



Input to the House Public Education Committee

August 9, 2022

The Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE) offers the following input to the House Public Education Committee regarding the interim charge to monitor House Bill (HB) 3906 from the 86th regular session and to study the unfulfilled recommendations from the 2016 Commission on Next Generation Assessments and Accountability.

HB 3906

ATPE's legislative program, which is written and approved by ATPE members, recommends that the state reduce the number of mandated tests and that accountability laws be designed to allow for educators to meet the needs of individual students. Therefore, ATPE supported the passage of HB 3906.

Per the Texas Education Agency (TEA) website, TEA is complying with HB 3906 through four areas: STAAR Redesign, the Assessment Educator Advisory Committee, STAAR Interim Assessments, and the Texas Through-Year Assessment Pilot (TTAP).

STAAR Redesign

Under HB 3906, TEA will roll out a significant STAAR redesign during the 2022-23 school year, focusing on transitioning the STAAR to a fully online assessment, adding new question types, incorporating cross-curricular passages, and collapsing writing assessments into the reading assessment.

Many of the changes envisioned in the redesign of STAAR have promising implications. However, there are some areas of concern. One example that holds both promise and concern is the transition to a fully online administration model. Although online test administration has obvious benefits, complete reliance on an online model also has potential drawbacks, including questions about the technical capacity of state infrastructure to accommodate a fully online administration on all campuses. Additionally, ATPE is concerned about the impact of online testing on student subpopulations. ATPE supports allowing appropriate modifications and/or accommodations on statewide assessments for English Language Learners (ELLs), special education students, and students served by Section 504. Special education teachers, special education advocates, and the parents of students with special needs have all expressed concerns that the proposed online-only testing model may not adequately accommodate student needs. The state should empower Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) committees to determine the appropriate method of assessing individual students and should support the implementation of a child's IEP regarding assessment delivery.

Regarding new question types, moving away from an assessment that is largely or wholly multiple choice in nature is likely a positive change. However, as new question types are introduced, it is important to inform the field about the use of these question types and to collect feedback from the field on how students are interacting with new question types in a testing environment. ATPE recommends that the state's accountability and data systems, including any growth models, be based on statistically valid principles. This necessitates ensuring that the test itself be well constructed to determine what students know and that that knowledge not be masked by students' ability, or inability, to navigate the test itself, which could be an issue with some question types.

Additionally, although embedding cross-curricular concepts within STAAR questions is a way to enhance and deepen learning, it is important that reading passages be designed to allow students to show their reading ability without having extensive background in other subject areas. Failure to do this results in an assessment that is muddled in its ability to determine students' reading ability versus their background knowledge. It is paramount that TEA maintain the agency's stated commitment that "the questions will only assess Reading Language Arts (RLA) TEKS; students will not be scored on their understanding of TEKS for other subject areas." On this note, ATPE recommends that curriculum remain in local control. Some have expressed concerns that TEA is taking steps to create a comprehensive state-level framework encompassing curriculum and testing that is neither advisable nor supported by educators or other proponents of locally determined public education.

One aspect of the STAAR redesign troubling to the many educators and parents concerned with the overburdensome nature of state standardized testing is the inclusion of writing in the 3-8 reading assessment. This also seems to be out of step with the spirit of HB 3906. Based on widespread concerns over the poor quality and deleterious impact on student learning of the STAAR writing test, legislators in HB 3906 eliminated the grades 3-8 writing assessment. The bill left intact separate provisions related to writing assessment in grades four and seven and as part of the English I and II end-of-course assessments, as well as adding new provisions to allow for a portfolio writing assessment. Instead of removing writing from the STAAR testing regime in grades 3-8, as the plainest reading of the bill would seem to indicate was the Legislature's intent and as federal law allows, the agency instead chose to embed the writing test into the reading test. Although it is too late to change this course of action for the upcoming school year, the Legislature should make plans to solicit feedback from the state's English Language Arts and Reading (ELAR) teachers during the next interim and seriously consider whether the new iteration of the STAAR writing test is as similarly problematic as the previous iteration.

STAAR Interim Assessments

Embedded in the ATPE Legislative Program recommendation to reduce the amount of mandated tests at all school levels is the goal to reduce the overall burden of the statewide standardized testing regime on students and educators alike. This has led ATPE to support bills that limit the amount of benchmark testing districts can pursue. While ATPE has no specific qualms with TEA's developing, or districts' using, TEKS- and STAAR-aligned interim or benchmark assessments, the Legislature may need to revisit the limits on the amount of instructional time that can be dedicated to standardized interim assessment. For example, classroom educators and the Legislature should have a significant conversation about

whether administering a full battery of Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) testing and a full battery of STAAR interim assessments is an appropriate use of limited instructional time.

Texas Through-Year Assessment Pilot (TTAP)

Perhaps the most promising piece of HB 3906 is the concept of replacing STAAR, which is designed as an end-of-year high-emphasis summative assessment, with a new low-emphasis assessment system spread across the year. The agency will begin piloting this work with more than 130 districts and charter operators during the upcoming 2022-23 school year as the Texas Through-Year Assessment Pilot (TTAP).

TTAP offers an opportunity, if done well, to make significant progress toward ATPE's stated goal of a testing and accountability system developed with educator input that maximizes student learning and helps educators meet the individual needs of students. However, reaching this goal will require the agency to engage in significant outreach and engagement efforts with campus and classroom educators, as well as a willingness to be open to thoughtful critique and meaningful revision as the pilot progresses and the new system is being shaped. Unfortunately, ATPE is already receiving some feedback from the field that the pre-pilot communications effort may be lacking. This is particularly problematic because the general stress levels within the education profession are high and the general trust level toward the agency is low, particularly because of poor rollouts of programs such as the Texas Reading Academies and the HB 4545 accelerated learning requirements. If TTAP is to reach its full potential, the agency must improve its collaboration and build trust with Texas educators.

Recommendations from the 2016 Commission on Next Generation Assessments and Accountability

ATPE has identified the following three recommendations for the final report of the Commission on Next Generation Assessments and Accountability as recommendations that are both promising and not yet fully pursued that we would encourage the Legislature to continue to work toward. They are:

- Studying alternative district-based assessment and accountability systems.
- Studying, using existing data, the relationship between the results of stratified, random sampling and whole-population testing.
- Studying the effect of weighting Domain I (Student Achievement) by the length of time a student has been enrolled in a Texas public school district.

Each of these concepts has the potential to reduce the reduce the burdensome nature of the accountability system on Texas students and educators and to create a more accurate and responsive system that could improve educators' ability to meet the needs of individual students.

ATPE appreciates this opportunity to provide feedback. Please contact ATPE Governmental Relations at (800) 777-2873 or government@atpe.org for any additional information.