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Education/Talent Development Committee Member

Testimony on HB 2236 and SB 1031

Key Points:

- Accountability systems are a management tool that changes behaviors to reach desired outcomes
- Good accountability systems focus the attention on a “handful” of the most important metrics
- Strategic planning based on accountability informs all the constituents about progress toward desired outcomes
- Higher college-readiness and matriculation into college are required by the Austin business community to support current and future employment needs
- We need better ways to track student progress toward college readiness by high school graduation
- Since the inception of assessment testing in Texas Public Schools, much progress has been made across all ethnicities
- Final bill should ensure that any potential new accountability systems are fully thought through publicly before eliminating high-stakes exit testing.

Accountability requires commitment on the part of students, parents, teachers and the administration. My parents could lecture me about how I ought to behave or how well I should do in school or whose company I ought to keep. But when my parents and teachers held me accountable, my behavior changed. Business accountability systems are fundamentally no different. All the participants, team members, and managerial levels play a key role in its success. None can be left out of the solution.

| We can measure many things in education just as we do in business. What we hold our schools accountable for determines what we consider to be most important as decision-makers. Accountability is simply a part of performance management.

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In management of any organization, we pick a small number of outcomes that matter most and have the biggest impact. We plan so as to focus our energy, resources and talent on improving or maintaining them. We ask how often to measure and how those preliminary results will change behavior today to meet the desired outcome and, ultimately, the primary mission of the organization.

If we believe metrics are so important, several layers of management need to get involved to accomplish the mission. This is demonstrated in many industries. Senior management asks a site manager, “if we’re here today, where will we be in six months based up current strategies?” In six months, senior management can ask the site manager, “what did we do right, what do we need to do better to meet these goals?” Our current accountability system based on assessment testing has demonstrated changes in behavior and in outcomes. When the exit tests did not count for high school graduation, only 47% of Austin ISD’s Class of 2004 passed all sections. In 2005, when TAKS was required for graduation, 85% passed all four sections. Part of the performance gains were due to the motivation of students and their parents who know a test has high-stakes; part has to do with principals directing talent and resources to students, and most assuredly the dedicated teachers who engage with these students daily. That is not to say that this system is perfect or has had no unintended consequences; but clearly it has contributed to higher assessment outcomes.

The Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce believes that readiness for college and the high-performance workplace – and actually enrolling in college– is very, very important. Last November, several of our CEOs kicked off the Chamber’s 20,010 in 2010 effort, to increase higher education enrollment from our region by 30% over 48 months. Post-secondary completion is the gateway to good jobs, promotions and innovation. College and career readiness and post-secondary enrollment and success should be primary goals in any accountability system, since all businesses are part of the primary beneficiaries of an educated workforce.

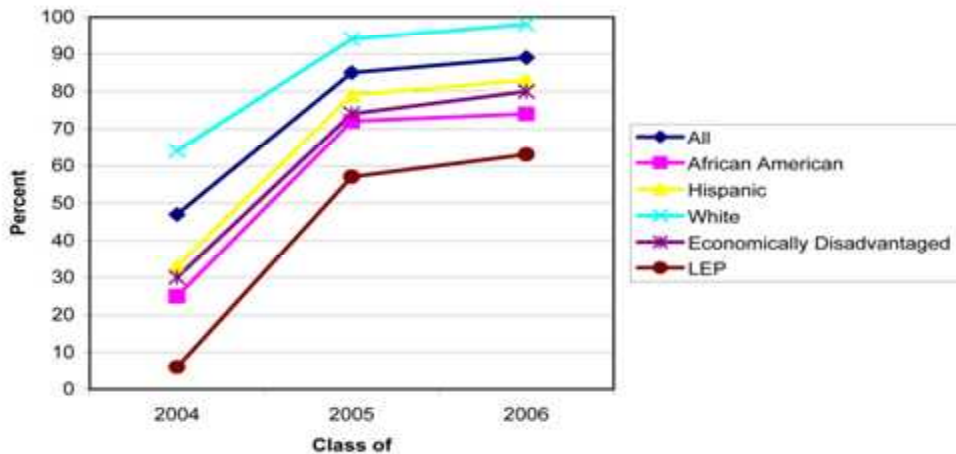
What is your goal: college and career readiness or classroom effectiveness? In business, we would say both. The economic future of Texas requires an educated workforce to sustain and meet the next generational demands of the workplace. Ninety percent of the fastest growing jobs in the U.S. now require some post-secondary education. And more and more, the knowledge and skills required to be successful in college or in any career path are equally demanding.

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The business community certainly must participate in the definition of desired educational outcomes. We ask that business leaders across the state join in that work. But, which system of testing and accountability best suits the mission? That debate will continue and will be vetted by educators, legislators, and business leaders.

What we ask is that accountability and assessment testing continue to play a key role in the Texas Public School Systems. We can see educational progress from the current system. It is not perfect. But don’t be tempted to roll out of what we have before we understand what changes we would want from a new system and how best to achieve them. What is critical is that the education requirements in all grade levels must have sequence, rigor, and relevance, and that education is effectively aligned to allow students to be college- and career-ready as they finish high school. The confidence instilled in this new generation of young, educated Texans will rival the world we compete in.

Cumulative Pass Rate on Exit TAKS (All Sections)



Conclusion

Texas businesses require a broad range of skills, and high performance jobs require someone who graduates high school academically ready for post-secondary learning through a well-rounded curriculum with rigor. Graduates need to be effective communicators, problem solvers, and leaders for tomorrow. They must be curious, life long learners.

We believe that without rigor, relevance, and feedback mechanisms in place that focus on the student, achievement weakens. Accountability systems can and should strengthen the resolve of those in the education process: the student, the parents, the teacher, and the administration. They should be in place for students, teachers, and schools. The results allow for strategic goal setting, public discussion on improvement and gaps, and transparency of results for future consideration.