

# 2019-20

# LEGISLATOR'S GUIDE to the Issues

## A-F Accountability

### The Issue

Texas' student reading and math results are lackluster and declining. According to the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR), 55% of Texas third-graders are reading below grade level and 52% are doing math below grade-level. Similarly, according to the April 2018 Nation's Report Card (NAEP), Texas reading scores are some of the lowest in the nation and declining: Texas ranks 46th in fourth-grade reading (down from 40th in 2015). In addition, the achievement gaps between white and minority children are persistent and the state's economically disadvantaged population is increasing.

Most Texas students are assigned to their schools based on their ZIP code, with no meaningful choice in the matter. In a situation where school districts have a monopoly on education, it is imperative that parents understand academic outcomes, so that failing schools are identified for a quick turnaround. In addition, without accountability systems, vast differences in student performance between schools teaching economically disadvantaged students and wealthier student populations can grow undeterred over time, and there is no consistent way to compare public schools across Texas.

HB 22 (2017) created Texas' new A-F Accountability System, which is a first-of-its-kind method for determining academic performance and improving and comparing student outcomes. Starting in August 2018, each district will get an A, B, C, D, or F rating. Starting in August 2019, each individual campus will also get a rating. The system will allow parents, students, taxpayers, policymakers, and educators to:

- Understand how schools and groups of students compare across Texas.
- Provide incentive for improvement in student performance to go from D or F to A or B ratings.
- Recognize schools with high levels of student performance so that best practices can replicate.
- Identify D- and F-rated schools so that turnaround efforts can be deployed to help students.
- Measure if economically disadvantaged and minority students are progressing.
- Determine whether statewide, district, and campus student performance are getting better or worse over time.

Texas' A-F Accountability System is thoughtfully designed and transparent. The new system:

- Uses easy-to-understand and meaningful A-F letter grades for districts and schools.
- Allows for a school district to design its own "local" campus accountability ratings.
- Relies in part on the STAAR test, which is developed with Texas teachers and is the only assessment that allows for statewide, uniform student performance measurement and growth comparisons.

- Provides that all school districts and schools can earn an A grade. There is no forced bell curve.
- Will remain the same for at least five years so that school districts and campuses that improve will receive higher grades over time. (This assumes no significant legislative changes.)

Previous accountability systems sometimes gave schools with high levels of economically disadvantaged students poor ratings mainly based on raw STAAR passage rates. However, Texas' new system gives credit for student growth. Even if a campus has many students who do not attain grade level STAAR performance, the campus can still earn an A, if students are learning and progressing.

### The Facts

- Despite taxpayers investing \$114 billion each biennium on public education, Texas' student results are poor and declining.
- The fundamental obligation of our schools is to teach children to read and do math. Parents, students, taxpayers, and educators have a right to know whether their schools are teaching students to read and do math at grade level.
- Texas' A-F Academic District and School Accountability System is fair, transparent, well-designed, and will improve student outcomes.
- Texas students often do not have a choice as to where to attend school. Poor-performing schools should be identified and turned around.

### Recommendation

Transparently and fairly hold school districts and campuses responsible for improving students' results using Texas' new A-F Accountability System adopted in HB 22 (2017).

### Resources

["Texas Public Education Outcomes,"](#) Testimony of Texas Commissioner of Education Mike Morath, Senate Higher Education Committee (April 25, 2018).

["The Big Idea of School Accountability"](#) by William McKenzie and Sandy Kress, George W. Bush Institute (Feb. 2015).

[House Bill 22 Overview,](#) Texas Education Agency (June 2017).

["House Bill 22, Implementation of A-F Accountability,"](#) Testimony of Texas Commissioner of Education Mike Morath, House Public Education Committee (April 18, 2018).

"NAEP 2017 Mathematics and Reading Results," NAEP Texas (April 2018). Available at the Texas Education Agency.

["Nation's report card: 'Something very good is happening in Florida'"](#) by Leslie Postal, *Orlando Sentinel* (April 10, 2018).

["Texas Public Education Outcomes,"](#) Presentation by Texas Commissioner of Education Mike Morath, Texas Commission on Public School Finance (Jan. 23, 2018).