance significantly reflects how performance is measured, rather than actual student performance, or factors that many consider beyond the control of schools, such as changes in the characteristics of incoming students or teacher turnover. In other words, researchers generally find a low correlation between school performance from one year to the next as a consequence of volatility.^{xxxi} Researchers confirm that ratings of Texas schools are significantly volatile; in a recent analysis of how school ratings impact eligibility for state grants, the likelihood of a Texas public school to retain a rating, particularly in the Comparable Improvement rankings, was close to random.^{xxxii}

The success of a school accountability system largely depends on the quality of performance measures. Texas has a long way to go in this regard. TIER recommends that student assessments should be designed with sufficient sophistication to measure the full range of student performance for the grade or course, the academic value-added during for each student during each school year, and the student's progress toward the exit standard (at 12th grade for high school, 8th grade for middle school, and 5th grade for elementary school).

TIER also suggests that school evaluations should be designed with sufficient sophistication to maximize reliability and minimize volatility. There are several different ways to increase reliability, as suggested by Thomas J. Kane and Douglas O. Staiger in their groundbreaking research on school accountability measures.^{xxxiii} Schools could be categorized according to size to account for the fact that smaller schools have less reliable test score measures and/or school performance should be averaged over several years.^{xxxiv} Other researchers, including Helen F. Ladd, offer value-added measures as a way to increase the reliability of measuring school performance.^{xxxv}

To enhance the success of the state's new accountability system, state policymakers would be wise to consult independent statisticians and psychometricians to ensure the technical sophistication of Texas system of public school accountability provides state of the art information about school performance.

Principle Four: State/Local Partnerships Can Enhance Public School Accountability

TIER suggests that public school accountability should represent a shared responsibility between local school districts and the state, and, consequently, accountability should be designed as a collaborative effort between local communities and the state.

The nature of public school accountability is evolving in Texas and throughout the nation. There is growing support for the idea of shared accountability, a notion recently expressed by the president of the United Federation of Teachers, the nation's largest union, who believes that states should be responsible for providing schools with the necessary resources and capacity to succeed, and that schools should work in partnership with the state to design "genuine" accountability for public education.^{xxxvi}

The idea that school accountability must be reciprocal in nature was clearly described in a policy position issued by the Council of Chief State School Officers more than a decade ago. The Council's position paper stated, "As we raise student standards higher than they have ever been, we have an obligation to ensure that schools have the capacity to enable all students to achieve these standards."^{xxxvii} The council also noted that, "states require a systematic view of accountability that will help the public and [school] officials at all levels know and assess what happens in schools and classrooms."^{xxxviii}

Likewise, TIER recommends that policymakers take a systemic view of public school accountability and consider devising a new approach to accountability that shares responsibility with school districts. A model of this form of accountability can be taken from the policy presently used by this state to introduce initiatives such as dropout prevention and educator incentive compensation to school districts. Using this approach, under the standards established at the state level, the state offers seed funding for school/district plans, sets guidelines for districts to use in designing local plans, identifies the outcomes that plans should produce, identifies a selection of measures that must be used to determine if the outcomes are met, provides the necessary technological resources (including information about performance), monitors district compliance, and reports on school and district performance.

Public school accountability should consist of two tiers. In the first tier, the state would set specific performance standards, require schools and districts to report their performance on these standards, evaluate and rate school and district performance annually according to these standards, and establish consequences for performance. In the second tier, districts would be responsible for supplementing state accountability with locally designed policies that could offer a broad approach to evaluation and improvement of school quality.

Districts could elect to evaluate and report elements of school quality that the community most highly values, such as (a) strong curriculum, (b) effective instruction, (c) safe and orderly learning environments, and (d) efficient investment of resources. These standards were proposed for local school accountability by the 1995 Council of Chief State School Officers' Policy Statements, and reiterated in the accountability proposal offered to New York by the United Federation of Teachers early in 2008.^{xxxix}

Use of local standards could help districts establish accountability for important aspects of education that go beyond test scores and help districts build the capacity for improving local schools. This type of information would also help state policymakers evaluate how well the state is fulfilling its obligations to help districts build the physical, human, and academic capacity to meet state standards for educational results.

Some school districts in Texas have already paved the way for shared state and local accountability. Districts such as Houston I.S.D. have developed local accountability systems to supplement state accountability; these district accountability systems are elaborate, creative, and driving significant improvement in student performance.

Strengthening local involvement has much to offer public school accountability, in terms of capitalizing on highly successful district models and leveraging the connections between public schools and their communities. Offering districts a larger share of governance if they allow their stakeholders direct and meaningful participation in accountability decisions can create powerful incentives for improved academic outcomes and financial efficiency. The connection between local control and enhanced performance of public schools has been well chronicled by research.^{x1}

Principle Five: All Stakeholders should be Involved in Public School Accountability

TIER believes that public school accountability would be strengthened by involving community stakeholders in substantial, meaningful ways. State policymakers could establish guidelines for districts to create decision-making bodies that are composed of parents, businesses, and taxpayers and charge these bodies to design the local accountability systems, recommend policies to support accountability, monitor the district system, and recommend changes to enhance the system. Community involvement in local school accountability systems can bring new, private sector expertise to school reform efforts through formal relationships fostered by state accountability guidelines.

TIER also suggests that the students, teachers, principals, and superintendents should play key roles in the design, management, and monitoring of the district accountability system. Accountability should hold students responsible for mastering grade-level skills and making progress towards postsecondary readiness, teachers responsible for the academic performance of their students, principals responsible for the performance of each teacher and the school as a whole, and superintendents responsible for the performance of each principal and school in the district.

The critical contribution of teachers and school leadership to student learning makes it imperative for state accountability systems to set rigorous performance standards for educators, employ sophisticated and reliable measures for evaluating their performance, identify those who fall short of standards, provide the remedial support necessary to succeed, and base continued employment on student success.

Broad stakeholder participation would help districts develop a local accountability system that connects with the community's unique educational priorities and local school improvement needs, and facilitate collaborative relationships that can enhance school resources.

Principle Six: Public School Accountability Must be Based on Sufficient Capacity and Resources to Enable Schools to Succeed

State Curriculum Standards:

TIER strongly believes that new state curriculum standards for kindergarten through 12th grade are necessary as the foundation on which to hold public schools accountable for postsecondary success. New standards for student performance should reflect the true level of academic rigor that students need to be successful in the 21st century workplace, and should be at least comparable to the most rigorous standards established by other states. New standards should set explicit, measurable grade-level expectations for student learning that increase in difficulty as the grades progress, and culminate in knowledge and skills that are nationally recognized as postsecondary readiness (such as those set by the American Diploma Project and ACT).

TIER also believes that standards should provide clear transitions: from elementary to middle school, middle school to high school, and high school to postsecondary choices – skilled employment, vocational training, or college. New standards should be vertically aligned from grade to grade so that cognitive demands, or rigor, increase evenly from one grade to the next,¹ and periodically validated and updated by independent content experts.

State Assessments:

TIER suggests that new state assessments are also necessary at each grade level to hold public schools accountable for measuring and meeting new, more rigorous state standards for student performance, and providing the information about student performance required to guide improvement of Texas public schools.

The cognitive demand of new assessments should be benchmarked to the National Assessment of Educational Progress,² exemplary states, the Third International Math and Science Assessment, and national college readiness assessments. New and rigorous standards should be phased in over time as increasingly higher expectations for progress

¹ This reform is particularly important because if grades fail to progress with equal difficulty and vertical alignment is not constructed – as is the case with state assessments today – students are not prepared to be equally successful in each grade, and failure in later grades is likely to be wrongly attributed to earlier grades.

² The Southern Regional Education Board recommends that state standards should be set close to the NAEP proficiency level (*Getting State Standards Right in the Early and Middle Grades*, 2006). Although some argue that NAEP proficiency standards are unrealistically high and should not serve as state benchmarks, at least three states have established proficiency on or above the NAEP standard (*Mapping 2005 State Proficiency Standards Onto the NAEP Scales*, U.S. Department of Education, 2007).

toward proficiency; this approach would contrast with the historical practice of establishing artificially low, but achievable, standards for improvement that are mistakenly described as proficiency.

TIER also suggests that new assessments should be aligned with state curriculum standards and benchmarked to national norms. Ideally, they should be designed for both formative and summative uses, and administered as computerized, adaptable instruments that are sufficiently sophisticated to measure the full range of student performance, annual academic growth and annual value added (such as the Measures of Academic Progress by the Northwest Evaluation Association). If, however, Texas continues to administer curriculum-based assessments, such as TAKS and state-developed end-of-course tests in high school, these instruments should be paired with a national norm-referenced test, such as the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, as is the practice in many states today.³

In order for districts, schools, and teachers to use the results of state assessments for tailoring instruction, the state should analyze and report results as absolute scores, annual academic improvement, annual value-added, progress toward reaching grade-level standards, and progress toward reaching standards for high school graduation proficiency.

State Education Information System:

TIER recommends that state policymakers create a new, comprehensive statewide K-20 education information system to hold public schools accountable for measuring and meeting state standards for student performance. The new information system should encompass current state data systems for public education, higher education, and State Board for Educator Certification data (as proposed by House Bill 2238, the Texas Education Data System, filed during the 80th Texas Legislature).

To maximize the ability of schools to improve student performance, the information system should organize, analyze, manage and report performance data in forms that schools, districts, independent researchers, and state policymakers can use to inform decision-making, and evaluate programs, policies, and systems. The system should establish an open interface between the state information system and district and school data systems to enable data exchange and incorporation. It should include a dropout subsystem that provides real-time information to schools and districts, identifying potential dropouts and related performance according to research-based factors. The system should also track individual students statewide as to information on institutions, classes, instructors, programs, attendance, disciplinary actions, and assessment results.

³ According to the National Center for Education Statistics, during the 2003-04 school year, 16 states plus Texas administered a state curriculum-based assessment while the remaining 33 states administered both a curriculum-based assessment and a norm-referenced tests or administered a hybrid of the two (http://nces.gov/programs/statereform/saa_tab5.asp).

Schools need real time reporting of and unrestricted access to individual student performance, attendance, disciplinary actions, supplemental/intervention programs, and on-track progress toward graduation. Additionally, the system should provide quarterly statewide monitoring and correction, and annual reporting of student performance that includes absolute scale score, gain score from previous year's performance (value-added), on-track progress toward high school proficiency standard (academic growth), and on-track progress toward high school graduation credits (Appendix II). Finally, the system should provide comprehensive performance data linkages of students with their teachers as well as teachers with both their initial preparation programs as well as their professional development programs. With this system, the state should develop a FERPA compliant policy to provide researchers unrestricted access to student-, school-, and instructor-related data.

All of the information collected by the state about students, schools and districts should be annually posted on the Texas Education Agency's website, including performance data collected for the ratings related to NCLB.

State Policy and Human Resources:

TIER suggests that the state has a responsibility to help schools develop the human resources necessary to meet new standards and be accountable for higher levels of student performance. This could be accomplished by developing policy to improve the content knowledge and classroom instructional expertise provided by state-approved educator preparation programs, both traditional and alternative. The ability to staff public schools with qualified teachers is a significant problem for Texas public schools, particularly for high-poverty schools.^{xh}

The state should also help districts build the capacity for improving student performance by providing seed funding for value-added performance-based compensation plans for educators, targeted professional development, and innovative instructional approaches, such as distance learning opportunities.

State Funding:

TIER suggests that state policymakers commit additional state education funding, on a programmatic basis, to help school districts develop sufficient capacity in technological and human resources to deliver the required curriculum and meet state goals for student performance.

Principle Seven: Public School Accountability should be Primarily Based on Final Educational Outcomes and Secondarily Based on Intermediate Education Outcomes

TIER suggests that the state evaluate and rate schools and districts annually with an alphabetic grade of A, B, C, D or F, depending on the degree to which schools and districts meet the accountability standards, using both primary and secondary standards that are

described below. This form of rating, commonly used for student performance and broadly understood, would more clearly articulate school performance to the general public.

TIER suggests that all performance standards used for purposes of accountability should relate in some fashion to reaching or progress towards the state's primary goals for student performance: (1) high school graduation, (2) progress towards postsecondary readiness, and (3) progress towards closing the achievement gaps between student groups.

One way of designing a system with these standards is to establish primary and secondary performance standards for school and district accountability, and devising ratings that weigh final outcomes more heavily than intermediate outcomes.

Primary standards (those related to final educational outcomes) for a high school could represent, for example: (1) high school graduation rate, (2) the percentage of high school graduates demonstrating postsecondary readiness by scores at or above a composite score of 23 on the ACT or a combined math and verbal score of 1070 on the SAT,⁴ and (3) the percentage of Hispanic and African-American graduates who demonstrate postsecondary readiness at a rate equal to or surpassing their White/Anglo peers. For high schools, secondary standards (the performance standards that relate to intermediate education outcomes) could, for example, represent: (1) the percentage of students passing or average scores for end-of-course tests at each grade, (2) the percentage of students enrolled in and passing Advanced Placement tests with at least a score of 3, and (3) the percentage of students at each grade level with sufficient credits for on-time graduation. State accountability ratings would be based on how well high schools meet all of the primary and secondary standards.

For middle schools, examples of primary standards could include, for example: (1) the percentage of 8th grade students who transition within three years to high school, (2) the percentage of 8th grade students who complete Algebra I, and (3) the percentage of Hispanic and African-American 8th grade students who score at or above the average performance of their White/Anglo peers.. For middle schools, examples of secondary standards could, for example, represent: (1) the percentage of students passing assessments at each grade level or average scores of grade-level assessments, (2) the percentage of students who are retained at each grade, (3) the percentage of students who acquire at least one year of academic growth or value-added at each grade level, and (4) the percentage of students who score at a standard of performance on state assessments that indicates they are on-track for postsecondary readiness in math and reading.⁵ State accountability ratings would be based on how well middle schools meet all of the primary and secondary ratings.

⁴ These scores represent the minimum performance that is statutorily required for students to be exempt from provisions of the Texas Success Initiative, and required to take and pass an approved assessment of postsecondary readiness (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, http://www.thecb.state.tx.us/Rules/tac3.cfm?Chapter_ID=4&SubChapter=C#4.59).

⁵ Research published by the National Center for Educational Accountability indicates the academic proficiency of high school graduates is predicated on and can be predicted by the levels of performance that students achieve in elementary and middle schools (*Identifying Appropriate College Readiness Standards for All Students*, 2006, <http://www.just4kids.org/en/files/Publication-Identifying-Appropriate-College->

For elementary schools, examples of primary standards could include, for example: (1) the percentage of 5th grade students who transition to middle school on time, (2) the percentage of 5th grade students who demonstrate a level of performance that indicates they are on-track for postsecondary readiness in math and reading, and (3) the percentage of Hispanic and African-American 5th graders who score at or above the average performance of their White/Anglo peers. For elementary schools, examples of secondary standards could include, for example: (1) the percentage of students passing assessments at each grade level or average scores of grade-level assessments, (2) the percentage of students who are retained at each grade, and (3) the percentage of students who acquire at least one year of academic growth or value-added at each grade level. State accountability ratings would be based on how well elementary schools meet all of the primary and secondary ratings.

TIER suggests that school and district performance should be measured and reported in four different ways, whenever possible: (1) the percentage of students passing each grade and course assessment, (2) the actual average score that students achieved for each grade and course assessment, (3) the average percentage of students that are on-track to reach the graduation standard of postsecondary readiness or credit accumulation, and (4) the average annual amount of academic value-added to student performance for each grade and course. These different ways of considering performance can furnish a broad, yet nuanced, understanding of academic achievement in Texas public schools.

Principle Eight: Consequences are Essential

Students:

TIER strongly believes that high stakes consequences, in terms of interventions, sanctions, and rewards for student performance are essential for public school accountability. Students should be required to meet grade level standards for academic proficiency to qualify for key educational transitions – completing elementary school, middle school and high school. Students who fail to pass any core subject area or grade-level assessment should be enrolled in accelerated academic instruction scheduled after-school, Saturdays, or summer programs.

If accelerated instruction does not result in placing the student back on track for grade-level promotion within one year (two years of failure), students should be given the opportunity to select either enrollment in a virtual school approved by the commissioner of education or a transportation-paid transfer to a public or private school of the student's choice, approved by the commissioner, within a reasonable distance from the district.

TIER also suggests that students who meet state standards at each grade-level should be rewarded with credit toward the cost of postsecondary education or training at state colleges and universities. Beginning in first grade and continuing at the conclusion of each successive grade through high school, students in Texas public schools could accumulate credits for

tuition assistance that would be redeemable at graduation from state institutions of higher education, with higher credits provided on the basis of financial need.

Teachers, Principals and Superintendents:

TIER recommends that performance evaluations for education professionals should be conducted annually and should be primarily based on growth in student performance. For individuals who lead classrooms and schools, the failure to meet standards should lead to professional training, continuous monitoring, and reconsideration of employment if standards are not met for two consecutive years.

Teachers, principals and superintendents who meet standards should be recognized with individual performance-based annual bonuses or tuition discounts at state higher education institutions for families of high-performing educational professionals.

Schools and Districts:

Consequences for school and district performance are also essential for public school accountability. For schools and districts that meet all state standards, state policymakers should dismiss their obligations to comply with state education regulation, exceptions pertaining to safety, assessment, and accountability requirements. TIER recommends that annual school- or district-wide financial awards be issued for exceeding state standards, and that local publicity – newspaper ads, radio announcements, and televised presentations – to laud the performance of schools and districts that exceed state standards for student performance be coordinated by state officials.

TIER suggests that the consequences for school and district performance should be closely connected with annual school ratings (A, B, C, D, and F, as proposed previously):

- The first phase of intervention, described below, should be promptly initiated whenever an annual school or district rating drops to a lower alphabetic grade (such as from A to B), even if the school's or district's performance remains within the acceptable range of A, B, and C;
- The second phase of intervention, described below, should begin at the end of the first year that a school or district has been given the annual rating of D for unacceptable performance; and
- The third phase of intervention, described below, should be initiated after a failing school district completes a second year of intervention without earning an acceptable rating (A, B or C) and is assigned an annual rating of F.

The first phase of state intervention should be prevention. The state accountability system should flag early signs of faltering performance for schools, such as: declining student attendance, slowing trajectories of academic growth, increasing disciplinary actions, higher teacher turnover, and declining morale of teachers and students. Once flagged, schools and districts should be provided state resources that include expert assistance from organizations, such as Just for the Kids, to develop a school improvement plan, and policies and practices to

improve the use of data for school decision-making, opportunities for professional development, and targeted grants to address specific educational deficiencies.

For schools that clearly fail to meet key state accountability standards, TIER suggests a two-phase approach to intervention, with matching state funds to underwrite district costs.

The second phase of state intervention should begin at the end of the first year that a school or district has received an unacceptable rating. State regulation should require school board trustees to select all of the following approaches that are necessary for improving the school's performance as most appropriate for the specific deficit(s), and to secure state approval for the corrective actions:

- Develop a plan for dropout identification, prevention, and intervention that is approved by the commissioner of public education and is linked to school accountability system;
- Evaluate school performance and solicit ideas for improvement by conducting a survey of students, parents, teachers, business leaders and other community members, and implement an improvement plan based on this survey;
- Create a community advisory board that is composed of community leaders and represents teachers, parents, businesses, and the local institution of higher education to develop and oversee a school or district improvement plan;
- Create a partnership with a state university to design and implement a school improvement plan;
- Engage an independent school intervention provider (such as Just for the Kids) approved by the commissioner of public education to develop a corrective plan and assist the school or district in restoring acceptable accountability status;
- Establish a strategic compensation program that links all salary increases to meeting required state standards;
- Establish a partnership with a school or district with similar demographics that has been successful in placing under-performing students at grade level to design a new plan for accelerating instruction; or
- Coordinate shared instructional services with a school of similar demographics that is successful in achieving high completion rates for accelerated instruction and placing students on grade level.

The third phase of state intervention should begin after a school or district concludes a second year of corrective action without earning an acceptable state accountability rating. At this juncture, the Commissioner would implement at least one of the following corrective actions. Most of the suggested actions pertain to changing personnel rather than programs because research suggests that the key to turning around schools lies more in changing teachers and or school leadership rather than instructional changes or professional development:^{xiii}

- Engage new school leadership with full authority to set aside employment contracts and other state law pertaining to school employment practices, with the ability to hire or fire personnel as deemed necessary;

- Engage new school leadership from outside the education community with full authority to hire or fire personnel as necessary and exemption from state law pertaining to school employment practices;
- Provide public or private school choice to all students with transportation costs included within a reasonable distance from the district;
- Convert the school into a virtual academy that is managed by a virtual school provider approved by the commissioner of public education; or
- Turn over management to a charter school or education management organization that is approved by the commissioner of public education and given full exemption from state law pertaining to school employment practices and awarded full authority for hiring and firing school personnel.

TIER recommends that schools and districts lose accreditation and state funding if the third phase of corrective action does not result in an acceptable accountability rating – either by performance growth or absolute scores – after two years (completing the total of five years of unacceptable performance).

Principle Nine: Multiple Means and Measures Enhance Fairness

TIER suggests that the state system of public school accountability should be governed by multiple means and informed by multiple measures:

- Administering several different types of assessments will provide Texans with a comprehensive, comparative, and fully-nuanced understanding of student performance, such as curriculum-based assessments, national norm-referenced tests, diagnostic and summative assessments, end-of-course tests and national tests of postsecondary readiness. Multiple forms of assessment, if they are well-designed, will limit the practice of teaching to the test and curriculum narrowing;^{xliii}
- Creating a holistic approach to evaluating student performance and identifying postsecondary readiness as a range of knowledge and skills that can be identified by a combination of test scores, courses taken, and school grades;
- Creating a holistic approach to evaluating and rating schools and districts by combining two models of public school accountability: a *status model* (average absolute performance compared against a standard of proficiency at a specific time, scores or passing rates), and a *growth model* (average annual change in performance over time as value-added, and growth toward a standard such as projected performance and high school graduation proficiency or postsecondary readiness);
- Combining the two forms of accountability systems: a *Consequences System* that is designed to stimulate educational improvements by imposing consequences for performance (rewards and sanctions levied by the state accountability system), and a *Reporting System* that is designed to stimulate educational improvements by district reporting of local accountability system performance results and leveraging public pressure for change;
- Encouraging districts to create local accountability policies within standards established by the state that incorporate the use of multiple performance outcomes,

such as: absolute test scores, passing rates, and measures of academic growth including annual value-added growth, annual growth toward the projected grade-level standard, and annual growth toward the high school graduation standard of postsecondary readiness. Additional outcomes that could be considered for school ratings could include: attendance (a critically important standard for school completion), the percentage of students who enroll in/earn a grade of 3 or better on Advanced Placement tests, the percentage of students who earn college credits in 12th grade, results of satisfaction surveys conducted among students and members of the school's community, the percentage of students exempted from developmental education by state institutions of higher education, the percentage of students who enroll in postsecondary programs immediately after graduation, and the percentage of high school graduates who successfully complete the first year college or vocational training.

Principle Ten: Full, Transparent and Accessible Information is Essential

TIER believes that the state system of public school accountability should be simple and easily understood by Texans inside and outside the educational community. While simplicity is necessary, the system must be sufficiently nuanced and flexible for accountability to fairly address the differences between schools. Fairness and accuracy can only be achieved by complex statistical methods of measuring and analyzing the performance of students and schools. These methods, beyond the understanding of most individuals, need not necessarily be transparent but information about the methods should be made public and easily accessible to all. The importance of using the sophisticated technology and statistical methods for measuring and evaluating student and school performance cannot be overstated.

TIER also suggests that the responsibility for transparency and honesty must be shared between state and district. Information must be broadly disclosed, widely accessible, and presented in terms that are understandable and meaningful. The success of public school accountability in improving Texas public schools will highly depend on how well state and district accountability are understood and perceived as fair.

Honesty must guide every aspect of accountability. In order to be credible, the standards established for student and school performance should accurately reflect their meaning to individuals outside the educational community. All too often today, this is not the case. Standards that are described as student proficiency or postsecondary readiness commonly represent a level of performance that is simply a notch higher than the performance that students are currently demonstrating. It is no longer acceptable to mislabel higher standards as high standards. Nor is it acceptable to set standards for proficiency in Texas that are self-evidently lower than many other states in the nation or to rate schools as acceptable when less than a large majority of students pass state assessments.

Likewise, information about student performance should accurately, honestly reflect what is recognized as commonplace in schools today. It is unacceptable to use measurements

that disguise the actual number of dropouts and non-high school completion in Texas public schools or the true level of academic proficiency when Texas students are compared with their peers in other states.

TIER recommends that local district accountability systems report the following academic and financial information to their public on district websites:

- Time-based performance trajectories⁶ for grades and subjects/courses that are disaggregated by students in the highest and lowest quartile of performance and the student groups identified by NCLB;
- Annual average percentage of students by grade and subject who fail to meet grade-level performance standards and are enrolled in accelerated instruction;
- Annual average percentage of students by grade and subject who fail to successfully complete accelerated instruction and are promoted to the next grade;
- Annual average percentage of students by grade who have not earned sufficient credit to graduate on time;
- Average dropout rates for cohorts of students in grades 9 through 12 by school that are disaggregated by students in the highest and lowest quartile of performance and the student groups identified by NCLB;
- Average attendance by grade and subject for each school, disaggregated by students in the highest and lowest quartile of performance and the student groups identified by NCLB;
- The school and district ratings by the state accountability system and NCLB;
- A list of subject areas, grade-levels, and schools taught by teachers who are teaching outside their area of certification; and
- Check registers that identify payment type according to the following classifications for each school: (a) regular academic programs, (b) state-mandated academic programs, (c) special education programs, (d) academic interventions; (e) sports activities, (f) non-academic student services, (g) legal services, (h) professional development/training of faculty, (h) lobbying activities, and (i) dues for professional associations.

CONCLUSION

Curriculum standards, assessments, and accountability shine a spotlight on what teachers are expected to teach and students are expected to learn. An enormous body of research has been developed over the past several decades examining the impact of district and state accountability systems. Among researchers, there is near universal agreement that high-stakes assessments, the tests that count in decisions related to student promotion and school ratings, significantly influence what teachers teach and how schools allocate their resources.

⁶ A time-based growth trajectory is the tracking of academic gains for individual students or groups over time that is usually plotted as a line graph; it provides information about achievement trends and allows comparisons of academic gains over time.

Although the research devoted to accountability and high stakes is far from unanimous, the majority of empirical studies find that well-designed tests and accountability broaden the curriculum, raise standards, and enhance instruction when coupled with effective school leadership.^{xliv} The majority of empirical studies also find a strong connection between centralized accountability and gains in student achievement.^{xlv}

Today there are many voices in Texas calling for reform of the state system of public school accountability. We should acknowledge that the current system has served Texas well, but that it is clearly time to enhance public school accountability if we are to make the dramatic changes in public schools required to introduce postsecondary readiness. Dramatic improvements call for dramatic reforms. As noted by Eric A. Hanushek, Texas Schools Project chair and research associate of the National Bureau of Economic Research:

"The State of Texas should be proud of its schools and the policies that exist. The early development of a thorough accountability system has helped to improve the achievement of students, particularly minority and disadvantaged students. Now is the time to take the next steps – to push students further...in my judgment the current system will not take Texas there."^{xlvi}

It is time for Texas to recalibrate education goals, refit education standards and assessments, and build the systemic capacity for schools to meet more rigorous expectations.

The foundation for a stronger, smarter system has been laid over the past fifteen years with the knowledge Texans acquired since creating the first nation's first system of public school accountability. We discovered that accountability can serve as a powerful vehicle for raising student achievement and improving public schools when properly constructed. We learned there are a lot of moving parts to accountability and all parts must be designed to move forward together. We now know that a new accountability system means top to bottom, comprehensive reform of public education.

We also now know that incremental and piecemeal change cannot get the job done. We found that high standards and devoted efforts are simply not enough to prepare students to reach high levels of performance, but that the state must help schools build the capacity to improve student achievement by providing systemic support, such as a sophisticated information system, and resources. We learned and learned over again that early diagnosis and early intervention offers the best hope for resolving problems. Lastly, we learned that fundamental changes in how schools educate children are required to significantly change educational outcomes.

Putting this knowledge to use will ensure that the next generation of public school accountability can be stronger, smarter, and foster growth of the schools we need for children to prosper in the 21st Century.

In this paper, TIER suggests some ways that state and district policymakers can translate the ten principles of accountability into state policy. By no means does TIER intend to convey that these suggestions are the only ways or necessarily the best ways to construct public school accountability. But TIER does intend for these suggestions to provide a constructive beginning for the discussion about creating a new state system of public school accountability. TIER's vision for a new state accountability system embraces:

- Shared governance – with strong state authority for setting, reporting, and monitoring standards for the performance of students, schools, and districts that is paired with strong district authority for designing and governing additional accountability policies that comply with state standards and achieve local goals;
- Redesign of academic standards, student assessment, school evaluation and accountability ratings with the goal of postsecondary readiness for all students;
- Multiple means and measures to inform the evaluation of performance and the consequences for performance – rewards, sanctions, interventions;
- Strong reliance on new, sophisticated technology and statistical methodology, particularly a comprehensive K-20 data system and longitudinal value-added measures;
- Comprehensive, comprehensible, and readily accessible information about educational performance, policy, programs, and data management;
- Strong accountability for the academic growth of all students, schools, and districts;
- Strong commitment to continuous evaluation, improvement, and validation of all aspects of the accountability system;
- Strong state investment in additional resources, on a programmatic basis, to develop districts build the capacity to meet state standards; and
- Strong public involvement in school accountability, governance, and reform.

TIER hopes these suggestions are sufficiently bold and ambitious to convey that it is time to end the custom of incrementalism in public school reform; to set high goals for what should be accomplished during the next five to ten years instead of what can be accomplished immediately at the margin with some effort; to do whatever it takes to prepare all students for postsecondary success; and to commit ourselves to the quantum leaps necessary to achieve high goals instead of the incremental steps that may lead to improvement but never to the level of educational success that is required.

Building a new state system of public school accountability offers an immense opportunity for Texans to set public schools on a whole new course. Once again, Texans are poised on the leading edge of education reform and have the opportunity to set the nation's schools on a whole new course of public school accountability. Guided by the vision of high standards and high student success, Texans can create the second-generation accountability that will shape the schools we need for the 21st Century.

MORE INFORMATION ABOUT TIER

For more information about TIER and access to other papers in this policy series, visit TIER's website at <http://www.texaseducationreform.org> or contact Andrew C. Erben, President, at (512) 477-1006.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TIER is indebted to Chris Patterson for drafting this paper, and to the following individuals who served as reviewers, provided significant input, and generously shared their expert knowledge of public education research and practice: Chrys Dougherty, Beto Gonzalez, Eric Hanushek, Dianne Johnson, Sandy Kress, Don McAdams, Rod Paige, Eric Rolfhus, Drew Scheberle, and Jim Windham. TIER is, however, solely responsible for all recommendations, interpretations of fact, and any possible error.

APPENDIX I

TEXAS PUBLIC SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY—A QUESTIONNAIRE

TIER has carefully considered the relevant questions that should be answered by the Select Committee on Public School Accountability, as well as those advocates who would propose significant revisions in the current accountability system, and suggests the following questionnaire to supplement the recommendations proposed in this paper and as a guide to the deliberations.

1. At what grade levels should assessment of student achievement be conducted?
2. What subjects should be examined at each grade level?
3. To what grade levels and subjects should the following "stakes" be applicable?
 - a. The data are available to the public in the form of aggregate statistics, and the media and other analysts are free to compare schools in whatever way they choose.
 - b. Student-level data are available to researchers under appropriate FERPA protections, and those researchers are free to publish school performance reports and lists of higher performing schools based on that research (example – the Just for the Kids School Reports).
 - c. Schools and districts are assigned state accountability ratings based in part on the test results.
 - d. The ratings assigned in c. are used by the State to determine school and campus accreditation.
 - e. The test results are taken into account in grade-by-grade student promotion decisions.
 - f. The test results are taken into account in students' eligibility to receive a high school diploma.

- g. School districts are encouraged to take the results into account in teacher performance evaluations.
 - h. School districts are encouraged to take the results into account in performance evaluations for principals and other administrators.
4. Assuming that a much simpler system is desirable, to which of the following achievement standards should schools and districts be held accountable?
- a. High school graduation rate for each student group.
 - b. An average passing rate on state assessments for each student group.
 - c. Preparation of students for work and college on the basis of national measures, disaggregated for all student groups.
 - d. A State minimum standard for student participation in assessments.
 - e. Meeting financial standards for productivity in spending and allocation of funds.
 - f. Meeting requirements for minimum class size in elementary grades.
 - g. Providing supplemental academic assistance for students who do not pass state assessments at the standards set for proficiency.
 - h. Providing full disclosure of campus and district spending by publishing check registers.
5. Again assuming the desirability of a simpler system, to which of the following achievement standards should students be held accountable?
- a. Passing state assessments at key grade levels in elementary and middle school to qualify for promotion.
 - b. Passing state high school end of course exams to qualify for graduation.
 - c. Meeting standards for reading and math proficiency that are equal to or higher than proficiency standards set by the National Assessment of Educational Progress.
 - d. Meeting state standards for work and college on the basis of national measures.
 - e. Completing supplemental academic programs if they fail to pass state assessments at the standard set for proficiency.
6. Are the current TAKS passing standards sufficient to indicate that students are on track to readiness for college and a skilled career? (If the answer varies by grades and subjects, be specific)
7. If the answer to #6 is that some or all standards are not sufficient, should the state focus on raising these standards?
8. What strategies or methods should be used to shift this focus to higher standards?
9. Should the state proceed with the development and implementation of academic growth measures that could be used to identify whether students are on a trajectory to college and workplace readiness?
10. Should the state proceed with the development and implementation of value-added methodologies that could be used to identify above-predicted annual gains in individual student performance?
11. Should measures of academic growth and value-added gains be used as standards for the performance of educators and/or the accountability ratings of schools and districts?

12. Are annual increases in student assessment scores exaggerating the extent to which schools are improving because of an undue preoccupation with strategies designed solely to raise these scores, i. e., "teaching to the test"?
13. If the answer to #12 is Yes, what should be done to identify the extent of this problem in specific schools and districts?
14. If the answer to #12 is Yes, what measures or strategies should be used to minimize assessment score inflation and improve the public's information on the true performance status of our schools?
15. How should lower-performing districts and schools and those in need of intervention be identified?
16. What intervention strategies for underperforming campuses should be used and how should these vary based on the length of time that the school has been underperforming?
17. If a school fails to meet the minimum standards for academic and financial performance, when, if ever, should state funding and accreditation be withdrawn? One year? Two years? Three years? Longer?
18. Given the answers to the questions above, what specific changes should be made to the current accountability system?

APPENDIX II

MEASURE OF ANNUAL IMPROVEMENT IN STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT: PROPOSED CHANGE TO TEXAS EDUCATION CODE (Section 39.034)

- (a) The commissioner shall determine a method by which the agency may measure annual improvement in each individual student's achievement from one school year to the next on an assessment instrument required under this subchapter.
- (b) For students of limited English proficiency, as defined by Section 29.052, the agency shall use a student's performance data on reading proficiency assessment instruments in English and one other language to calculate the student's progress toward dual language proficiency.
- (c) The agency shall use a student's previous years' performance data on an assessment instrument required under this subchapter to determine the student's expected annual improvement. The agency shall report that expected level of annual improvement and the actual level of annual improvement achieved to the district. For each school in the state, the agency shall publicly report the average annual improvement and average expected improvement for all students who are in school on October 1 and who subsequently take state mandated tests. These reports should be separated by specific test and should also be provided for each disaggregated subgroup (by NCLB definitions) in addition to the highest and lower quartile of students in a school and grade for which there are ten students in the schools. Within two years, the agency should develop data systems to permit these reports to be prepared at the individual teacher and classroom

level. The report must state whether the student fell below, met, or exceeded the agency's expectation for improvement.

(d) The agency shall determine the necessary annual improvement required each year for a student to be prepared to pass the exit-level assessment instrument required under this subchapter for graduation. The agency shall report the necessary annual improvement required to the district. Each year, the report must state whether the student fell below, met, or exceeded the necessary target for improvement.

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