



Comments on SB 8

Regarding testing and accountability

Aug. 6, 2025

The Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE) offers the following input on Senate Bill (SB) 8 by Sen. Paul Bettencourt:

ATPE has consistently advocated for a reduction in state standardized testing as part of our ATPE Legislative Program, which is developed and voted on annually by our members. While we appreciate the Legislature's willingness to discuss assessment and accountability reform, SB 8 falls short of delivering the meaningful changes that are urgently needed.

SB 8 proposes replacing the STAAR test in name only with a new "instructionally supportive assessment program" (ISAP). However, the bill does not address the central issues with high-stakes testing that have caused widespread frustration and harm. In fact, SB 8 risks compounding those problems by creating a new assessment structure that may increase the volume of testing without pausing the state's punitive accountability system, which would remain tethered to test performance. True to its name, ISAP may indeed sap even more precious instructional time.

The bill mandates three rounds of assessments each year (beginning, middle, and end-of-year) in multiple subjects and grade levels. While this is framed as a means of measuring growth and supporting instruction, the increased testing frequency, particularly in grades 3 through 8, raises serious concerns about lost instructional time and the continued overemphasis on standardized testing. SB 8 attempts to limit local benchmark testing, but as currently drafted, its exceptions allowing the use of alternative assessments as benchmarks risks creating a parallel system of assessments layered on top of the state tests. This directly undermines the stated goal of reducing test-related disruption in classrooms.

Moreover, SB 8 would not only fail to include a pause in accountability consequences during the transition to the new assessment system, but also it would reach back in time to enforce punitive accountability on schools for years in which they were not rated. The state should not be seeking to reach into the past to enact punitive measures, nor should students, educators, and schools be sanctioned based on results from a testing framework that has yet to be designed, piloted, or validated. The absence of a multi-year pause while rolling out a new and

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.

unvetted system would force schools to navigate high-stakes accountability during a period of uncertainty, experimentation, and inevitable adjustment. This is not only unfair but also irresponsible. Educators cannot support a bill that preserves the same pressures under a new name without even allowing time to ensure the new system works as intended. We recommend the Legislature stop and reevaluate what parents and teachers are really asking for regarding testing and accountability reform and then pause the punitive aspects of the accountability system—while maintaining reporting—following the rollout and vetting of any new system.

While SB 8 includes mechanisms for teacher review of test items and establishes an advisory committee on accountability standards, those provisions, unfortunately, fall short of the robust, sustained stakeholder engagement that true reform demands. Educators and parents must have a formal and ongoing role in the design, implementation, and revision of both assessments and accountability metrics. A temporary advisory group dominated by legislators and with a limited scope does not meet this standard. ATPE recommends the creation of a permanent Texas Education Agency (TEA) advisory committee on testing and accountability that includes classroom teachers, parents of public school students, organizations representing educators, and other stakeholders with a direct connection to public school students. We recommend amending the bill to include “parents, and, as necessary, business and industry representatives” to ensure educators and parents are not sidelined in favor of industry interests in the standard-setting process.

ATPE also questions the need to curtail local districts’ ability to challenge what they view as administrative misuse or abuse of the accountability system, including in instances where the agency is acting with a lack of statutory authority. It seems reckless to effectively hand the commissioner a blank check by disallowing districts and charters either temporary relief from or a venue to test the validity of the commissioner’s self-proclaimed authority to take action when that action would directly and often negatively impact them and their students. Districts should have the right to challenge ratings based on a potentially flawed implementation of the accountability system in court because locally elected school boards, chosen by the same voters who elect their state legislators, are entrusted to represent their communities and make budgetary and educational decisions based on local needs and priorities.

At its core, SB 8 is a great example of why testing for the sake of school accountability ratings is incompatible with educationally useful diagnostic testing. To be “fair” for accountability purposes, a test must be strictly limited to grade-level and state expectations, as is prescribed by one part of SB 8. It also must be administered only after content has been delivered to the students who are being tested, but it also must exclude from testing those students whose needs for modification make the test an inaccurate tool for determining whether a school has

reasonably delivered an appropriate education to that student. This type of test may give policy makers and the broader community one view, albeit an incomplete view, of the health of the public school system, but it does little to address educators' and parents' need for deeper information on individual students. That kind of deeper diagnostic assessment, one that serves learning, requires a broader view. Its goal is not to determine if the system is ensuring the average student has a grasp of grade-level state standards, but it is instead meant to test individual students' limits and depth of knowledge on both the high and low ends. It must by default go outside the bounds of the grade level in determining where each student is on their educational journey. It should inform instruction, provide timely and useful feedback to educators, and support students, which it cannot fully do if it is also used as a punitive instrument. The dynamic adaptive nature of good diagnostic testing and the statically standardized nature of meaningful accountability testing are mutually exclusive, yet SB 8 calls for one test to accomplish both things. Beyond simply testing, true accountability should also attempt to reflect the full picture of student growth, school climate, community context, and educator impact, not reduce an entire campus to a single, overly simplified rating based largely on one narrowly focused metric.

SB 8 is not ready to move forward. It does not reduce testing in practice. It calls for the design of a new test that is internally conflicted. It does not pause high-stakes consequences. It does not empower educators and parents with a true voice in the process. With the clock ticking on this brief special session and such limited time for constituents to weigh in, we respectfully urge the Legislature to slow down and get this right. Texas public school students deserve more than a rushed rebranding of STAAR. They deserve a thoughtful, collaborative, and student-centered approach to assessment and accountability that restores trust and puts teaching and learning first. ATPE stands ready to work with lawmakers and other stakeholders on a real solution to address the flaws of STAAR and our current accountability system.

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