



Input on SB 1962

Relating to public school accountability and challenging the operations of the public school system

April 1, 2025

The **Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE)** offers the following input on **Senate Bill (SB) 1962** by Sen. Paul Bettencourt.

ATPE is deeply committed to supporting student success, improving instructional quality, and advocating for a fair and equitable public school system. While we support meaningful accountability and assessment reform, SB 1962 includes sweeping changes that raise significant questions about fairness, transparency, educator voice, and local governance. We respectfully express our concerns regarding this legislation. ATPE supports accountability measures that are transparent, valid, and used constructively to improve schools; unfortunately, this bill as filed seeks to silence valid concerns about the implementation of the A–F accountability system and imposes punitive consequences on school districts that exercised their legal rights to protect their students and communities.

SB 1962 would bar school districts from using public funds to legally challenge the state—even when they believe a state action is unlawful or damaging to their educational mission. This restriction infringes on the legal rights of locally elected school boards and their responsibility to advocate on behalf of their students and taxpayers. Litigation is not taken lightly by school leaders. The most recent lawsuits regarding the A-F accountability system were a direct response to sudden and significant changes in the accountability system, implemented with minimal notice and shifting metrics. The districts sought clarity and fairness, not evasion of accountability.

ATPE is especially concerned about the bill's provisions that would impose retroactive sanctions or governance changes based on ratings that were never formally issued. This sets a dangerous precedent. School improvement efforts should be based on actual, transparent performance data—not speculative determinations. Using hypothetical or delayed ratings to trigger sanctions erodes trust in the system and places undue blame on local schools rather than fostering meaningful improvement.

Prohibiting appeals and restricting judicial review of state actions severely limits the ability of educators, parents, and communities to hold the system accountable. Rather than building trust, these provisions create a climate of fear and coercion. The accountability system must be subject to public oversight, especially when its rules are unclear, its changes abrupt, and its consequences severe.

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.

Although SB 1962 includes a grant program to support local accountability systems, that effort is undermined by the broader tone of the legislation. True accountability should be collaborative, reflecting both state standards and locally driven priorities. Schools thrive when accountability systems are rooted in student growth, educator support, and community engagement, not top-down mandates and legal threats.

ATPE respectfully asks the committee to consider taking the following actions:

- Delaying implementation of any major accountability changes until they can be introduced transparently and with sufficient time for districts to prepare.
- Preserving due process by maintaining school districts' ability to legally challenge state decisions they believe to be unlawful or harmful.
- Focusing on support, not sanctions, particularly in the wake of the pandemic, which continues to affect student learning and educator capacity.
- Engaging educators and local leaders in the design of accountability systems to ensure they reflect classroom realities and support continuous improvement.

Texas educators believe in accountability—but not in a system that penalizes good-faith efforts to ensure fairness, silences local voices, and retroactively punishes districts based on a flawed and shifting process. ATPE urges you to reconsider the punitive and anti-democratic provisions in SB 1962 and instead work toward a system that builds trust, fosters collaboration, and centers student success. We look forward to working with you to improve this bill. For additional information, contact ATPE Governmental Relations at (800) 777-2873 or government@atpe.org.