

**SUBJECT:** Reducing STAAR testing and related performance requirements

**COMMITTEE:** Public Education — committee substitute recommended

**VOTE:** 12 ayes — Huberty, Bernal, Allen, Allison, Ashby, K. Bell, Dutton, K. King, Meyer, Sanford, Talarico, VanDeaver

0 nays

1 absent — M. González

**WITNESSES:** For —Molley Perry, College Station ISD; Christi Morgan, Sunnyvale ISD, Texas Association of School Administrators; Jennifer Stratton; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Andrea Chevalier, Association of Texas Professional Educators; Chris Masey, Coalition of Texans with Disabilities; Jane McFarland, League of Women Voters of Texas; Colby Nichols, Leander ISD; Kristi Hassett, Sheri Hicks, and Theresa Trevino, Texans Advocating For Meaningful Student Assessments; Dwight Harris, Texas American Federation of Teachers; Barry Haenisch, Texas Association of Community Schools; Amy Beneski, Texas Association of School Administrators; Mark Terry, Texas Elementary Principals and Supervisors Association (TEPSA); Jerod Patterson, Texas Rural Education Association; Dee Carney, Texas School Alliance; Lisa Dawn-Fisher, Texas State Teachers Association; Michelle Cavazos, Texas Urban Council and Texas Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents; Sheri Doss, Texas PTA; and seven individuals)

Against — None

On — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Steven Aleman, Disability Rights Texas; Eleanor Sanford Moore and Anne Schiano, MetaMetrics, Inc.; Jamie Crowe and Monica Martinez, Texas Education Agency; Daphne Hoffacker; Michael Lopez)

**BACKGROUND:** Education Code sec. 39.023 requires Texas public school students be assessed annually in grades 3 through 8 in reading and math; in grades 4

and 7 in writing; in grade 8 in social studies, and in grades 5 and 8 in science. High school students are required to take end-of-course exams in Algebra I, biology, English I and II, and U.S. history. The current testing program is known as the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness, or STAAR.

Education Code sec. 28.0211 contains requirements for students in grades 5 and 8 to be retained in those grades if they do not perform satisfactorily on their reading and math exams unless a grade placement committee unanimously recommends they be promoted to the next grade.

**DIGEST:**

CSHB 1480 would reduce STAAR testing requirements, eliminate a requirement that students pass certain exams in order to be promoted, and revise requirements for accelerated learning for students who had failed their exams.

**Testing and accountability.** CSHB 1480 would eliminate the state-mandated STAAR exam for grade 8 social studies and the high school U.S. history end-of-course (EOC) exam. It also would eliminate a requirement that students in grades 5 and 8 pass their STAAR reading and math exams in order to be promoted to the next grade.

The bill would repeal a requirement that the Texas Education Agency (TEA) adopt or develop exams for Algebra II and English II that a district may choose to administer.

The education commissioner, with input from school districts, would have to adopt a STAAR testing calendar that minimized classroom disruption and maximized available instruction time by scheduling the spring testing to occur as close to the end of the semester as possible, but not later than the second week of May.

CSHB 1480 would add the Texas Success Initiative diagnostic assessment to the list of college entrance exams that could be used to satisfy the EOC requirement in an equivalent course. The commissioner would be required to designate a student's performance on a substitute exam as "masters

grade-level performance" if the student's performance would earn college credit or met the exam provider's designated grade-level college readiness benchmark. The bill would require the commissioner to adopt a rule that determined a method for appropriately crediting such a student for growth under the school accountability system.

**Accelerated instruction.** The bill would replace the system of grade placement committees required for students in grade 5 and 8 after their second unsuccessful attempt to pass STAAR reading or math exams. Schools would be required to form accelerated learning committees for students in grades 3, 5, and 8 after the student's initial failure to perform satisfactorily on STAAR reading or math exams.

The committee would have to develop an educational plan for the student that provided the necessary accelerated instruction to enable the student to perform at the appropriate grade level by the conclusion of the subsequent school year. Parents would be notified about the committee.

If a student failed to perform satisfactorily the following year on an exam in the same subject, the district superintendent or the superintendent's designee would have to meet with the student's committee to identify the reason for the student's failure and determine whether to modify the student's educational plan and require additional resources to ensure the student performed satisfactorily on the exam at the next testing opportunity.

A district board of trustees would be required to adopt a policy for the establishment of accelerated learning committees. The policy would have to specify:

- the composition of a committee and its frequency of meetings;
- the agenda and purpose of meetings, including whether the committee would consider a student's grades, attendance, behavior, disciplinary measures, vision, and social-emotional health;
- the objectives and goals of educational plans for providing the

- necessary accelerated instruction to the student; and
- methods for measuring the efficiency of the accelerated instruction.

For a student in a special education program, the school board would have to determine whether the student's admission, review, and dismissal committee would serve as the accelerated learning committee and whether to include a response-to-intervention approach in administering the student's educational plan.

The board-developed policy would have to require that, to the extent practicable, school personnel would remain assigned to a student's accelerated learning committee during the entire period the student was receiving accelerated instruction. A district superintendent or campus principal would not be required to serve on a committee.

The requirement for accelerated instruction for students who fail their STAAR exams in grades 3 through 8 could be provided during the subsequent school year. The bill would remove the requirement for districts to report the percentage of students promoted through the grade placement committee process and require them to report how those students performed on their assessments in the subsequent school year.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2019. It would apply beginning with the 2019-2020 school year.

**SUPPORTERS  
SAY:**

CSHB 1480 would improve the STAAR testing system by eliminating some exams and easing some of the high stakes associated with the exams. Many educators and parents have lost confidence in the assessments after some studies concluded that STAAR exams are unfairly testing students at reading levels higher than their current grade. While not a direct reaction to those concerns, CSHB 1480 would provide a measured and long-needed approach to restoring confidence in state standardized testing.

Eliminating the eighth grade social studies and high school U.S. history end-of-course exams would save Texas millions of dollars and bring the state's testing system closer to the minimum federal requirements. Though students will no longer have to take these exams, civics education will continue to be an important part of the required curriculum.

The bill also would allow for maximum classroom instruction time by moving the exams closer to the end of the school year.

The bill also would lower the stakes for students in the fifth and eighth grades by eliminating requirements that they pass STAAR reading and math exams in order to be promoted to the next grade. Educators would still be able to retain a student in the same grade if they decided doing so would best serve the student.

CSHB 1480 would refocus the school committees formed to help a struggling student on developing a plan and a realistic time frame to bring the student up to the appropriate grade level by the end of the next school year. These changes could lessen student retesting and the harmful effects that can occur when a student has to repeat a grade.

Local school boards would structure the new accelerated learning committees to best serve the educational needs of each student rather than trying to fit each student into a statewide mold. This would better allow local schools to take a holistic look at factors such as poor eyesight that could be affecting a student's academic performance. Expanding the use of these committees to students in third grade would ensure early intervention and support for struggling students.

Allowing districts to use the Texas Success Initiative to show that high school students are college ready would be a cost effective alternative to national tests like the SAT and ACT.

**OPPONENTS  
SAY:**

CSHB 1480 would marginalize social studies instruction by removing testing requirements in eighth grade and high school. Instead of

eliminating tests in social studies and U.S. history, the state should work to improve the exams to emphasize critical thinking skills that can help students better understand and evaluate historical narratives.

Removing some of the consequences for students who fail their STAAR exams could provide an incentive for some students to neglect their exams. In addition, socially promoting struggling students might put them further behind their classmates in the next grade.

NOTES:

According to the Legislative Budget Board, CSHB 1480 would have a positive impact on general revenue related funds of \$5.4 million through the biennium ending August 31, 2021. The estimated savings would come through the elimination of certain testing requirements.