

Date: April 8, 2011

To: Dan Eissler, Representative District 15
Room E1.408, Capitol Extension
Austin, TX 78768

Subject: House Bill 500

Dear Representative Eissler,

Texas public schools will welcome in a new state assessment system during the 2011-2012 academic year. The State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) will usher in higher academic requirements, increased levels of student learning and achievement, more focused classrooms, and students who are better prepared for the 21st century. The four-core curriculum groups of Texas: English-Language Arts, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies, welcome the upcoming challenges of STAAR. A well written House Bill 500 can facilitate transitioning from the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) to the STAAR at the high school level.

The core curriculum groups would like to make sure the following provisions are adequately addressed in House Bill 500. All End of Course (EOC) tests taken by a student should count toward that student's graduation as well as campus and district accountability. It has been well documented that if students take an assessment that does not have implications for the student, levels of student performance drop dramatically. The campus and district are left to suffer the consequences of student apathy. Currently, students would only have to pass four of the twelve EOC exams as written in HB 500. Our recommendation is, if an EOC is administered, it should count towards that student's graduation.

If students are required to meet the passing standard or a cumulative score for all EOC tests taken in order to graduate, this would eliminate the need for EOC tests to count as fifteen percent of a course grade. Unfortunately, districts would apply the fifteen percent option in different ways, resulting in a system that lacks consistency throughout the state. The fifteen percent option would not be standardized, would be difficult to monitor, and result in statewide confusion. Our recommendation is eliminate the fifteen percent option.

As mentioned earlier, Texas educators are ready to meet the future challenges. There is another step that can ease the transition from TAKS to STAAR. The TAKS assessments were administered with the passing standard being phased in. This greatly reduced anxiety among students, educators, and parents. It would be very helpful to all stakeholders if the passing standard set by the Commissioner of Education is phased in. There are reasons a phase in would be beneficial. In some academic areas, instructional materials correlated to the new Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) are not yet available, leaving educators scrambling for appropriate resources. The first few administrations of any new assessment always have various glitches in spite of the best laid plans. It takes time for the state, schools, educators, students and parents to adapt to

higher-level questions, academically enriched curriculum, and increased expectations required by the STAAR. The angst and anxiety of a new assessment system can be greatly reduced with a reasonable phase in of standards.

High stakes assessment is generally regarded as negative. Well thought out implementation, expectations, and requirements can actually make STAAR a positive force in Texas education. The core curriculum groups of Texas look forward to working with all stakeholders to ensure Texas students receive the best education possible, achieve at their highest potential, and meet all the future needs of our growing and diverse state. The following associations listed below, representing 25,000 educators in various capacities throughout school districts in Texas endorse the recommendations outlined in this letter. We hope these recommendations will be implemented.

The Coalition of Reading and English Supervisors

The Texas Council of Teachers of English Language Arts

The Texas Association of Supervisors of Mathematics

The Texas Council of Teachers of Mathematics

The Texas Science Education Leadership Association

The Science Teachers Association of Texas

Texas Council for Social Studies

Texas Social Studies Supervisors' Association