



FORT DAVIS INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

P.O. Box 1339
Fort Davis, TX 79734

March 6, 2023

The Honorable Eddie Morales
Texas House of Representatives
EXT E1.212
PO Box 2910
Austin, TX 78768

The Honorable Cesar Blanco
Texas Senate
CAP GE. 7
PO Box 12068, Capitol Station
Austin, TX 78711

Dear Representative Morales and Senator Blanco,

Over the past several months, the Texas Education Agency has been working on an “A-F Accountability Refresh” to roll out with the 2023 Accountability Ratings. The TEA states that the purpose of the refresh is to “refocus on goals that directly address post-pandemic student needs” and to “allow Texas to leverage lessons learned over the last five years to improve the rigor, transparency, and fairness of the accountability system.”

These are certainly admirable goals. However, we write today with significant concerns regarding the proposed update to the College, Career, and Military Readiness (“CCMR”) cut scores as part of the refresh and the fact that the TEA has chosen to implement this refresh at the same time as another major change, the redesigned STAAR exam. **Today, nearly 250 districts across the state with enrollment ranging from less than 100 to over 100,000 and collectively responsible for educating more than 2.7 million Texas students, sent a letter to the Governor and Commissioner requesting that the TEA pause its planned refresh so that the legislature can reevaluate the accountability system holistically.** We ask that you add your voice to this request and urge the Commissioner to allow the legislature to review the need for increased rigor in the accountability system, rather than making drastic changes himself.

The TEA proposes to raise the cut score necessary for a high school to receive an “A” in the CCMR domain from a 60 to an 88, a nearly 47% increase in one year and apply this increased cut score to students who graduated in 2022. Districts no longer have any influence over the performance of those students, and it is unreasonable to apply new standards retroactively, particularly because these students will not benefit from the “improve[d] rigor, transparency, and fairness [of] the accountability system.”

According to materials published by the TEA, the newly proposed cut score was set for two primary reasons: 1) too many schools are performing above the 60 point threshold; and 2) 68% of students who are deemed college, career, or military ready, sustain postsecondary success one year after graduation.

The TEA states that one of the goals of the A-F Accountability System as a whole is to ensure that no forced distribution exists and that all schools have the opportunity to achieve an A rating. As a result, it is perplexing that the TEA would use the justification that too many schools are receiving an A for CCMR to raise the cut score.

Additionally, the fact that only 68% of students who are deemed college, career, or military ready are sustaining postsecondary success one year after graduation suggests that either the components used by the TEA to measure



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such readiness are inadequate, or that issues in higher education may be hindering otherwise prepared students from succeeding. Both of these likely play a role in this issue. For example, the TEA emphasizes a certain list of “industry-based certifications,” however, many of those certifications are not truly of value in the workforce. But because the TEA emphasizes those certifications, many schools feel compelled to spend resources promoting them instead of focusing on other potential opportunities for students to become prepared for postsecondary success.

These significant changes to the cut score for CCMR will have drastic impacts to school ratings across Texas.

The A-F system was designed to make it easier for the public to understand how schools are truly performing. But increasing the cut score for an A for CCMR by almost 47% in a single year will create the misconception that high performing schools are drastically declining, even if their CCMR performance actually improved. In the midst of a teacher shortage, the last thing school districts need is another false narrative that drives a wedge between schools and the families they serve. No public relations campaign from the TEA will be adequate to combat the misperception that our schools are suddenly worse than they were last year.

House Bill 977 would create an Assessment and Accountability Commission to fully review the current system and make recommendations regarding improvements to how we measure success and communicate school performance to parents. The legislature has used the commission model with great success to address other complex issues over the past few sessions and should apply this same model to the A-F Accountability System.

Moving forward with the planned refresh is irresponsible as it will cause significant confusion among the community, put increased pressure on teachers and other staff who are already at their breaking point, and wrest the policy decisions of how we should hold our schools accountable away from the elected representatives of the people leaving them in the hands of unelected bureaucrats.

We ask that you urge the TEA to pause its accountability refresh and allow the legislature to examine the system and make the policy determinations of what Texans expect from their schools, as you were elected to do.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Graydon Hicks III". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Graydon Hicks III
Superintendent
Fort Davis ISD