

Participation and Success Committee Meeting

AGENDA ITEM I

Public hearing on Uniform GPA proposed rules

Public Testimony Transcription:

Jason Bullock

My name is Jason Bullock and I am the principal of Temple High School, a diverse, comprehensive, 5A school. I have served as an advance placement coordinator and an international baccalaureate coordinator, and as an IB history teacher. I have also taught as an adjunct at the college level. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you on behalf of our students who choose a more rigorous curriculum because they know it is the key to being prepared for college course work. In line with the Coordinating Board's Closing the Gap by 2015, we are working to raise the academic bar for our students, thereby changing their future and breaking the chains of generational poverty that keeps so many of our kids from even considering college. The key to this is increasing the number of students who are successful with rigorous course work. We must work together to provide incentives for students to choose rigor, and the earlier the better.

The proposal currently before the Board grants additional GPA weight to AP, IB, and dual credit courses, but does not grant weight to courses like Temple High School's pre-AP and IB courses that are taught at ninth and tenth grade. These ninth and tenth grade advanced academic courses are the foundation for the success our students realize during their junior and senior years in their AP, IB, and dual credit course work and exams. Currently, one-third of our ninth and tenth grade students take THS pre-IB and pre-AP classes. They are willing to take the risk rigorous classes pose to their GPA because we award weighted points to these classes. Encouraging rigor from the outset of high school is the key to success in raising the bar for all students. Our ninth and tenth grade teachers receive training from AP and IB in how best to lay the groundwork for student success. Research, writing, and analytical discussion skills are the standards for these courses. The target and evaluation of these standards are the courses and examinations that come during the junior and senior years. Our students, and especially those from underserved populations, must have a strong foundation to be successful. The state supports our ninth and tenth grade courses through its AP-IB incentive program, with a reimbursement of up to \$450 per teacher trained. Rigor is the key. We are using every tool to get more students to take rigorous courses as early as possible. If this Board tells students the foundation courses at grades nine and ten are unimportant, and do not merit GPA weight, students will choose to protect their class rank and there is no

way they will be prepared for the rigors of AP, IB, and dual credit. Under this scenario, the product of Texas public high schools will be a student who is less prepared for college. I encourage you to provide support to the foundation advanced academic courses like the THS pre-IB and pre-AP courses by granting them additional GPA weight, because this is central to setting high standards and preparing kids for a brighter future. Without a strong foundation in grades nine and ten, we cannot build the kind of college prep program our students deserve and need. Thank you for your time, and I appreciate you listening.

Ms. Bricker: Thank you very much, Mr. Bullock. I have been told by our attorney that we are not to deliberate, but if there are questions, we may ask a question. Alright, thank you very much. Next is Randy Pollock.

Randy Pollock

My name is Randy Pollock. I am the president of the Alamo Heights Independent School District Board of Trustees. I'll be focusing on the portion of the proposal involving the extra points allowed only for AP, IB, and dual credit, and not for GT, pre-AP, and honors courses. Members of the committee, we all want our children to reach up and take the most challenging courses that they can handle, however, the fact of the matter is that for a student who is stretching his or her abilities in taking rigorous courses, that student's grades in those courses will be lower than if he or she had just taken the correspondent regular courses – unless extra points are given to compensate for that grade disadvantage. Without those extra points, many, if not most, of those students, the students stretching their abilities, won't take those most rigorous courses because doing so without the extra points means suffering the penalty of a lower GPA.

To put it another way, if the course that is rigorous does not involve those extra points, you will lose lots of kids to the corresponding regular courses. It's that simple. It's important to note here that kids typically make the decision whether to pursue more rigorous courses on an academic path early in high school because it is hard to transition to the more rigorous courses later in your course work. The GT honors and pre-AP courses in question are typically in the freshman and sophomore years, and this is the critical time when these kids are making their choices. Not allowing those extra points for these courses will dissuade many students from ever heading down the path of a more challenging curriculum to begin with. The end result will be fewer students ultimately taking AP, IB, and dual credit courses, which means fewer students reaching higher. Allowing extra points only for AP, IB, and dual credit courses just won't be enough to avoid this. Of course, students at the very top of the class will likely keep taking GT honors and pre-AP courses even without the extra points for those courses. The students that will be hurt the most by disallowing the extra points will be the students for whom these courses are pretty challenging - the kids who are willing to reach up and realize their full potential. Many of those students just won't take the courses and risk a lower GPA. Finally, I'd like to point out that allowing the extra points for all the rigorous

courses will not detract from the goal of substantially normalizing class ranking across the state, as all the high schools will still be under the same GPA calculation rules. Therefore, the primary objective can be achieved without jeopardizing the level of participation in our challenging courses. Thank you for your time.

Ms. Bricker: Thank you very much. Questions? Mr. Heldenfels.

Mr. Heldenfels: I do have a question, and the same question for Mr. Bullock - do you know what percentage of high school students or freshman and sophomore students at Alamo Heights take pre-AP courses?

Mr. Pollock: It's a majority of them.

Mr. Bullock: About a third.

Mr. Heldenfels: And over 50 percent at Alamo Heights?

Mr. Pollock: Yes.

Ms. Bricker: Thank you, Mr. Pollock. Robert Floyd

Robert Floyd

Good morning. I'm Robert Floyd with the Texas Music Educators Association, and I also chair the Texas Coalition for Quality Arts Education. It's a coalition of 40 organizations who believe the arts are an integral part of the child's education in Texas. We were astonished this past week to read in several state newspaper articles that a spokesperson for the office of the Commissioner referred to high school Fine Arts courses as "non-academic," and thus, would not be included in the Uniform GPA calculation. AP, IB, and dual credit courses in Fine Arts, however, appear to be included in the section identifying weighted courses – and I apologize if I've misinterpreted that. Chapter 28 of the Texas Education Code includes Fine Arts as an academic subject of the required curriculum. In addition, all instruction in these subjects - including fine arts - must be TEKS or standards-based as a condition of accreditation. As I am sure you know, the Fine Arts are also included in the Core Academic Curriculum in the federal legislation, *No Child Left Behind*. In the College Board publication "Academic Preparation for College," the Fine Arts are included among the basic academic subjects, along with our four foundation subjects and languages other than English. The College Board states, "preparation in the arts will be valuable to college entrants whatever their intended field of study," and the publication goes into lengthy detail on the value of the arts in effective college work at the university level.

So it is perplexing to us then, in the current draft plan, that student grades for courses such as Yearbook, Newspaper, Speech, Debate, and Photojournalism would count; but Orchestra, Art History III (an advanced level course), Music Theory I or II, or an advanced course in Fine Arts in Photography, would not. This past school year, there were 640,000 Texas high school students in a TEA, state-approved, standards-based, Fine Arts course. Certainly, the Board does not intend to denigrate the hard

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work and academic accomplishments of those students, and I certainly hope the members of the Board do not want the state of Texas to go on record as the kind of state that fails to recognize that the study of music and other fine arts is an academic course of study. We urge the Board, then, to consider that all TEA-approved Fine Arts courses for which standards exist be counted in GPA calculations along with the weights in AP, IB, and dual credit courses that have been mentioned earlier. We would be glad to provide the Commissioner and the Board members with additional information, including TEKS standards for all our Fine Arts courses, if you so choose. Thank you very much for your time.

Ms. Bricker: Thank you very much. Commissioner?

Commissioner Paredes: I would love to get that information about arts courses.

Mr. Floyd: Okay. I'd be happy to provide it.

Commissioner: Thank you.

Ms. Bricker: Other questions? Thank you very much, Mr. Floyd.

Mr. Floyd: Thank you.

Ms. Bricker: Jim Wussow?

Jim Wussow

Good morning, my name is Jim Wussow. I am the Executive Director for Curriculum Instruction for the Plano schools. I have served in that role for a number of years, and I've had the privilege, in some ways I would say, of working with grade point issues over the last 20 years or so. Our district completed a fairly comprehensive review of the grade point issues about 15 years ago. I'd like to echo that many of the comments that were made before - we certainly agree with those. But, to me, the main issue that still is on the table is about pre-AP and pre-IB courses not being weighted.

What I would like to do is address some of the statements that existed on your website and in the handout that was just passed out this morning that talk to the reasons that you are considering to exclude pre-AP and pre-IB. First of all, it says that it is "not recognized by the College Board." Actually, the terms "pre-AP" and "pre-IB" came from the College Board. Prior to that, our district - and most districts - called those "honors" courses. So, certainly in the Dallas area, and around most of the state, most districts have "honors," or pre-AP or pre-IB courses that have standardization or uniform standards of rigor. These courses are all text-based, so there is definitely standardization. In our district, all of our courses in our course catalog - and especially honors courses - go through a district course review committee. So we go through a very rigorous process to assure that those courses meet a certain standard of rigor, and I can assure you that most districts go through a similar process. So a comment here that districts will simply add courses to get additional grade points - I really don't think that is a valid statement. However, I do agree with colleagues that have spoken before that whatever the grade point process is - grade points are very high stakes for students and parents, they don't just serve colleges and universities - they serve us in

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K-12 education as well. I really implore you to look at this thing of weighting pre-AP and pre-IB courses. It will have an impact on what students take. We have one of the largest AP programs in the country and in the state. We give more AP exams than probably most other districts in the state, and we're very concerned. We've had parents that are very concerned that their children will be encouraged to take a less rigorous path if those honors or pre-AP courses are not acknowledged in the grade point scheme. Thank you.

Ms. Bricker: Thank you very much. Are there any questions? Thank you, Mr. Wussow. Next is Dennis Cabaniss to be followed by Patrick Cates..

Dennis Cabaniss

Good morning. I appreciate the opportunity to address the Board and other interested parties. My name is Dennis Cabaniss. I have taught at Salado High School for 37 years. At one time or another, I have taught most ability levels, and at least 13 different subjects. During my 19 year coaching stint, I coached six different sports, some boys, and some girls; was UIL academic coordinator for 12 years; and I had to get somebody to drive my bus route this morning so I could make this appearance before you. For the past 15 years, I have taught pre-AP and AP Math classes exclusively. I do not say any of this to brag, I have nothing of which to brag. Rather, I mention these various experiences to my understanding of students and the educational opportunities we provide them. My concern is the Commissioner's recommendation that pre-AP and/or pre-IB courses not be weighted in the Uniform GPA calculation. Students care more about their GPA than they do about being college-ready. As a result, if the Commissioner's recommendation is followed there will be a mass exodus from pre-AP classes into regular classes – further dumbing-down our educational system. I discussed this issue yesterday with my students and with a few parents. Without exception, the comments were, "as much as we would like to be in your pre-AP classes, we could not risk making eight or 10 points lower than our competitors in regular classes who are doing half the work." I tell my students and their parents that research shows academic rigor of high school classes to be the most reliable indicator of college success. They say that matters little if they cannot gain admission in the first place. These are the comments of students in a school that regularly sends its graduates to major universities across America, and which has won the UIL state championship seven times since 1995. Yes, AP classes are to still be weighted, but without proper preparatory classes students would lack the confidence, the pre-requisites, and the work ethic to succeed – even if they could be convinced to try.

Your literature addresses the reasoning for excluding pre-AP/IB courses from weighting. Reason one states that these courses "are not recognized by the College Board." I don't know exactly what that means, because they have a link on their website for pre-AP – and under that link one finds pre-AP focused feature articles, activities from pre-AP workshops provided by the College Board, and many,

many strategies for teaching pre-AP topics and concepts. Another reason says that there is “no standardization and no uniform standard of rigor.” It wouldn’t be difficult to adopt and impose a uniform set of standards for each class, although differences in teachers alone lend itself to different standards of rigor – even if all other aspects of the classes are the same. It seems to be that the benefits of a faster pace, greater depth and scope of content, extra workload, increased rigor, and higher expectations of pre-AP over regular classes far outweighs any lack of uniform standards that I believe are more perceived than real anyway. And, surely, we do not think there is uniformity among dual credit classes. Our experience at Salado with Temple College has been to see a vast difference in rigor from year to year and from class to class. I don’t have much to say about the third reason, except that any institution of higher learning would feel better about a student that has taken pre-AP classes than one who has not. Does anyone really believe that grade point averages have uniform interpretations anyway? A 75 in one class often represents more effort, more learning, and more accomplishment than a 95 in another class. This will always be the case. The real culprit here is the Top Ten Percent law. This puts students in the awkward position of having to hurt themselves by taking non-rigorous, non college-prep classes in order to help themselves be assured of the top ten percent status.

Ms. Bricker: Thank you very much. Are there any questions?

Ms. Phillips: Can you give us a copy of your remarks this morning?

Mr. Cabaniss: Yes.

Ms. Bricker: Thank you.

Mr. Heldenfels: I have the same question for everyone this morning. I am interested in what percentage of students in each school takes pre-AP classes.

Mr. Cabaniss: About 50 percent of our ninth and tenth grade students take pre-AP classes in Salado.

Commissioner Paredes: Do you have any data on the correlation between the students who take pre-AP and how they do on actual AP exams? To show that the students who take pre-AP actually do better in AP exams than the students who don’t?

Mr. Cabaniss: To my knowledge, we have not had any students through regular classes who then took AP exams. All of our students who take AP exams have come through pre-AP classes.

Commissioner Paredes: Well, let me put it another way. Do you have any data to show the effectiveness of pre-AP courses in doing well in either AP courses or AP exams? That taking pre-AP courses actually enhances a student’s ability to do well on an AP exam?

Mr. Cabaniss: I know they do because I know the difference in those classes. I know that in my classes the students work much harder, we go much faster, there’s greater depth of content in my classes. I hear what goes on in regular classes and I know that there tend to be more discipline problems and more distractions in those classes. It’s a no brainer to me that a student who is taking those pre-AP classes is going to be far more prepared for the rigor of an AP class and the difficulty of an AP test than a student

who has not experienced those classes. I could probably get some data. I'm sure some of my colleagues may already have some.

Commissioner Paredes: We'd appreciate the data from anyone.

Ms. Bricker: Commissioner, if he is saying that if students not taking pre-AP are not taking the exam, then he wouldn't know that those who are taking pre-AP taking the exam are doing better, because the ones that aren't taking pre-AP, in the less rigorous courses, are not taking the exam. Is that correct?

Commissioner Paredes: No. The data you would look at would be the data for students before you implemented pre-AP courses – whether the implementation of pre-AP courses led to a significant improvement on test scores or test results on AP exams. You would compare pre pre-AP to the enactment of pre-AP courses.

Mr. Cabaniss: I can't speak for other schools, but in Salado we instituted them at the same time. We began pre-AP classes at the same time we began to offer AP classes. We're a small school. We have 450 in high school, and that's the largest we've ever been.

Mr. Heldenfels: It may be the easiest statistic may be just to see what the pass rate and/or average scores are for those going through pre-AP and then taking the AP exams. That's a statistical number that any school should be able to get. At least we'd know if they are 80 percent successful, 60 percent, what have you.

Ms. Bricker: But you'd only have that data for those students who took pre-AP.

Mr. Heldenfels: Right.

Mr. Cabaniss: There would be no means of comparison between the...

Mr. Heldenfels: Right. If, indeed, non-pre-AP students are not taking AP exams, you can't make that comparison.

Ms. Bricker: Correct.

Mr. Cabaniss: And they are not. There are no exceptions in our school. Never has a student who has not come through the pre-AP classes taken the AP exam.

Mr. Heldenfels: You could ask what the pass rate is on AP exams. You would be able to provide that data, correct?

Mr. Cabaniss: Yes sir. We usually have some fives, some fours, some threes, some twos, and some ones. I wish we had all fives. Plano may have, but we don't.

Ms. Bricker: Other questions? Thank you very much. Patrick Cates to be followed by Kim Rose.

Patrick Cates

Good morning, Mrs. Bricker, Board. My name is Patrick Cates and in my former life I was an AP English teacher, and I have been principal of Lubbock High School and Round Rock Westwood High School, both of which are AP and IB schools. I am currently the principal at Highland Park High School in

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Dallas, which has one of the largest AP programs in the country. In a school of 2,000, last year we gave 3,100 AP exams. I'd like to speak to you about three concerns I have about your deliberations this morning. I believe that AP and IB courses should be weighted more than dual credit classes, because AP and IB courses are held to national and international standards with rigorous national or international exams. And they are recognized by colleges and universities and the very best preparation for college work. Teachers receive regular training in the curriculum and instruction from the College Board and from the IB organization. And the AP and IB curricula are regularly audited by their respective organizations. On the other hand, in all three schools where I've served as principal we've also had dual credit, and those dual credit classes are locally developed, no state or national standards, with no assessment analogous to an AP or IB exam. Experience in our very own dual credit courses tells us that requirements and rigor for dual credit vary from college to college and, indeed, from one instructor to another. Across the country it is AP and IB courses, not dual credit, that are recognized by colleges and universities as the gold standard.

Secondly, for two reasons I would like to propose that pre-AP and IB courses should carry additional weight as compared to standard level courses: First, the curriculum in pre-AP and IB courses is more rigorous than standard level courses, and they prepare students for subsequent AP and IB courses later in high school. Students in pre-AP, pre-IB courses spend more time preparing for class, complete more homework, and study for more rigorous tests than students in standard high school courses, all of which deserve more weight. Second, as you've heard, if pre-AP, pre-IB courses are not weighted then students may not be motivated to take the AP and IB courses that follow, which means they may not be as well qualified for admission as other students, and AP/IB programs will suffer in our state.

Thirdly, students in Texas begin planning their high school career choices as early as the seventh grade – in my district, perhaps even earlier. And just as college students begin and end their degree plan under one catalog, high school students begin and end under one grade point average system. To change the GPA system for students in the 08/09 school year would mean unintended consequences in class rankings, possibly differences in valedictorian, salutatorian, the top ten percent of the graduating class; and it would be patently unfair to the students and families who began working under one GPA system since they began accumulating high school credits. Changes in the GPA system should begin with a rising freshman class, not a senior class, so that students are under the same plan for all four years of high school and know the requirements needed for admission to the colleges of their choice. We estimate that 70 to 75 percent of our students take at least one AP or pre-AP class in our school, and over 60 percent of those students make a three, four, or five on the exams.

Ms. Bricker: Thank you very much. Any questions?

Commissioner: Well, the only comment I would make is that we determined some time ago that our recommendation would be that this new method for calculating GPA would be implemented with the ninth grade class of 2009.

Mr. Cates: Excellent. Thank you. I stand corrected. Thank you.

Ms. Bricker: Thank you for your comments.

Ms. Phillips: Just one quick question. I missed your last remark, so let me ask how many students do you have that do not take pre-AP and AP classes?

Mr. Cates: The way I said it was, over the course of their four years, 70 to 75 percent of our students will take at least one pre-AP or AP course, and by the time they graduate, last year over 60 percent of our students made a three, four, or five on an exam. I don't have the exact number of students who matriculate through at least one course, but I could certainly get it to you.

Ms. Phillips: No, that's alright.

Mr. Heldenfels: 60 percent of all students?

Mr. Cates: 60 percent of our entire student body, yes. We gave 3,107 exams last year for a student body that is actually just under 2,000 students, so AP is the place to be in my school.

Mr. Lewis: Do you have students who don't take pre-AP who go on to take an AP class?

Mr. Cates: Almost never.

Ms. Bricker: Do you have students coming to you from the middle schools that have taken high school credit that's weighted?

Mr. Cates: No, not weighted credit.

Ms. Bricker: It's not weighted?

Mr. Cates: Not in the middle school, no.

Ms. Bricker: But they are taking high school credit in seventh and eighth grade?

Mr. Cates: Yes, and that's gathering speed.

Ms. Bricker: Is that a district policy that they don't have weighted credit in seventh and eighth grade? Because some districts do.

Mr. Cates: I don't know that it's a district policy, I just don't believe they're offered in our middle school. They're taking other non-weighted classes in the middle school, which leaves more room in their high school schedule for weighted classes.

Ms. Bricker: Correct. Any other questions? Thank you very much.

Mr. Cates: Thank you very much for your time.

Ms. Bricker: Kim Rose to be followed by Ann Wright.

Kim Rose

Good morning. I'm Kim Rose and I'm the director of counseling and guidance for Highland Park schools in Dallas. I want to spend my few moments with you today talking about, specifically, the weight of pre-AP, certainly concurring with much of what has been said here today. Those responsible for college admissions need to identify the best possible predictors of success, imperfect as they may be. Most higher education institutions suggest that students pursue the most rigorous curriculum appropriate to the ability level of their students, as grades and academic curriculum difficulty are the two most important factors in first year admission decisions. As Director of Guidance for Highland Park schools, and having been involved in the college admissions process for 25 years, I understand the complexity of the process and urge you to consider the weight of pre-AP/IB coursework. As stated on the College Board website, "the pre-AP initiative is to equip all middle and high school teachers with the strategies and tools they need to engage their students in active, high-level learning, thereby ensuring every middle and high school student develops the skills, habits of mind, and concepts they need to be successful in college. To quote Carl Rogers: "If we value independence, we will be disturbed by the growing conformity of knowledge, of values, of attitudes, which our present system induces, and we will wish to set up conditions of learning which make for uniqueness, for self-direction, and for self-initiated learning." And I believe that pre-AP/IB coursework, along with AP and IB coursework, accomplishes that.

I feel confident that our universities in Texas, as well as those outside our great state, want to craft a freshman class who has challenged themselves with the most rigorous coursework without suffering the loss of GPA points. To accomplish this, pre-AP and IB courses must be given additional weight as to encourage, not hinder participation. I urge you to consider this request. Thank you for your consideration.

Ms. Bricker: Thank you, Ms. Rose. Any questions?

Commissioner Paredes: I have a question. Since you've been involved in admissions decisions, do you know of any selective university in the United States that recognizes a bonus point for pre-AP courses?

Ms. Rose: I think that one of the concerns, outside the selective nature of college admissions, that's unique to Texas is the fact that we are required to rank, and oftentimes in selective admissions they are looking solely at GPA for many high schools across this country. And if you look at a high school GPA outside of rank, you can't make the same comparison as our kiddoes who have the rank. So I believe that whatever coursework is on that transcript – in working with college admissions folks – they want the most rigorous coursework and they see that when they see pre-AP, pre-IB, or honors.

Commissioner Paredes: But my question is specific. Do you know of any university that actually calculates GPA with a bonus point for pre-AP? Of course they take a look at whether students take pre-AP courses or not. But, do you know of any university that actually gives a bonus point? Because I don't know of one, every selective university I know takes a look at the GPA that students submit and if that includes a bonus point for pre-AP they simply recalculate the GPA without it.

Ms. Rose: And we're aware that universities across this country have the choice to un-weight and recalculate the things that they feel are important. Selective or unselective colleges across this country choose to do that. And they may only choose the core subjects, your four standards and then foreign language versus all these other things. I would rather that be the college's decision when it gets to the end, rather than it being us not preparing our kids appropriately when they're with us.

Ms. Bricker: Mr. Heldenfels?

Mr. Heldenfels: Ms. Rose, I'm sure that everyone giving testimony would have an opinion about this – but I'm going to ask you. In your opinion, what relative weight would you give pre-AP and pre-IB courses compared to the weight we're proposing for AP and IB courses?

Ms. Rose: Currently in our district, and I provided this to Natalie, it is 4.5. A 4.5 scale halfway between the standard level scale and the AP scale, and it just goes down the same increments as the others.

Ms. Bricker: Do you also have honors courses as well?

Ms. Rose: We do.

Ms. Bricker: Any other questions? Thank you very much. Ann Wright to be followed by Freddie McFarland.

Ann Wright

Good morning everyone. My name is Ann Wright. I'm the vice president for the College Board for the Southwestern Region based here in Austin and I have a lot of research references in my remarks which I will not read because it will take up my entire three minutes. I do want to start by saying that the College Board supports research-based weighting of rigorous secondary school coursework for the following fundamental reasons. Weighted high school GPA predicts first year college GPA than non-weighted high school GPA. Second, the majority of high schools and colleges now apply grade weights, re-computing high school GPA by eliminating non-core courses and accentuating those deemed to be advanced, and third, it is commonly perceived by students that rigorous coursework will make it more difficult to achieve a higher GPA unless the competitive disadvantage of enrolling in rigorous coursework is ameliorated by grade weighting. So rigor is the answer here.

However, if courses qualify for weighting simply by adopting a name like "honors," rather than demonstrating through external evaluation the qualifications for additional GPA weight, Texas runs the risk of creating a system in which schools can qualify students for college admission simply by the labeling of curricula. Note that out-of-state colleges and universities rarely award weighting for coursework prior to AP and IB.

Research demonstrates that AP coursework deserves additional weighting, even for students who do not score three or better on the AP exam for the following three reasons: One, the AP curriculum is explicitly designed by college faculty nationwide to replicate college level rigor; two, starting

in 2007, each teacher's curriculum has been audited by external reviewers to insure that it meets the demands of the corresponding course in college, and three, schools receive external evaluation of the rigor and quality of the AP course through the AP examination – which is both developed and scored externally for the school by college faculty and expert teachers.

Accordingly, the most recent study on which courses deserve additional weighting conducted by Harvard and University of Virginia professors, concluded in units of high school letter grade, an honors course in the subject corresponds to an increase of one half of a letter grade and an AP course corresponds to an increase of one letter grade. For students who pass the requisite AP exam, the grade level is equivalent to two additional letter grades.

While all this research provides a solid basis on which to set policy awarded grade weighting for AP courses, it also suggests that other coursework, separate from AP, can contribute to increased performance in college and thereby deserves weighting, albeit half the weight deserved by AP courses. Accordingly, the College Board does believe that a mechanism should be provided for other rigorous programs of study to apply for consideration as weighted coursework. This is particularly true in Texas, which has pioneered the systematization of pre-AP through various areas such as the O'Donald Foundation's "Laying the Foundations" curriculum and assessments, and also many innovative districts that have worked with traditionally underserved minority population and have established defined, detailed, and consistent pre-AP programs. I'll stop there. Any questions?

Ms. Bricker: Thank you. Yes, I think there are going to be some questions.

Ms. Wright: Okay.

Ms. Bricker: No? Okay. Well I have questions. Since you're representing the College Board, and you are not representing a particular school district, let me ask you a question about whose responsibility do you think it ultimately should rest upon – the school district to decide which courses - whether it's pre-AP, pre-IB, whether it's honors – how many, music theory, or other different things other than the core curriculum. Do you think the school district itself... is there any harm in the school district itself making those determinations for a weighed GPA in a pre-AP, pre-IB or honors?

Ms. Wright: I don't know that the Board has made an official statement about that. The statement that I made about the requirement for externally-tested research being really the standard is the one that I think they would fall back on.

Ms. Bricker: And yet, if the individual school districts make that determination – that they're going to have a pre-AP in a music theory or an honors program, or in yearbook or something that, in fact, if those students are prepared for AP and are determined to be college-ready, then the responsibility and the accountability, I'm asking: should that not rest with the school district itself since they're charged with preparing those students for college?

Ms. Wright: You're asking me a political question between individual responsibility versus the state or a larger way of evaluating. I think I have to answer that consistency is really the final word that the Board would state on this. That we have to have some way of looking at all of the schools in the same way, and the fact is that it is true that just labeling a course pre-AP should not suggest the rigor that would come from the testing and from the research.

Ms. Bricker: Mr. Heldenfels?

Mr. Heldenfels: I have a two-part question, hopefully the answers will be factual. First, are you aware, without naming any schools or districts in Texas, that you would consider are labeling courses pre-AP without sufficient rigor?

Ms. Wright: I am not aware of that.

Mr. Heldenfels: There's none that come to mind?

Ms. Wright: No.

Mr. Heldenfels: Secondly, can you recommend any states that have established standards for pre-AP and pre-IB courses that you think would be good models for Texas?

Ms. Wright: I do not know of any states that have established such standards. Pre-AP really was developed in this part of the country. Arkansas and Texas, I think, were leaders in this, and I think the Board very much supports the rigor that comes in the middle schools and does a lot of professional development with teachers in pre-AP. The problem simply comes with the consistency across a large number of schools and trying to give official weight to those.

Ms. Bricker: Other questions? Thank you very much. Freddie McFarland to be followed by Nola Wellman.

Freddie McFarland

Good morning. My name Freddie McFarland and I am principal at Jarrell High School – what you would truly call a small learning community. We have about 250 students in the school, and we struggle to keep all these programs juggling with very small numbers. Some things that I'm concerned about with the Uniform GPA proposal: First of all, it's going as an optional plan as I understand it. By optional, I mean we're going to use it for college admissions, but you don't have to use it locally for determining whatever kinds of things you want to determine locally, and I see small schools like ours using two systems – so we're going to create a dual system of GPA's and the confusion and irritation that will come from that kind of a system if it happens. The second thing that I'm a little concerned about, and that is the lead time. We're starting with the kids who will start high school next year, and many of the students and parents make decisions about the kinds of courses they're going to take when they begin their middle school years – when they begin the sixth grade – and they're a couple years into this by the time they reach us in high

school. I think it would be better if we gave a little more lead time for education, and also to prepare the students and the parents for the programs that they were going to participate in.

Finally, the concern that I think everyone is bringing to you, but I'll voice my two cents here, is dropping pre-AP and pre-IB programs from GPA calculation or from weighted calculation will make it considerably more difficult to convince students to enroll in these programs - and to remain in them. I know that our students between the ages of 12 and 15 – while they may be very intelligent - are still children at heart. And most are not ready and not sophisticated enough to make decisions about their future without significant guidance from the school and from their home. In those cases, the group of students we will most likely lose when they get to these programs are those who traditionally do not fare well in our academic system. So the kids we have the most difficulty getting into the rigorous classes and getting into college are the ones that will look at this and say, "There's really no bang for my buck here, I'll just stay out of it." So it appears to me this is just one more small bureaucratic barrier to the success of some of these traditionally underserved kids. Thank you.

Ms. Bricker: Thank you very much. Any questions? Thank you. Nola Wellman to be followed by Linda Rawlings.

Nola Wellman

Good morning. I'm Nola Wellman. I'm Superintendent of Schools for the Eanes School District here in Austin. Westlake High School is our single high school. Thank you for the opportunity to address you this morning concerning the proposal for the Uniform Grade Point Average guidelines. I want to address two aspects of this. First, the proposal - and then the process. First, the proposal as presented earlier this month does not adequately promote a rigorous high school curriculum. We have almost 75 percent of our students who pre-AP program, and then we have 2,635 AP exams taken by 1,000 students. So this is a significant component of our program, and the building blocks of the pre-AP is very important. The proposal as it sits today represents a disincentive for students to attempt those rigorous courses - especially given the top ten percent rule and the competitiveness of getting into our flagship universities in the state. And by not recognizing pre-AP courses with the weight, I believe we are going in the wrong direction. As a state we need to align our policies with our goals. And our goal is to enhance the potential of our students and not dissuade them from taking those rigorous courses. I think this needs to be corrected in the proposal. Secondly, as stated by others, the AP course of study is more standardized and monitored than dual credit courses, and that needs to be acknowledged in the proposal. Dual credit courses may have some rigor and they may not. There is a significant variance in our state of dual credit courses.

In terms of the process, I'm deeply concerned that the professional expertise of high school educators around the state seems to be being discounted in this process. Contrary to what you may have

heard, this issue has not been vetted sufficiently around the state. And the fact that it's on the agenda later today further indicates that the concerns of K-12 educators may not be valued. I urge you to slow this process down, to listen sincerely to the concerns expressed, and seek to find common resolution to this issue. If this proposal is fast-tracked, as it seems to be, I fear damage between the relationship of the K-12 education and higher education will result in this state. It is far more important to have a respectful, sincere dialog on this issue so that the outcome can be supported by all. Thank you for your time today.

Ms. Bricker: Thank you very much. Are there any questions?

Commissioner Paredes: I don't understand how changing the way that GPA is calculated will affect the top ten percent. Could you explain what your concerns are?

Ms. Wellman: Because our students start in their middle school years looking at what course of study they will take in order to have the highest grade point average, and that course of study is a constant – every time we have grades they recalculate that – and they're looking at whether they are in the top ten percent, hoping they can go to the University of Texas at Austin or to our flagship universities in the state. And they frequently are - we want to encourage them to take rigorous courses – and depending on how those rigorous courses weight their GPA, will determine their course of study.

Commissioner Paredes: But if you have a uniform method for calculating GPA, and you have rigor in all courses – won't the distinction between an A and a B give you the same indicator of performance? If you have a uniform method for calculating GPA across the state for admission to a university, you're having everybody play by the same rules.

Ms. Wellman: If you don't have the pre-AP courses weighted at some level less than the AP courses, students will choose – rather than making a B in an advanced course – they will choose to take the less rigorous course to get an A.

Commissioner Paredes: But isn't the solution to that situation to make sure that all courses are rigorous?

Ms. Wellman: Well all courses are rigorous as we develop them in terms of pre-AP and AP. Of course we want them all rigorous. What I'm trying to say is we want that stair step to incentivize our students to stay on those harder level courses – the college preparation courses.

Ms. Bricker: Other questions? Mr. Lewis.

Mr. Lewis: What do you weight pre-AP courses at now?

Ms. Wellman: Ours is a 1.2, and our pre-AP is a 1.1.

Ms. Phillips: Just one quick question. This is confusing me throughout the speakers. If all courses are rigorous, wouldn't you have some students who took AP classes without taking pre-AP classes?

Ms. Wellman: Well I think what we're debating here is the definition of rigor across the state isn't clearly defined. But what we know on AP is that there is a defined curriculum and standards by which those courses remain at a higher standard than the regular courses. Our pre-AP teachers and courses are that

stair step to that – and those teachers as well have more work and higher standards than the regular courses.

Ms. Phillips: So when we say all courses are rigorous, we should mean all AP and pre-AP courses are rigorous?

Ms. Wellman: Well I believe all of our teachers try to have a rigorous curriculum. Obviously, they want to stretch students to the highest level. But yes, pre-AP and AP.

Ms. Bricker: Other questions?

Mr. Heldenfels: Nola, can you tell me how many graduates from Westlake High School now enroll in out of state universities and colleges?

Ms. Wellman: It is about 40 percent of our students that go out of state.

Mr. Heldenfels: Do you know what that percentage was prior to the advent of the top ten percent law?

Ms. Wellman: Less. It was fewer.

Mr. Heldenfels: Anecdotally, since my kids went to Westlake, I can tell you that the fact that Westlake actually gives less weighting than other districts for pre-AP and AP made a difference in the number of pre-AP and AP courses my kids chose to take – for what it's worth. You need to give more credit.

Ms. Wellman: We're trying. Thank you.

Ms. Bricker: Thank you very much. Linda Rawlings to be followed by Alene Zimmer.

Linda Rawlings

Good morning. My name is Linda Rawlings, and I'm the principal at Westlake High School. I speak to you as the leader of an outstanding high school with 2,400 students. Westlake is the largest high school in the state currently receiving an exemplary rating. Last year, Westlake administered over 2,600 AP exams to almost 1,000 students. Approximately 94 percent of our students go to college. I believe that the number of students enrolled in AP courses has a direct impact on both our exemplary status commended scores, and the number of students who go to college and do well there. As they only principal on the committee that is advising this board, I want you to clearly understand the deep concerns of high school principals across Texas. We are very concerned about the Higher Education Coordinating Board's proposal for the implementation of a standardized method for calculating GPA for the purpose of college admissions. Specifically, I have heard concerns with the following areas: One, the current proposal would give equal weight to both AP and dual credit courses. AP courses must be approved by the College Board, and students receive college credit when they make an acceptable score on this national AP test for a particular subject area. Dual credit courses are not monitored, and students do not have to pass a national exam in order to receive credit. Because of the required rigor and monitoring of AP courses, we urge you to weight AP courses at a higher weight than dual credit. Two, the current proposal does not give additional weight to pre-AP courses. Pre-AP courses prepare students for AP classes. We believe that this

proposal discourages students from pursuing pre-AP classes, and that students, as a result, will be less prepared for AP classes. At our last meeting the comment was made that students should have an intrinsic motivation to take these classes, whether or not there is an additional weight calculated into the GPA. Many of our students are intrinsically motivated, but all of our students realize in today's competitive school environment, what they have to achieve with a GPA to make the top ten percent. If students receive the same GPA for a regular and a pre-AP course, why would a student choose to take a pre-AP class that is more rigorous and make a 92, if the student can take a regular class and make a 98? Finally, we urge you that whatever decisions you make should apply beginning with students entering sixth grade during the 2009/10 school year. Since your propose counting in a GPA the high school courses that a student takes in middle school, you must communicate this to students and parents prior to students enrollment in those classes. Principals across this state have not reached a conclusion as to whether or not a uniform GPA is even a good idea. We are clear, however, that there are serious concerns about this proposal. We encourage you to listen carefully to all of the concerns that have been expressed today and to slow down this process in order to thoroughly investigate the ramifications of the decision you will make. Thank you.

Ms. Bricker: Thank you very much. Are there questions? Thank you very much. Alene Zimmer to be following my Allyson Collins.

Alene Zimmer

My name is Alene Zimmer, and I'm from Katy ISD in Katy, Texas, and I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today. We have a couple of issues with the proposal as stated. The first one is the limitation on the number of courses that are counted in the GPA. In colleges and universities, all courses that are taken at the institution are applicable to the student's GPA. We feel that all the coursework required for graduation in the high school should also be included in that student's GPA, at a very minimum.

As to the advanced placement and not weighting the pre-AP courses: by not allowing the weighted grade points to be awarded for advanced coursework prior to the AP courses, the number of students willing to participate in advanced placement – and who are adequately prepared to participate – will be reduced significantly. Coursework prior to the AP course is designed to be advanced, to be accelerated, and to be aligned with the AP course to both aggressively and deliberately prepare students for the rigors of college level coursework as much as two years prior to when they would traditionally be ready to do so. With no incentive to pursue this course of study, students will opt out of not only the advanced course work prior to the advanced placement courses, but ultimately AP. This would put our Texas students at a disadvantage as well. Second issue with paragraph five in the proposal, in a diverse state as Texas the availability of community college options varies greatly. The quality of these programs varies greatly as

well as there is no national or state standard for dual credit coursework. In these areas with strong AP or IB programs, dual credit programs might be smaller. In those areas where AP programs are not as strong, dual credit programs are typically larger. It is the local school district that has the best information on the relative strength of those programs, and it is the local school district that must evaluate the option that best meets the needs of its student population and best prepares its students for post-secondary opportunities. The relative weighting of grades by the local school district for these programs is a reflection of their strength in that region – and forcing districts to award the same weight to dual credit as to advanced placement ignores the district’s ability to evaluate the options available in that community. Dual credit programs are idiosyncratic to the districts that they serve. In Katy ISD, for example, our students must pay the out of district fees and purchase their own textbooks. By requiring additional grade point for dual credit, this would allow students who can pay greater access to a weighted grade point than those who cannot pay. This creates greater inequity for these students. Increasing the incentive to take dual credit will increase the demand for these courses, but it does not necessarily increase the capacity of the community college to provide the quality instruction for those courses. And it further strains the resources of community college to do so. In Katy ISD, the dual credit courses are not the most rigorous that we can offer our students. The AP courses are. It is the local district that has this information to make the judgment, and not a judgment that can be made uniformly for the entire state for all systems in the state.

Ms. Bricker: Thank you very much. Any questions? Thank you. Allyson Collins to be followed by Kenneth Craycraft.

Allyson Collins

Good Morning. My name is Allyson Collins, and I am an attorney with the Texas Association of School Boards in the Legal Services division. The way I see the conversation about which courses are included in this GPA are two-fold. One, which courses should be weighted? And we at TASB echo all the comments you’ve heard previously, our members overwhelmingly would like pre-AP and pre-IB to be weighted. But I would actually like to cover a different point, which is basically which courses are even included at all in this calculation? Because, essentially, if a course isn’t even included, it’s a pass/fail on the transcript. You may get a grade on the transcript from the district, but it won’t even be included in the official calculation at all. Now we have been combing these rules, and not just because I’m an attorney, but at TASB we write policies and student handbooks and so we are trying to get prepared for what’s ahead and what we need to do for our members. And we can’t figure out which courses are even going to be included in the first place. The rules say that “academic courses in Chapters 110-114 of Title 19 of the Administrative Code,” will be included. And I can get the 110 to 114, that’s very clear. But this word, “academic” is used. “Academic” is not defined in the proposed rules. “Academic” is not defined in

Chapters 110-114. The courses are not delineated in that way. And, actually, there's not a definition of "academic" courses in any rule or Texas statute. So, it's unclear to us even which course will be included in the first place - which courses will even get to be part of the official calculation.

In the previous advisory meetings, a piece of paper has been passed out that's been referred to as "Attachment A." I'm not sure that you have that attachment with you. But that was a reference to another Administrative Code section that was used to define what the academic courses would be. That would be the guide about which courses were to be included. And let me tell you a little bit about that. First of all, it's not incorporated anywhere here in these rules. That was just to be a guide. So, officially, from a legal standpoint, that's not going to be the definition of "academic" courses. Secondly, that handout is based on old law. In May, 2008, that law changed, and so the handout that was presented is not even current Administrative Code. And third, the handout that was presented - and it doesn't look like you have it in front of you, those are the courses that are exempted from no pass/no play. And it's interesting to me that no pass/no play exempted courses are very high level. They're AP, IB, honors - and only the core curriculum. Regular English I, II, III, IV; regular Biology, they're not exempted from no pass/no play. So, it's interesting to TASB that Chapter 110-114 are included in the GPA, but only "academic" courses, and, apparently, only the courses that are exempted from no pass/no play will even be included at all. So English I-IV regular won't even be included? I don't think that was the intent, but I will say that the rules are drafted in an unclear way, and so we can't even figure out the baseline of what's going to be included. Similarly, the proposed rules also say that "AP and IB courses in Chapters 110 and 114 will be given extra weight," as you've heard. But, think about all the AP and IB courses that are not in Chapters 110 to 114. AP Economics is not in 110 to 114. I have a list here: AP Art History, AP Studio Art, IB Music, IB Theater Arts. Those are not even Chapters 110 to 114. But they are legitimate AP and IB courses. And so, if I do my run around to try to figure out even what's going to be included in the first place, it's only things in 110 to 114. AP Economics is not in 110 to 114. Does that mean AP Economics is not even going to be included at all? It's going to be a pass/fail?

Again, I don't think that was the intent of this Board, but I do think the rules need some work in terms of definitions, clear lists of courses that are going to be included. TASB would recommend echoing a previous comment that all of the courses that are given state graduation credit be included. Everything in the Recommended High School Curriculum, at least be included in the official system. And then you can think about how to weight different categories of courses. But we have basic issues with, at a minimum, what courses are going to be included. And we would like to see all the courses that get state graduation credit - including Fine Arts, Career and Technology - all of those be included, and then perhaps different weights be given to different courses. So we would recommend clarification of the rules on these points.

Ms. Bricker: Thank you very much. Questions?

Mr. Heldenfels: I think you may have answered this question, but if we were to ask TASB for recommendation on defining courses to be included, how long would it take TASB to give us an official answer?

Ms. Collins: Our official answer, I can give it to you right now. We would say that all of the courses in the Recommended High School Program should be included in the Uniform GPA, and then various levels of weights given to different categories. And our members would include intermediate weight given to pre-AP, pre-IB, and then a higher weight given to IB and AP.

Mr. Heldenfels: Thank you.

Ms. Bricker: I'm going to ask if the staff can provide us with a written testimony, since she was speaking without notes, so that all of us can have the written testimony and look through it. Mr. Craycraft to be followed by Linda Jolly.

Kenneth Craycraft

I'm Ken Craycraft, Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Texas State University System. One thing I want to talk about a little bit this morning – it's a little bit different here – but it's the advantages of a common grade point average. First of all, from our campus standpoints, any time we have a common core and a common grade point factor, it increases efficiency and accuracy in evaluating high school transcripts for admission and for competitive grant purposes. Currently, every university in this state has to apply certain types of algorithms right now to try to balance and try to reach some equity because of the variation right now. I think we hit most of the time, but the problem is that we miss some of the time. And when you're talking about involving students and student's futures, any misses we make are unacceptable with that. We know that we could improve the efficiency of reporting transcript data electronically for the colleges and universities attended. We think it provides a more uniform standard for the weighting of AP, IB, and dual credit coursework. It reduces programming and processing costs for admissions offices, less time devoted to recalculating different grading systems. And it promotes the use of grade point average instead of just class ranking, because some schools choose not to use class ranking anymore with that in the admissions process. And it allows for an easier transfer process for students moving from one Texas high school to another, and what opportunities may be or may not be available to them when we talk about accelerated learning opportunities – provides the receiving districts transfer students to have a template more to determine equivalency. And with the long range goal I think that we have in this state of establishing and implementing vertical and horizontal alignment for the AP, IB, and dual credit courses, it is recommended, for our focus, and the Commissioner's focus, to remain on the core curriculum coursework. This is something that is legislated in this state. This is something that's totally transferable to any public institution in this state. And it seems that if we are going to address the goals of closing the gaps, that we need to make sure that we facilitate the smooth transition for these students and their

knowing exactly that what they choose is going to be applicable regardless of their college or university choice.

While in most cases there are more similarities than differences in baccalaureate programs in terms of courses taken, the uniqueness of each district is determined by the value-added quality and efforts. And I think that's what we're hearing from our public schools today. That each value certain things, and these are the things they want to emphasize with that. But if equity, access, and opportunity are important in this state, the recommendation for a common grade point average must be fair and consistent for all students regardless of their district affiliation.

Ms. Bricker: Thank you very much, Dr. Craycraft. Any questions? No? Thank you. Linda Jolly to be followed by Ramiro Canales. Linda Jolly is not in attendance, so Ramiro Canales to be followed by Jesus Chavez.

Ramiro Canales

Good morning members. My name is Ramiro Canales. I'm the Assistant Executive Director for Government Relations and an attorney for the Texas Association of School Administrators. I want to preface my comments by saying that last fall I had the opportunity to teach a public policy course at UT, and the class assignment was for my students to develop a standard GPA method. It was a fascinating experience. I would have to say that at least one student recommended what is being proposed today. But it was good to hear from the students themselves. And the responses varied by region, by experience, and by economic class.

TASA, as you know, we are an umbrella organization – and I represent Highland Park to the schools in the Valley. Right now, we are gathering comments, and we are going to be submitting some written comments regarding this. But I do want to provide some general comments that we have received thus far. I had a great time reading the opinion and, even today, there are some of our members that are still confused as to when this applies. I've told them this does not apply to this school year. Top ten percent will not be impacted. And I'm glad that you put this out because it really does clarify that. But I've had some members panicking, saying, "We're confused because the Attorney General's opinion in the summary says it starts with the class of 2009, and then you have the word 'prospective'." So there's some confusion out there. But in general comments we have some of our members that are concerned about weight not being given to pre-AP, pre-IB, very similar to what you've heard today. There is also the concern with CATE (Career and Technology Education) classes. I know Speaker Craddick has made some comments publicly that there should be a focus on technical courses. Not only to have students college ready, but also workforce ready. So I think that needs to be factored in just to make sure that some of the students that are taking those classes and decide to go to college – that their grades are also going to be factored in.

In an earlier meeting, I mentioned also the possibility of the Governor's Schools. Those were created last session, and I don't know how those grades are going to be factored into this GPA calculation. But, clearly, those schools were designed to provide very talented kids with an opportunity during the summer, and I think that those classes definitely need to be factored in. Dual credit is good. We've had some of our members who don't have access to a lot of AP classes that giving weight to dual credit classes is actually very, very good. Migrant workers - I know that there is in the rules that out-of-state academic courses will be given credit if they are going to be receiving credit under the specific program. I know that down in the Valley we have a huge migrant population. Those students who go out of state - I think, at the very least, they need to be made aware that if they are going to be taking certain courses for a seasonal time period, that those courses are going to count when they come back to Texas. Special education students - I know that there was some concern at the last meeting from El Paso ISD how to factor in some of those grades. And I think we need to be very attentive to the needs of special ed students, as well as gifted and talented students as well.

I know that in the bill there was nothing explicit about school districts calculating, but the Attorney General said that is implicit. So we do have some school districts commenting on how it's going to be done, how much it's going to cost, and things like that. There was also a general comment that instead of calculating at the ninth grade, that we should start earlier, perhaps the fifth grade or eighth grade. So just like my students, we have varied comments from varied parts of the state, but I do appreciate the time for this and you have a great task in front of you. But this is a great exercise.

Ms. Bricker: Thank you very much. Questions?

Commissioner Paredes: I'd like to follow-up. I'd like to see what your students came up with.

Mr. Canales: Okay. Let me just comply with FERPA. It was very interesting. I did have to stop a fistfight because there were some students – you have the students from Bellaire that preferred AP classes more, and then you had the students from Crockett High School that had only one AP class – but had a lot of dual credit classes. I learned a lot. Students from El Paso said, you know, AP – kids in the Valley said dual credit. But it was the perspectives from the students themselves who actually took these classes that fascinated me. Because they, even today when I tell them, “Look, they're proposing equal weights,” students are going, “That's not fair, because I know that an AP class is harder than a dual credit class.” So, just hearing their perspectives really enlightened me to what their experience was with this.

Ms. Bricker: Thank you very much. Final speaker is Dr. Jesus Chavez.

Jesus Chavez

Madam Chair, Commissioner Paredes. First of all, let me thank you for the opportunity to visit with you. It is certainly a pleasure being here. Let me go ahead and get into the testimony. I have several comments that I'd like to make in regards to the proposals. First of all, with regards to the GPA process.

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By the way, I'm Superintendent in Round Rock, and that's who I'm representing. I'm not representing any other group, but Round Rock as the superintendent. With regards to the process, you know, from our perspective, it's critical that we recognize a student's actual grade level. Here I'm talking about those students that have a grade of 95 or higher - that we give appropriate weight and proper recognition to honor those students' achievements. We do support the high school credit at middle school, that, indeed, that be included in the calculation. Let me talk about gifted and talented, because I don't know whether that's been mentioned or not. And we may be unique to this. We actually have still, some GT courses in our course catalog that we offer. And so I think some consideration for including those in the calculation is going to be important to our students. I think you've heard a lot about including and weighting the pre-AP and IB. And here I'm going to talk about the state policy perspective as it relates to the closing the achievement gap and getting more students into college.

It may not be that, with regards to the top ten percent, it is as critical to give the weight to the pre-AP. But I think from a state policy perspective, it is critically important that we recognize that, yes, those courses are at a higher level than our regular courses at high school. And so our suggestion is that that be recognized, and that weight be given to pre-AP and IB courses. There is also some discussion around the dual credit courses, concurrent enrollment courses, and whether those should receive weight. Again, I come back to the state policy perspective and what it is we're trying to accomplish in this state. We've got the closing the gap goals. We want to remain competitive, not only within the state, but nationally and globally. And we do need additional students at the university level. And so I think that we ought to support additional weight to the dual credit courses so that more students become interested in taking those at the high school level.

With regards to the eighth grade classes, you know, we do support including those courses as part of the calculation. And this last point here with regards to who is going to be doing the averaging: our suggestion, our recommendation, and my understanding is that, yes, the institutions of higher education would be doing that. I think from a school district perspective that would be the best thing to do. Let me tell you about the Round Rock situation with regards to GPA and class and rank. In our district, I already have those two systems. And literally I mean two systems. We do two calculations. And so if, indeed, we were required to do a third calculation, well, you can see where I'm going with this in trying to explain to parents three different sets of systems. I know our preliminary discussions have said that we're going to maintain the district class and rank calculation. Our parents are very comfortable with that. It's been an evolution over the last 25 years, and honestly, I don't want to open up that can of worms that we would be facing in our community if, indeed, we had to redo that internally for our own students. So let me stop there and see if, indeed, you may have any questions regarding the comments that I have made.

Ms. Bricker: Any questions?

Mr. Heldenfels: Same question about percentage of students taking pre-AP courses and percentage of students taking AP exams.

Dr. Chavez: You know, I wish I had brought those numbers. I'd be happy to provide them to the Board. I don't have them with me, and I hate to give you wrong information. I'll tell you that, with regards to our specific interest in our district, it's to encourage those – particularly for our economically disadvantaged students, particularly to our minority populations. So those numbers have been increasing, and I know they jumped from last year to this year's class. And we specifically, as part of our district goals, have that as a goal. To increase the number of economically disadvantaged students, African American students and Hispanic students, taking the AP courses, taking the IB programming (we happen to have that two our high schools). But I'll get you those numbers.

Ms. Bricker: Dr. Chavez, do any of your non pre-AP students end up taking AP courses?

Dr. Chavez: Some do, but very few. Hence, our suggestion, our recommendation, that we give some additional weight to the pre-AP courses.

Ms. Bricker: As an incentive?

Dr. Chavez: Yes ma'am. Again, I think that aligns very well with what we in the state are working on to get additional students to take more rigorous coursework. But beyond that, to get them better prepared for college, because we need more students in college.

Ms. Bricker: The Katy speaker talked about not being in a taxing district for community college. Therefore, the dual credit classes cost more. Are you all, I can't remember if you are in a service area with Austin Community College.

Dr. Chavez: We're very happy to report that the election that we had this past May to include ACC across our entire district was successful, so we are now part of the Austin Community College District.

Ms. Bricker: So you would not have tuition for your students to take dual credit? Or you would have reduced tuition for your students to take dual credit?

Dr. Chavez: Yes ma'am. We do have the reduced tuition after hours. If they're taking coursework during the day with us, there is no tuition.

Ms. Bricker: Other questions? Thank you very much.

Dr. Chavez: Thank you so very much.

Ms. Bricker: Okay. This concludes the speakers that have signed up.