



The Texas School Alliance is a superintendent-led education organization comprised of 50 school districts across the State of Texas representing over 2.3 million Texas public school students.

Dear Members of the Texas Legislature:

House Bill 4 presents a generational opportunity to make needed, overdue reforms and improvements to student assessment and accountability in Texas. The bill responds to concerns that parents, educators, and elected officials have long expressed regarding the STAAR test and how it is used. The bill also provides a more accurate, complete evaluation of school performance in the A-F ratings system.

Chairman Brad Buckley put this bill together with thought and with considerable input. He listened to parents and created a working group of superintendents and accountability experts to provide feedback. These practitioners deeply understand the details of our current system and, for years, have seen ways that it could better serve students and communities. The unanimous 13-0 vote of support that this legislation received in the House Public Education Committee affirmed Chairman Buckley's good work.

There are some special interest groups and respected organizations who want to protect the status quo and have shared information criticizing House Bill 4. It is important to set the record straight and explain how House Bill 4 would make meaningful improvements for Texas students. Above all, it would maintain rigor and improve transparency in the system.

Legislators from both parties have long criticized the STAAR exam and its use in our public schools. House Bill 4 would replace STAAR in grades 3-8 with shorter norm-referenced tests given at the beginning, middle, and end of the school year. These are the same tests that the Texas Legislature now requires students receiving state-funded private school vouchers to take. The new tests will assess the state standards (which is required by law), emphasize instructional growth, and serve parents and teachers much more effectively by producing real-time results that can be integrated into an individual student's instruction immediately; not 4-6 weeks later when it is too late for teachers to adapt how and what a student is learning. In an age of highly sophisticated technology, there is no reason that students and their families should have to wait so long to get test results.

House Bill 4 would increase the percentage of a school's A-F overall rating that depends on student performance. In other words, students' knowledge and skills would play an even bigger role in determining the letter grade ratings. A small part of the rating for elementary and middle schools would include new factors, such as workforce preparedness, early childhood literacy, advanced learners, and quality teacher development. All of these factors will better reflect a school's overall performance. The new indicators in the ratings system also reflect priorities expressed by the Legislature.



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Over the last several years, A-F ratings have been delayed by lawsuits based on legitimate concerns about how the Texas Education Agency was not following state law and arbitrarily changing criteria in calculating the high-stakes ratings. House Bill 4 provides a way to resolve such lawsuits more quickly while assuring ratings will be released each year. It also requires that there will be greater transparency and clarity in how ratings criteria are set and gives elected legislators a needed voice in changing criteria — rather than such changes just being left to the agency.

House Bill 4 would facilitate the testing-and-accountability reform that Texas needs. Shorter tests provide more instructional time for students and teachers. Teachers would have results more quickly so they could use those results to address student learning needs. And the accountability system would become both more rigorous and more comprehensive. Our legislators should not miss this rare opportunity to deliver the reforms and improvements to the system that Texas parents — and many legislators themselves, from both parties — have long sought.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'HD Chambers'.

Mr. HD Chambers, Executive Director
Texas School Alliance