Written Testimony

Senate Education
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Commissioner of Higher Education

Senate Bill 3

First, I'd like to say that HB/SB 3 is critical legislation that emphasizes student achievement on two axes: growth and reaching thresholds of competence and mastery. This is precisely how we should measure student achievement and define accountability.

Second, I applaud the focus on helping students who either start or fall behind to catch up. One of the tragedies of the U.S. and Texas education is that children who are behind seldom catch up and this bill with its emphasis on accelerated learning plans for such students is another critical step in the right direction.

I would like to offer 5 recommendations which I believe will make the bill even stronger.

1) Change the names of the two proposed academic tracks from "Standard" to "Basic" and "TX Diploma" to "Recommended TX Diploma."

2) Establish a core curriculum that essentially carries all students through the first 3 years of high school: 3 years of English Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies.

a. One difference: for students seeking a "basic" credential, 3rd year of science can be a rigorous "applied" or Career and Technical Education (CTE) course.

b. Real differentiation would occur in senior year when students can specialize in fine arts, rigorous CTE courses, or advanced academic preparation.

The key goal has to be giving every child a solid academic foundation, after which he or she can pursue divergent interests. Because I am concerned that all children be provided a strong academic foundation, I also strongly recommend that End-Of-Course exams be offered in the 4 key disciplines to all students.

3) I also recommend we establish a single, clear post-secondary readiness standard. The Texas Institute for Education Reform, for example, has a good one that goes something like this: "the range of academic, workforce and social proficiencies necessary for successful transition to the skilled workforce (civilian or military) or higher education without remediation." And as the Texas Institute for Education Reform (TIER) points out, since community colleges do both workforce and academic training, a proxy for this definition could be community college readiness without remediation.

4) Align this common definition of post-secondary readiness with College and Career Readiness Standards developed by vertical teams and adopted by the Coordinating Board and the Commissioner of Education. They have standards for both content knowledge and intellectual skills indispensable in post-secondary education and the skilled workforce.

5) Use the bill to increase and institutionalize cooperation/coordination among the State Board of Education (SBOE), Texas Education Agency (TEA) and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB). Getting the provisions of this bill right will require unprecedented levels of collaboration and shared responsibility.