

Testimony Before the  
Select Committee on Public School Accountability

Presented by:  
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Introduction

Madame Chair, Mister Chairman, members of the committee, I am Jim Windham, Chairman of the Texas Institute for Education Reform. Thank you for inviting me to testify this afternoon. As you recall, I testified at your April hearing in San Antonio and outlined TIER's recently-published accountability paper which highlighted ten principles we believe are vital to a successful accountability system. The committee staff asked me to testify today and explain how these principles can be incorporated into the State's accountability system.

Before I go into the specific recommendations, please keep in mind that there may be more than one way to achieve each principle. While we believe that our suggestions are solid, viable, and will produce the results we wish to achieve, we are open to working with other models as long as they are in line with the overriding principles.

To review, TIER's principles are as follows:

- Make Postsecondary Readiness the Goal of Accountability
- Connect Postsecondary Readiness with Closing the Achievement Gap between Student Groups
- Sound Statistical Design is Essential
- State/Local Partnerships Can Enhance Public School Accountability
- All Stakeholders should be Involved in Public School Accountability
- Public School Accountability must be Based on Sufficient Capacity and Resources to Enable Schools to Succeed
- Public School Accountability should be Primarily Based on Final Educational Outcomes and Secondarily Based on Intermediate Education Outcomes
- Consequences are Essential
- Multiple Means and Measures Enhance Fairness
- Full, Transparent, and Accessible Information is Essential

Recommendations

**1. Accountability—School Rating and Accreditation**

TIER's overriding principle is postsecondary (P.S.) readiness--defined as *"The range of academic, workforce & social proficiency students should acquire to successfully transition from high school to skilled employment, advanced military training, associate's degree, bachelor's degree or technical certification—without the need for remediation."*

As such, our public education system should give each student the knowledge and skills necessary to: 1) begin college, career and technology training, or advanced military training without the need for remediation, 2) enter the workforce with a job that pays a living wage without the need for remedial training.

To achieve this goal, we need to establish one state accountability system for all schools—including charter schools, schools with large populations of disadvantaged students, and dropout prevention/recovery programs. We should eliminate the Alternative Accountability System and assess our districts, schools, and students based on progress towards postsecondary readiness.

Adopting postsecondary readiness as our primary goal will help close the achievement gap. “Growth” models can be incorporated to recognize and give credit for significant student progress and ensure that all students are on pace to graduate college or career-ready.

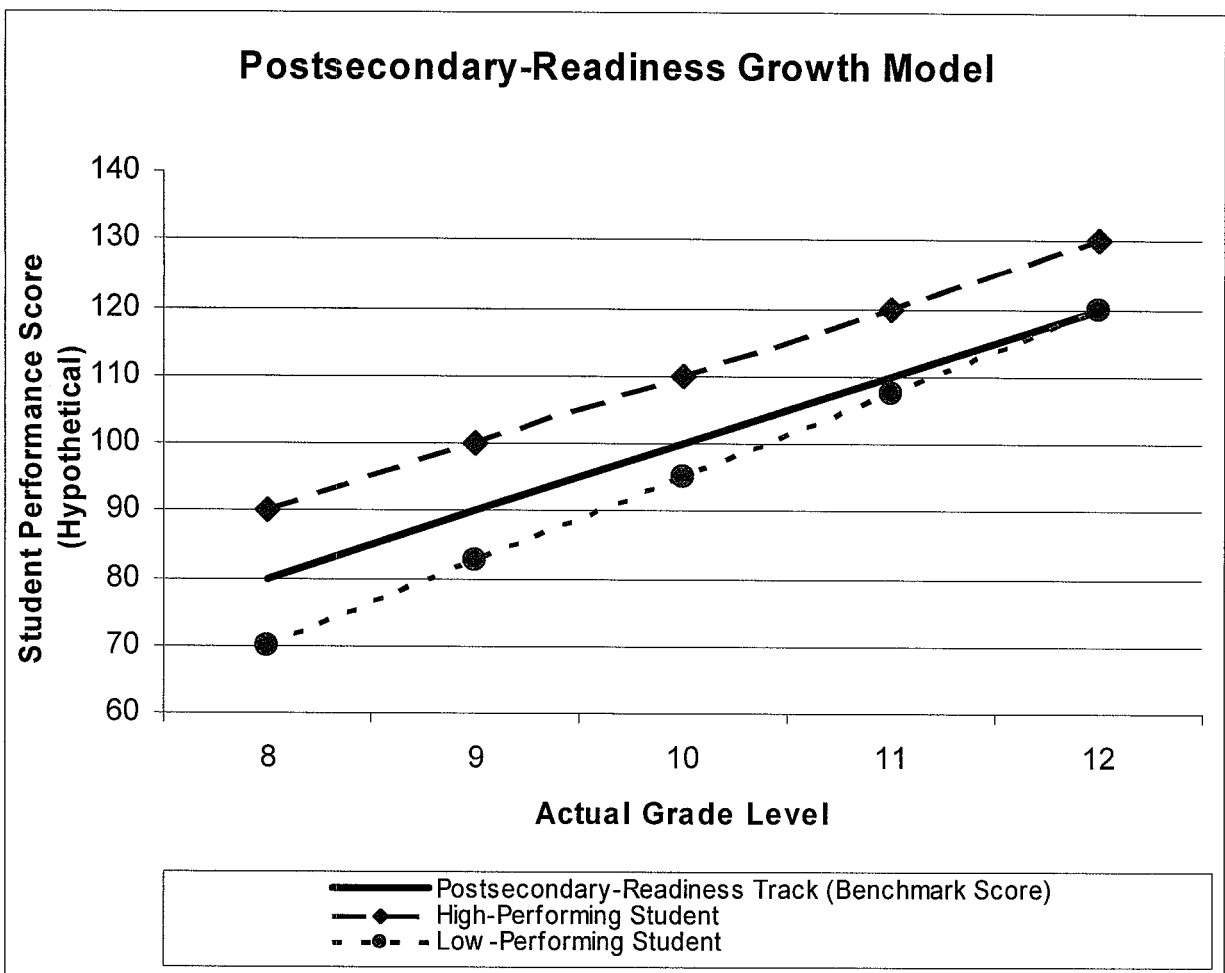
Once we have established specific academic standards that define P.S. readiness, the curricula and assessments for each grade level and each subject area should be aligned to move students progressively toward the graduation standard. In essence, we start with P.S.-readiness standards and work backwards through grades K-12 defining the specific knowledge and skills that students must master at each grade level. Once completed, we should have a set of standards that increases in rigor from year-to-year and culminates in postsecondary readiness.

Annual assessments would be tailored to measure progress toward the graduation standard (P.S.-readiness standard) and benchmark scores would be established. Student test results would be measured against these benchmarks to indicate the progress that students are making each year.

Individual districts and schools would be rated both on a *status model* (the average absolute performance against the benchmark) and a *growth model* (the year-over-year improvement as it tracks toward the P.S. readiness standard). Ratings would be based on the outcomes demonstrated by students during their final year on campus (high schools should be held accountable for graduation results, middle schools for grade 8 or 9 results, and elementary schools for grade 5 or 6 results). The *status model* would measure the percentage of students who met or exceeded benchmark scores during their last year on campus. The *growth model* would measure the percentage of students who made satisfactory progress during their time at the school. For students who are meeting or exceeding the benchmarks, the *growth model* would require them to continue to meet or exceed them by at least the same amount each year. Students that score below the benchmark would be required to make up ground each year so that they are on track to meet the graduation standard by the 12<sup>th</sup> grade. School and district performance would be judged based on the percentage of students that make satisfactory annual progress towards P.S.-readiness.

For example, assume that our hypothetical assessment goal is that 12<sup>th</sup>-grade students score 120 points on an assessment to be college-ready (see figure below). For simplicity, our example requires students to gain 10 points per grade. Let’s say that an 8<sup>th</sup> grade student exceeds the benchmark score of 80 and scores a 90. For that student to make satisfactory progress, he or she would have to score 100 the next year. For an 8<sup>th</sup> grade student that scores a 70, he or she would have to improve 12.5 points per year until graduation (i.e. 82.5 in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, 95 in 10<sup>th</sup> grade,

107.5 in 11<sup>th</sup> grade, and 120 in 12<sup>th</sup> grade). While that student would not have to eliminate the entire deficit in one year, he or she would have to make sufficient progress to be on track for graduation to be considered “satisfactory”.



Once each student's benchmark scores are established, we should group students for accountability (not instructional) purposes in each grade and each subject area into the lowest 25% and the highest 25%, in addition to disaggregating data by race and economic status, as required by *No Child Left Behind*.

Schools should be accredited annually if they are meeting/exceeding the following criteria or demonstrating annual gains to meet benchmarks in growth to the P.S. standard. Additionally, schools would be rated “A” through “F” depending on their success in reaching benchmarked goals related to these criteria.

**High Schools:**

- 90% of students achieve the P.S.-ready benchmark score and graduate within 4 years;
- 80% of graduates demonstrate postsecondary readiness by achieving satisfactory scores on the ACT, THEA, or SAT;

- 80% of graduates immediately transition into post-secondary education (including career and technology training or advanced military training); and
- 80% of graduates do not require remedial education in the state system of public universities and colleges.

#### Middle Schools:

- 90% of students achieve the appropriate benchmark score (either under the *status model* or the *growth model* and complete middle school on time;
- 80% of 8<sup>th</sup> grade students successfully complete Algebra I; and
- 80% of students have 5 or fewer absences during the school year.

#### Elementary Schools

- 90% of students achieve the appropriate benchmark score (either under the *status model* or the *growth model* and complete elementary school on time;
- 80% of students demonstrate proficiency on 5<sup>th</sup> grade reading and math assessments; and
- 80% of students have 5 or fewer absences during the school year.

To measure district and school performance, the state should adopt a highly-reliable, longitudinal statistical data system for grades K-20. The system should provide real-time data for individual students, schools, and districts. It 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 annual reporting of student performance that includes absolute scores against the benchmark, tracks year-over-year progress against the benchmark, and tracks overall progress towards the graduation standard.

## 2. Accountability—District Report Cards

Each year, districts should be required to produce a public report card that is published on the district's website. The report should identify the district's performance in relation to each accreditation goal and the ratings of each school. This report card should also include the following information:

- Average results of student assessments by school, grade, and subject that is disaggregated by highest and lowest quartile of performance and the student groups identified by *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB);
- Average annual academic growth and progress relative to the benchmarks for students by grade, subject, class, and school that is disaggregated by the highest and lowest quartile of performance and the student groups identified by NCLB;
- Time-based performance trajectories for student groups, classrooms, and schools;
- Average dropout rates for cohorts of students in each school for grades 9 through 12 that is disaggregated by highest and lowest quartile of performance, and the student groups identified by NCLB;
- Average attendance by grade and subject for each school, disaggregated by highest and lowest quartile of performance, and the student groups identified by 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) lobbying activities, and (i) dues for professional associations.

### 3. State Requirements, Sanctions, Interventions, and Rewards for School Performance

- Release districts from all state law and regulation, with the exception of safety requirements, when all of the schools in the district meet state standards or are meeting state standards for improvement;
- Require all districts to have a plan for dropout identification, prevention, and intervention that is approved by the Commissioner of Public Education and linked to the school accountability system;
- Require schools to provide year-round academic intervention for students who do not demonstrate proficiency on reading, math, social studies, and science assessments (during the school day, after school, and during the summer) or provide scholarships to a provider approved by the Commissioner of Public Education (such as Kumon or Sylvan Learning Center);
- Adopt consequences for school and district performance that are closely connected with annual school ratings (A, B, C, D, and F, as proposed previously): (1) 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; (2) 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 (3) 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:*
- 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). Require schools that repeatedly fail to meet accountability standards—either under the *status* or *growth* models—to (a) be placed on conditional accreditation for one year and engage an educational intervention provider approved by the Commissioner of Public Education (such as Just for the Kids) to assist with school improvement; and (b) turn over management to a charter school or education management organization approved by the Commissioner of Public Education that is given full authority for school and staff decisions;
- Require students to pass assessments (state and national) at grades 3,5,8, and 12 to progress to the next grade or graduate;
- Require students in each grade to enroll in accelerated academic instruction after school and during the summer whenever students demonstrate below-standard performance in reading, math, social studies, or science;
- Present annual awards to students for attendance (such as scholarships or tuition discounts in a public university or college); and
- Award graduates of Texas public schools a state scholarship for use at public universities and colleges, with increasing higher amounts for achieving specific scores on the benchmark tests and on national college readiness assessments.

#### 4. State Curriculum Standards

- Hold all students to the same standards for academic performance with the exception of students enrolled in special education programs;
- Revise standards to make them explicit, measurable, and specific for each grade;
- Create vertical alignment of the standards for each grade level so the cognitive demands—or rigor—increases evenly from one grade to the next;
- Establish postsecondary readiness as the culmination of knowledge and skills from kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade—as defined by national and state standards—including ACT’s “Standards for Transition”, the College Board’s “Standards for Success”, and the recommendations of the Commission for a College Ready Texas;
- Use exemplary state and international standards to benchmark the content and cognitive demands of elementary, middle, and high school grades (including standards for Indiana, Massachusetts, California, the American Diploma Project, and the Third International Mathematics and Science Assessment).

#### 5. State Assessments

- Hold all students to the same expectations for academic proficiency, with the exception of students enrolled in special education programs;

- Benchmark standards for proficiency on assessments to standards established by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), exemplary states, the Third International Math and Science Assessment, and national college readiness assessments;
- Phase in expectations for students to reach proficiency, establishing standards for reasonably-achievable, annual improvement gains (such as five percent annually for schools in the lowest quintile of current performance and three percent for schools in the highest quintile);
- Align levels of proficiency from grade to grade to state assessments to establish an even progression of cognitive difficulty as grades progress;
- Develop or purchase new assessments that are grade-level specific and provide sufficient range to measure performance several grades above and below the grade at which the assessment is administered;
- Report results of assessments in absolute scores, annual academic improvement, annual growth, and progress toward reaching college-ready proficiency;
- Establish end-of-course tests for math, science, and social studies in both middle and high school;
- Administer a national standards-based test (such as the Measures of Academic Progress produced by the Northwest Evaluation Association) at grades 1, 3, and 8;
- Administer a national pre-college readiness assessment at grade 7 and a college-readiness assessment at grade 11 (such as those produced by the ACT and College Board);
- Require 100% of students to be tested annually; and
- Require that state assessments be administered in English not later than three years after a student has enrolled in bilingual education or English as a Second Language.

## 6. **Education Information System**

- Create a statewide K-20 education information system that is based on the provisions of HB 2238 (filed during the 80<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature) and includes public education, higher education, and State Board for Educator Certification data;
- Create a dropout sub-system in the statewide information system that provides real-time information to schools and districts, identifying potential dropouts and related performance according to research-based factors;
- Develop an open interface between the state information system and district and school data systems to enable data exchange and incorporation;
- Implement statewide tracking of individual students with institution, classes, instructors, programs, attendance, disciplinary actions, and assessment results;
- Develop real-time reporting of and unrestricted school access to individual student attendance, disciplinary actions, supplemental/intervention programs, and on-track progress toward graduation;
- Implement quarterly statewide information updates, monitoring, and corrections;
- Annually report student performance that includes absolute scale score, year-over-year growth, on-track progress toward college-ready proficiency, and on-track progress toward high school graduation credits; and



- Develop a FERPA-compliant policy to provide researchers unrestricted access to student, school, and instructor-related data.

### Conclusion

Thank you for your time today. I would be happy to address any questions you may have.