



May 15, 2023

RE: House Committee Substitute for Senate Bill 8

Chairman Buckley and Members of the House Public Education Committee:

My name is Keith Bryant, and I am the superintendent of Lubbock-Cooper ISD (LCISD). I am testifying on behalf of LCISD and as legislative chair of the Texas Association of School Administrators (TASA) in opposition to CSSB 8. LCISD is a fast-growing district with an enrollment of 7,800 students - almost triple the number of students the district had just 15 years ago. We anticipate this growth trend to continue for the foreseeable future.

I will focus my testimony on the assessment and accountability portions of the bill. However, I would like to make it clear that I do not support the ESA component of the bill in any form or fashion, nor do I support the notion of taking taxpayer money to fund education in a private setting.

To begin, I would like to address the ideas regarding assessment. Before going into the specifics of those provisions, I offer a note of caution. I have grave concerns that crucial changes to our state assessment system have been introduced the last two weeks of the session without the opportunity for all stakeholders to provide public testimony. I urge this committee to practice due diligence in vetting changes to prevent substantial unintended consequences.

I want to thank you for removing the requirement to tie graduation to student performance on five end-of-course exams. We all know that kids are more than a test score, and I speak for many educators when I express my full support of this portion of the bill. I also appreciate the intent to move toward only testing what is required by federal law, and the elimination of the eighth-grade social studies test is a step toward that alignment.

While I commend the recognition that our onerous testing should be revamped, this bill does not do away with the current tests in our STAAR system (which is understandable because of the federal accountability requirements). So even if the state renames the assessment system and develops new test content, reading and math must still be assessed every year, and science assessed twice during grades 3-8. In addition, the bill's provisions that call for through-year-testing, three times a year, on top of what is required by federal law, lead to a vast increase in the number of tests administered to students in grades 3-8.

The bill's provisions also increase the number of tests for high school students. The current number of high school End of Course (EOC) exams is five: Algebra 1, English 1, English 2, U.S. History, and Biology. The proposed bill, while eliminating some EOC exams, will increase the total number of exams to six, including transition to, and development of, new tests under the name of the Texas Success Initiative Assessment: Pre-TSIA ELA, Pre-TSIA Math, U.S. History, Biology, TSIA ELA, and TSIA Math. Provisions in the bill authorizing the Commissioner to mandate that a district participate in a "pilot" program and continue to administer currently required tests, while also administering field tests for new assessments the Texas Education Agency (TEA) is permitted to adopt or develop, will significantly strain the education system, and will result in increased testing for students at every grade level.

Furthermore, TSIA exams are college-bound measures. There are three groups representing a significant number of Texas students that could be negatively affected by a move to the TSIA – CTE, military-bound, and special

education students. How would the TSIA affect special education students who may not be college-bound, but are still deserving of a supportive, encouraging educational experience? How would this test affect students who are not college-bound, but are instead intent on career and technical-based fields (which are critical to our state's workforce and economy)? (As a reminder the Legislature passed HB5 several years ago, which moved away from 15 EOC exams and placed an emphasis on CTE courses to provide certifications in fields that do not require college degrees.) And, what about the students who choose to serve our country in the armed forces before or instead of pursuing higher education?

By removing the State Board of Education's (SBOE) involvement in the testing program and giving all authority to TEA, an appointed Commissioner would be able to make these critical decisions (instead of members of the SBOE who have been elected by the voters of Texas). Furthermore, the determination of passing standards of TSIA exams would be stripped from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) and given to TEA, whose only requirement would be to *consult* the THECB. These elements of the bill will impact the A-F accountability system for public schools only, and the effects may not have been fully considered within such a short timeline.

If the TSIA exams become the new high school exams, there must be flexibility in when the tests can be administered. In my experience, students who have not completed and achieved proficiency in Algebra 2 have a difficult time passing the TSIA Math exam. Other students complete Algebra II as freshmen or sophomores, and making them wait up to two years to take the exam could harm a student's ability to pass the exam. The exam should be available for administration on a flexible schedule when the student and district believe the student is prepared to take it.

Furthermore, the proposed multiple exams per year in grades 3-8 are cause for concern. While many districts already administer both nationally-normed and local assessments multiple times per year, these exams are designed to inform instruction in classrooms and to meet the needs of struggling students. The provisions of this bill indicate that the results of state-mandated assessments throughout a school year could be used for rating purposes rather than assisting educators in meeting students' needs. This could result in devastating effects reflected in the A-F accountability system by punishing schools that are trying to grow students. Should this component remain in the bill, I urge you to allow local districts the discretion to use exams already in place that are intended for meaningful assessment.

Finally, this bill only permits retakes on exams after a student has graduated high school, which conflicts with the need for students to make decisions about future education and career plans before graduation. I ask that you reconsider this provision and allow our students the time and resources necessary to plan successful futures for themselves.

Thank you for the opportunity to share educator insight with you as you consider action on CSSB 8. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully,

Keith Bryant

Lubbock Cooper ISD, Superintendent
Texas Association of School Administrators, Legislative Chair