



ATPE Input on HB 4

Regarding testing and accountability

April 29, 2025

The **Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE)** offers the following input in support of HB 4 by Chairman Buckley:

ATPE appreciates the considerable work that has gone into the committee substitute of this bill. The committee substitute is a much improved bill that aligns more closely with the author's stated goal for the legislation.

High-Stakes Testing

ATPE has consistently advocated for a reduction in testing as part of our Legislative Program, which is developed and voted on by our members. We very much appreciate that this bill is reducing testing to the federally-mandated minimum, and we particularly appreciate the trigger provision that automatically reduces testing if federal requirements reduce. Additionally, the through-year provisions and the limits on the time spent taking these exams are much needed and will allow schools to not have to shut down for the day to test. These are important steps toward lowering the temperature around high-stakes standardized testing in Texas.

With regard to benchmarks, if we are going to have a state level through-year testing system, we see no reason to continue to allow districts to also conduct benchmark assessments not used for formative or local grading purposes.

Additionally, with regard to moving to a norm-referenced test, it is important to note that norm-referenced testing is a way to evaluate a student's performance by comparing it to the performance of other students. The goal is to see where a student stands in relation to a group, not necessarily whether they have mastered specific skills or knowledge. For example, if 100 students take the same math test, and Student A scores 85, Student B scores 92, and Student C scores 70, their results are ranked rather than judged by a fixed standard. Student B might be in the top 10%, Student A in the top 25%, and Student C below average—not because of the specific scores they earned, but based on how they performed relative to everyone else. This type of test answers the question, "How did you do compared to others?" This does not reflect our goal as a state of testing mastery of material, and can be harmful to students' overall growth and self-esteem.

The Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE) is the leading educator association in Texas and has been a strong voice for Texas educators since 1980. With its strong collaborative philosophy, ATPE speaks for classroom teachers, administrators, future, retired and para-educators and works to create better opportunities for the more than 5 million Texas public schoolchildren. ATPE is the ally and the voice of Texas public school educators.

Accountability

We appreciate the efforts in the bill to give districts and educators advanced notice and predictability in how assessment data will be scored/translated into state ratings and the efforts to add efforts to add longitudinally by encouraging long stretches under the same rubric.

While one of the stated goals of HB 4 is to have “instructionally supportive” testing, the accountability system continues to be punitive in nature. It is hard to imagine an assessment system that does all of the things listed in the bill as instructionally supportive and also drives a punitive accountability framework. To be clear, when we say punitive, we do not mean simple reporting of assessment results. Public schools welcome accountability, and we agree that we owe parents and voters information regarding student progress. That said, the continued ability of the state to threaten state takeover, among other things, is punitive and not instructionally supportive, nor is it helpful to districts as they implement an overhauled testing system. The legislature has very clearly said in SB2 what they do with that information is up to them individually. We should optimally find ways to support struggling students and campuses, but we should not try to punish them into compliance. Again, as was stated through SB 2, parents are the individual arbiters of student success and if they don’t like the progress their child is making based on the data presented to them, they are free to explore other options. **For these reasons, we would recommend that the Legislature pause the punitive aspects of the accountability system for 3-5 years following roll out of this legislation, and simply report both absolute numbers and growth.**

Section 8

We would recommend amending line 14 on page 19 to say, “parents, and, as necessary, business and industry representatives.” This would require the commissioner to consult with educators and parents on adopting standards (and business and industry representatives, when necessary, such as with CTE) without allowing the commissioner to determine that consultation generally is not necessary. If we are going to use a nationally norm-referenced test, such as MAP, the commissioner should also need to explain how the state standard is aligned to the individual assessment scoring as set by the assessment vendor.

Section 13

While we are not opposed to expedited judicial review in theory we are mindful that our court dockets are very full and generally with litigation on high priority issues it does not seem like good justifiable policy to have testing jump the line ahead of all other priority issues on the courts docket. Likely the provisions of this bill with regard to stability and advance notice will address many of the issues districts were concerned about, especially if the provision on consultation is tightened up. **Therefore we would recommend removing section 13 as unnecessary.**

Section 14

While we wholeheartedly agree with eliminating the required Social Studies tests, and in fact think we should save the expense of creating an optional one, we would suggest that schools have and will continue to have amazing programs in all four core curriculum areas, including Social Studies, that have nothing to do with testing and are worthy of recognition through a distinction. **We would therefore encourage the legislature to instead of removing the Social Studies distinction require the agency to develop (with the input of stakeholders) distinction criteria that are not reliant on state standardized testing.**

For additional information, contact ATPE Governmental Relations at (800) 777-2873 or government@atpe.org.