

May 9, 2008

**To: Select Committee on Public School Accountability  
Senator Florence Shapiro and Representative Rob Eissler, Co-chairmen**

**Re: Public Meeting, Houston, Texas, May 12, 2008  
Texas State Alternative Education Accountability System**

**Dear Senator Shapiro, Representative Eissler and Committee Members:**

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to submit written testimony on issues that pertain to public education and public school accountability. As a product of the public school system, and a supporter of the importance of diverse cultures in our democracy, I believe in public schools and the responsibility that we all have to provide public schools that work for all students. I believe that public schools should be held accountable for educating all learners to high academic standards and outcomes regardless of the different characteristics that the learners may have. This includes students who choose to attend public charter schools.

As a retired public school administrator, I had the opportunity to work with Responsive Education Solutions (RES) formerly known as Eagle Academies of Texas, the largest Charter holder in the state of Texas. As the high school principal of a charter school in Pharr, Texas, composed primarily of economically disadvantaged youth who were also limited English proficient and met at least one if not more of the criteria labeling a student as "at risk", the staff and I experienced major challenges in our efforts to educate them. In addition to the fact that our students were struggling with the English language and financial hardships at home, many of them also faced serious social issues that were a product of these two factors. We had a serious commitment to educate all of our students as we believed that if our students were all "at risk", then we, as community members were also "at risk".

Our country has come to the realization that it is not only what happens to an individual when he or she drops out of school; it is what happens to us in our communities, state and country because of the major economic drain that dropouts as an uneducated citizenry can become.

As you can tell, I have a passion for educating all youth. I am, however, especially interested in creating schools that work for all students, particularly those who are "at risk" of not graduating from high school.

I believe that young people and their parents ought to have a choice in the selection of a school that works for them by addressing their individualized needs. My decision to work for a public charter school was intentional as I sought ways to serve young people who were struggling in the traditional high schools.

This job has been very rewarding for me as the district continues to increase the number of students who graduate from high school every year. Based on the Alternative Education Accountability results for the 2006 school year, all of the schools in our district were given the highest rating of "Acceptable". During the current 2007-08 school year, and in an effort to meet higher academic standards, some of our district's charter schools have elected to be rated under Standard Accountability rather than Alternative as they strive to attain the much coveted "Exemplary" status.

Having said that, I would like to express appreciation for the indicators that are currently a part of the Alternative Education Accountability system that is being used to evaluate the success of charter districts and campuses. We consider these indicators to be fair and equitable to all public school charters:

- ✓ Use of an Accountability Subset composed of students enrolled on the PEIMS Snapshot day to measure student performance and progress in both the Standard and Alternative Accountability Systems. This method identifies students who have attended our schools a sufficient period of time to attain expected Essential Knowledge and Skills that will be measured by State Assessments.
- ✓ Use of TAKS Progress Indicators for Alternative Education Districts and Campuses, rather than the Performance Indicators used for Standard Accountability, gives students in Alternative Education Accountability credit for student growth and progress.
- ✓ Addition of successful Exit Level TAKS Retest results to indicators used to measure Alternative Education Districts and Campuses. These results, in addition to the measurement of growth and progress, add value to the overall data set used for district and campus ratings.

There is one other Alternative Education Accountability Indicator; however, that is currently impacting school districts and campuses in an adverse manner -- the "Completer II Indicator". This indicator is utilized in assessing "academic ratings" and penalizes districts and campuses for students who may have been enrolled for only one day. In spite of the short enrollment, the district and campus are "academically rated" on the basis of data containing these students.

This must change so that Charter Schools will be able to serve as an option or choice for students who have struggled in their previous educational experience.

Charter schools should not have to fear negative consequences from serving the very students who need our help the most because of an indicator that continues to impact us negatively. Realizing that the Committee will need to study this indicator more carefully, Responsive Education Solutions (RES) District staff has prepared an Alternative Education Accountability Memo providing definition of the "Completer II" indicator, explanation of its effect, analysis of past implications, and a proposed solution.

I have attached a copy of this memo for your review.

As a former school board member for the Mission Consolidated Independent School district for 12 years, I learned how important it is to have policy that ensures that all of our schools and districts are meeting the state's expectation to educate students with the higher standards of the Recommended and Distinguished Graduation plans.

I believe that a review of the Completer II Indicator and a change in its effect may help improve schools' holding power and increase the likelihood of more students graduating from high school with the rigorous academic expectations of these two plans.

Again, thank you and all of the committee members, for giving our district and representatives from other charter holders an opportunity to provide input on the Alternative Education Accountability System. We appreciate your public service and what you are doing to improve the quality of education for all students in the state of Texas.

Respectfully,

Rosalinda S. Gonzalez  
Academic Director  
Responsive Education Solutions



**Responsive Education Solutions**  
**Alternative Education Accountability Memo Re: Completer II**

**Negative Implications of the Completer II Indicator on Alternative Education District / Campus Academic Ratings:**

**Completer II Indicator – Effect on AEA District/Campus Academic Ratings**

**Definition:**

In order for a Charter School evaluated by Alternative Education Accountability (AEA) to obtain a rating of Academically Acceptable, their District and Campus Completion Rates – determined by the “Completer II Indicator” – have to be 75% or higher. This rate is determined by using the following criteria:

For last year’s accountability ratings, the Completer II Indicator studied the “Class of 2006” – students who entered Texas Public Schools as 9<sup>th</sup> graders in the school year 2002-2003. Thus the students who were in this “cohort” for Eagle Academies were those who enrolled in an Eagle Academy at any time during 2002-03 as freshmen, during 2003-04 as sophomores, during 2004-05 as juniors, and in 2005-06 as seniors. It does not matter when during the year the student enrolls; it does not matter how long he attends school. He is in the cohort if he enrolls in the targeted grade during the targeted year.

Thus even though a charter school student was enrolled in school only one day during his stay on the charter campus, his non-completer status was assigned to the charter, rather than to the previous ISD.

The above students were then classified in 2007 as Graduates, GED recipients, Continuers, Dropouts, or Other Leavers. Graduates, GED Recipients and Continuers are positive. Dropouts are negative. Other Leavers do not count for or against the school. A fraction is formed using Graduates, GEDers and Continuers as the numerator, and all of the above plus Dropouts as the denominator. The value of that fraction must exceed 75% for the school to be Academically Acceptable according to the Texas Education Code.

**Example of its Effect:**

With this definition of “completers”, Open Enrollment Charter Schools are punished for accepting all students requesting enrollment. If a student has been unsuccessful in another school district, drops out of that school, and enrolls in Eagle Academy (brought by parent, parole officer, etc.), then attends only one day before leaving (running away, family disappearing, etc.), that student is counted as a dropout for Eagle Academy – though he may have attended his ISD for years and Eagle Academy only one day. This occurred three times in the Eagle Academy of San Antonio “Class of 2005” used for 2006 State Academic Ratings.

In the cohort “Class of 2005” as defined by Completer II Indicator, Eagle Academy of San Antonio had 15 graduates, one (1) GED recipient, 11 Continuers (students still in school planning to graduate) and 11 “dropouts”. Using the Required improvement factor, the percentage was one tenth (.01) of one percent below the requirement. Thus Eagle Academy of San Antonio with above acceptable TAKS scores, SDAA scores, and annual dropout rate, was given a rating of “Academically Unacceptable” and received a letter of closure from the TEA – all because of 11 “Dropouts”.

Eagle Academy of Ft. Worth has had the same experience. Other Academies are projected to be rated “Unacceptable” in 2006 due solely to the Completion rate falling below 75%.

**Analysis:**

Of the eleven (11) Eagle Academy of San Antonio students counted as Longitudinal dropouts over a four-year period, data analysis found the following to be true of seven (7) “dropouts” during a four-year period:

- One “Data Error” was actually still present on campus on track to graduate. However, though she was added to the “graduates” on appeal, her ethnicity added her to the Hispanic subpopulation and our appeal was denied.
- One “dropout” left the Eagle campus to attend another city charter school, came back to Eagle to resume his work, and has now graduated from Eagle Academy of San Antonio and entered the U.S. Armed Services.
- Three “Eagle Academy dropouts” attended school only one day. After an extensive period of unsuccessfully trying to contact their families, they were withdrawn from PEIMS.
- One “dropout” attended only 14 days before leaving.
- One “dropout” left to attend Job Corps. He has done exceedingly well there and is on track for graduation and vocational preparation. The Texas state accountability system counts entering Job Corps as a dropout.

**Proposed Solution: AEA Designates the “Completer II Indicator” as “Report Only”**

The “Completion rate percentage” using the “Completer Indicator II” should be changed in the Texas State Accountability System to “**Report Only**” for Charter Schools rated under the Alternative Education Accountability System and not be included in criteria used to determine Academic Acceptability. Students attending a campus only one day should not affect Academic ratings. Schools should not be forced to deny enrollment to any student based on projected success or failure.