BOWIE COUNTY STUDENTS DESERVE BETTER FROM TEXAS LEGISLATORS

Starting with the 2017–18 school year, the Texas commissioner of education will label each public school district and campus with a rating in the form of an A–F letter grade to comply with House Bill 2804, passed by the 84th Texas Legislature in 2015. For those of you who are watching state accountability standards, they clearly change on a yearly basis. Enough is enough! Bowie County students deserve better from the Texas Legislature.

To add insult to injury, the Texas Education Agency now wants to publicly release a "preliminary" report of what the accountability measures will look like based upon data from two years ago that does not reflect nor define our districts and schools of today. According to a letter from TEA on December 1, 2016, "Development of the new accountability system will continue – with additional input from stakeholders – until spring 2018, when the final rules are adopted." Furthermore, HB 2804, Section 24 states that "...the commissioner of education shall submit a report to the standing committees of the legislature having primary jurisdiction over primary and secondary education that provides for a preliminary evaluation of schools districts and campuses..." So, where in all of this language do we find that a preliminary report will be made public? Nowhere! What we now have is another game of political maneuvering at the cost of our schools and students.

We believe our students would be better served by a comprehensive community-based accountability system that looks beyond high-stakes, multiple-choice tests to meaningful assessments that have value for students, parents and teachers, as well as measures what each community deems important in promoting college and career readiness. Therefore, we do not embrace or recognize a rating or ranking of our schools based on this narrow of an indicator or a single day performance of our students. Bowie County school districts will continue to move forward and not dwell on the continual changing accountability systems the state chooses to send our way, especially when we have never received prior instruction or rules for which the system will or is following.

As recommended by the Texas Association of School Administrators, we ask the Texas Legislature to replace the A-F rating system with a community-based accountability system for the following reasons:

A–F rating systems are based predominantly on once-per-year standardized test scores. Although it is called a criterion-referenced test, the STAAR was designed to rank order students, not assign judgments of quality. A rank-order test can never measure for the amount of what is being analyzed, making the STAAR inappropriate for accountability. In addition, when surveyed by the State Board of Education (SBOE) in 2016, an overwhelming majority of Texans said they do not want a public school accountability system based primarily on students' standardized test scores.

A–F rating systems have not worked in other states. Virginia repealed its A–F school rating system in 2015. Oklahoma researchers recently conducted a study on the state's A–F system and found that test scores have not only stagnated or declined generally, but performance drops have been most severe among low-income students. And the significant growth in student performance touted under Florida's A–F system can be credited to adjustments in state policy and rules to make the results match public expectation, rather than actual improvement.

To reduce the many measures of school and district performance to a single grade, A–F rating systems rely on pages upon pages of complicated rules and calculations. As a result, no one really knows what a letter grade means. No one can explain the grade, and no one knows what to do to raise the grade. "A" schools have just as difficult a time explaining why they were given an "A" as "D" schools have explaining why they were given a "D." The difference is that "A" schools don't have to.

A–F systems fail to account for varying socioeconomic conditions that influence performance. Letter grades based largely on standardized test scores hold schools and districts accountable for many factors they do not control. A simple example: Some students come to school not yet knowing their ABCs. Their schools should not be penalized for that any more than schools should get credit for enrolling students who already know their ABCs.

Grades in an A–F system will align with wealth or poverty and likely punish poor schools for being poor. When schools are held accountable for factors they cannot control, poor schools are judged as bad, and wealthy schools are judged as good, when neither is entirely true. A–F systems don't account for the growth that students make; they assign a label based largely on a snapshot of those students' performance at one point in time.

A–F rating systems provide no sense of what schools must do to improve. When surveyed by the SBOE in 2016, most Texans agreed that accountability should provide a way to identify areas of support needed for underperforming schools as well as identify areas of effective best practices used by high-performing schools and districts. "Simple" letter grades based on a complicated system of calculations is neither transparent nor useful for improvement.

A–F rating systems create a false impression about an entire neighborhood of children and shames students. The reduction of a school to a single grade whitewashes the variance in a school, unfairly reducing every student to the school's assigned grade.

A community-based accountability system empowers school districts to design their own internal systems of assessment and accountability that, while meeting general state standards, allow districts to innovate and customize curriculum and instruction to meet the unique needs and interests of their communities. The foundation of community-based accountability is a four-part system consisting of: 1) student and classroom-centered evidence of learning; 2) strategic use of standardized testing; 3) performance reviews and validation of learning by highly trained visiting teams; and 4) rigorous descriptive reporting to parents and communities.

As your area superintendents, we are committed to addressing true measurable results that in turn allow us to develop students who are great digital citizens, people of character and individuals who can, will and are competing in a global work environment.

Dr. John Booth
Superintendent, DeKalb ISD

Shane Krueger
Superintendent, Hooks ISD

Traci Drake
Superintendent, Hubbard ISD

Jim Tankersley
Superintendent, Leary ISD

Ronnie Thompson
Superintendent, Liberty-Eylau ISD

Brian Bobbitt
Superintendent, Malta ISD

Charlie Martin
Superintendent, Maud ISD

Dr. Rose Mary Neshyba
Superintendent, New Boston ISD

Dr. Jason Smith
Superintendent, Pleasant Grove ISD

Nick Blain
Superintendent, Red Lick ISD

Dr. Kathy Allen
Superintendent, Redwater ISD

Rex Burks
Superintendent, Simms ISD

Paul Norton
Superintendent, Texarkana ISD

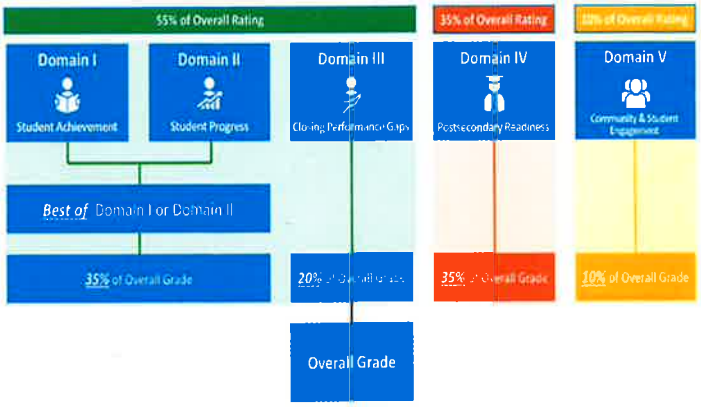
A-F Overview

The 84th Legislature passed **HB 2804**, changing the Texas school accountability system so that every campus and district receives one of five ratings from A-F. Much like students receive grades in individual subjects and those are combined for a GPA, the law requires schools and districts to be issued grades based on five different areas of performance or "domains," and those five grades must be combined into a single overall rating.

The ratings will be issued for the first time in August 2018. But the law requires a preliminary work-in-progress report noting potential grades by domain to be issued to the legislature by January 1, 2017. Given the limitations of data available, this report will feature possible grades for four of the five domains, and will not include an overall rating for any campus or district. That being said, the agency has a preliminary approach for how the overall grade may eventually be calculated from the five domains. Given the agency's current work-in-progress, the domains would be combined as reflected in the chart below:

In this way, the A-F rating for any campus would be based on the best of student achievement or growth, combined with how well a school performs relative to its level of poverty, how well kids are prepared for college, career, or the military, and how the local school system grades itself. **The system reflects a commitment to recognizing high achievement, but also recognizing the impact of highly effective educators.**

Current Work-In-Progress Model: Overall Grade Calculation



It is important to note that the current work-in-progress A-F system attempts to support a focus on continuous improvement of student outcomes by following two guiding principles:

1. The system should not be built on a forced distribution so that some set percentage of campuses must get an A or an F. It should be based on criteria meaningful to ensure our students are prepared for success, and it should be mathematically possible that all campuses achieve an A rating.

2. Rather than facing a constantly changing goal post that makes it harder and harder to demonstrate improvement each year, the ratings should be based on stable criteria, so you can make apples-to-apples performance comparisons from year to year.

Detailed descriptions of the calculation methods used for each domain are available separately. But the following overview is intended to provide some background.

Domain I
Student Achievement

Domain I: Student Achievement

To determine an appropriate goal for would constitute an "A", the agency tried to identify an appropriate benchmark based on what would best position our students for success. The state's **60X30TX** plan provides that benchmark and is aligned both to work being done in colleges throughout Texas and to the needs of the workforce. The goal of the plan is straightforward: by the year 2030, 60% of Texans aged 25-34 should possess some form of post-secondary credential. To align with this plan, the bar for high student achievement – performance at an "A" rating in Domain I – **is set at 60%** of students being on pace for likely success in a post-secondary setting, be it a trade school, community college, or four-year university. The STAAR® provides a valid method of identifying this.

The STAAR test was built and validated by actual student performance so that achieving a Final Level II proficiency rate is indicative of a student who, if that proficiency level is maintained through high school, has a better than 60% chance of passing freshman college level math & English courses. The Advanced Level III proficiency rate is indicative of a student who has a better than 75% chance of passing those courses. (This latter standard is used by SAT & ACT). The Phase-in Level II rate is about 1 standard deviation below Final Level II, and as such works to indicate a student who has not quite reached grade level proficiency.

In an attempt to add clarity, the agency is proposing to change these terms. You can see the changes to the right:

As part of the guiding principles for A-F, the agency is also proposing to lock in the formerly Phase-in Level II rate at its current rate of rigor. So rather than constantly raising the bar, the newly named Approaching standard will remain a constant proficiency level, allowing for easier year over year comparisons.

Domain I: Proposal To Measure Proficiency

Current PLD	Current Public Label	New PLD/Public Label
Level 1	Unsatisfactory	**Does Not Meet**
Phase-In Level 2	Satisfactory	**Approaches**
Final Level 2	Postsecondary Ready*	**Meets**
Level 3	Advanced	**Masters**

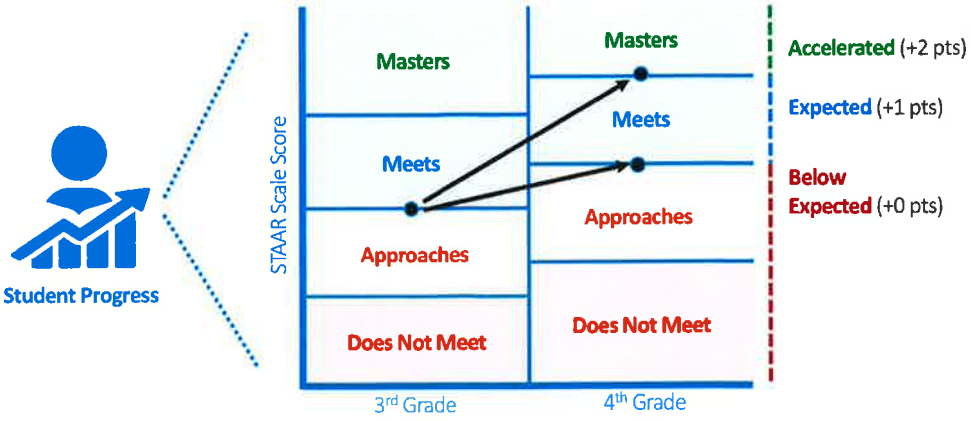
* This label has not been featured on Confidential Student Reports for parents.

Domain II
Student Progress

Domain II: Student Progress

The current proposal for Domain II examines each child's scale score on STAAR this year versus last year. Students who gain enough scale score points to maintain the same level of proficiency as the year before are designated as having met expected growth. Students who gain enough scale score points to gain a proficiency level (ex: from Meets grade level to Masters grade level) are designated as having accelerated growth. In the current approach, points are tallied for each student who reaches expected growth (one point) or accelerated growth (two points), and points are added up for all students and for various sub-populations. The agency has begun examining several alternative approaches to ensure we have the most effective method for recognizing student growth, but at present, no changes have been proposed.

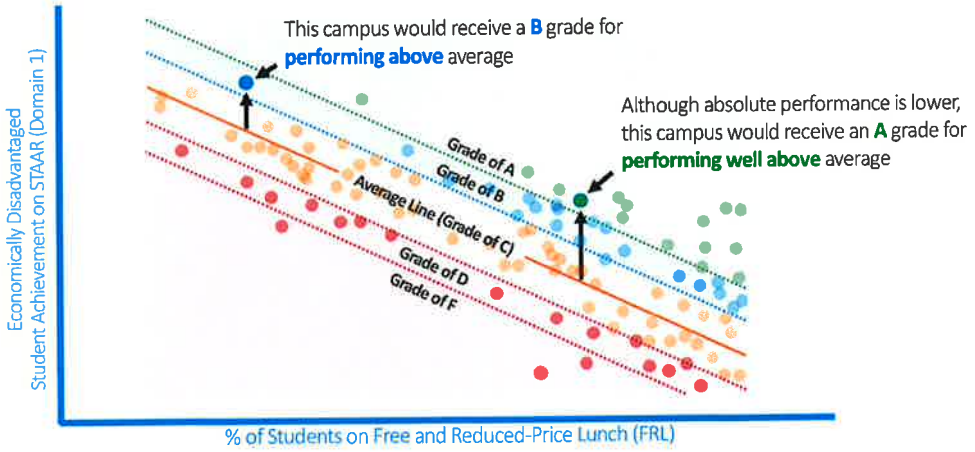
Domain II: How Growth Is Currently Calculated



Domain III
Closing Performance Gaps

Domain III: Closing the Gaps

There are many ways to determine how effectively campuses are closing achievement gaps. The proposed approach examines how well campuses throughout Texas are doing today in terms of student achievement for their economically disadvantaged students given how many economically disadvantaged students they have. This chart to the right illustrates the approach. Schools that perform well above the average line appear to be closing achievement gaps, and would be given an A rating. A benchmark cut point would be set based on the 2016-2017 school year, and those cut points would remain fixed over time, to ensure all campuses have an opportunity to improve to an A over time.



Domain IV
Postsecondary Readiness

Domain IV: Postsecondary Readiness

Domain IV, which is 35% of a campus's overall grade, relies on indicators other than STAAR.

At the elementary and middle school level this will involve the use of chronic absenteeism. Middle school will also incorporate the middle school drop-out rate. The agency engaged in extensive stakeholder conversations to determine whether additional indicators could be used in elementary and middle school, but no suitable additional indicators could be found.

At high school, Domain IV will be based partially on the graduation rate and partially on the percentage of students graduating with a higher level graduation plan. But it will also examine the percentage of students who graduate ready for college, career, or the military, as evidenced by SAT/ACT/AP/IB/dual credit, an industry credential or appropriate CTE course sequence, or military enlistment. Ratings in this domain will be built so that schools will receive the same level of recognition for students who enter the military as they do for students who achieve industry-recognized credentials and as they do for students who achieve high SAT/ACT scores.

Domain IV: Calculating Domain IV Score

Elementary Schools
- **All 35%** Chronic Absenteeism Rate

Middle Schools
- **Half of 35%** Chronic Absenteeism Rate
- **Half of 35%** 7-8 Annual Dropout Rate

High Schools
- **10 of 35%** Graduation Rate
- **5 of 35%** Graduation Plan Rate
- **20 of 35%** Annual Graduates Who:
  - Completed a CTE-Coherent Sequence of Courses
  - Completed 12 or More Hours of Postsecondary Credit
  - Completed One or More AP/IB Courses
  - Met the TSI Benchmark on TSIA, SAT, or ACT

A–F Accountability System

Domain I: Student Achievement

Domain I measures STAAR assessment results combined across all grades and subjects. One point is awarded for each percentage of assessment results that are at or above the following:

- Level II Satisfactory Standard
- Postsecondary Readiness Standard
- Level III Advanced Standard

Domain II: Student Progress

Domain II measures progress at the STAAR satisfactory and postsecondary readiness standards on ELA/reading and mathematics assessments. One point is awarded for each percentage of assessment results that meet or exceed progress measure expectations and one point for each percentage of assessment results that exceed progress measure expectations. Performance is calculated for ten student groups:

- All students
- African American
- American Indian
- Asian
- Hispanic
- Pacific Islander
- White
- Two or more races
- Students served by special education
- English language learners

The performance of all ten groups is combined to determine the Domain II score.

Domain III: Closing Performance Gaps

Domain III measures academic performance differentials among students from different socioeconomic backgrounds. The Domain III score is based on the relationship of a district or campus's Domain I score and the percentage of its students who are economically disadvantaged. Using statewide data from the 2015–16 school year, TEA determines a predicted Domain I score (using assessment results of only the economically disadvantaged subgroup), based on district or campus type and the percentage of students who are economically disadvantaged. For the purposes of calculating the Domain III score, this specialized Domain I score is referred to as the Domain I_{DIII} score. The difference between a district or campus's Domain I_{DIII} score and the predicted Domain I_{DIII} score is the district or campus's Domain III score. TEA provides a formula for districts and campuses to use to calculate their predicted Domain I_{DIII} score.

Domain IV: Postsecondary Readiness

Domain IV measures whether students are on track for success in postsecondary life: in college, a career, or the military. The indicators used to measure postsecondary readiness vary by campus type.

Elementary

Domain IV scores for elementary schools are based on the chronic absenteeism rate calculated by student group.

Middle Schools

Domain IV scores for middle schools are based on the chronic absenteeism rate and the annual grade 7 and 8 dropout rate, if available. If a dropout rate is not available, the Domain IV score will be based solely on the chronic absenteeism rate.

High Schools, K–12 Campuses, and Districts

Domain IV scores for high schools, K–12 campuses, and districts are based on graduation/dropout rates, graduation plan rates, and college and career readiness indicators.

- The graduation rate component is based on the best result of the four- or five-year longitudinal graduation rate. If a longitudinal graduation rate is unavailable, the annual 9–12 dropout rate is used.
- The graduation plan score is based on a longitudinal cohort of students. Two percentages are calculated:
  - The percentage of students graduating under the Recommended High School Program or the Distinguished Achievement Program (RHSP/DAP)
  - The percentage of students graduating under either the RHSP/DAP or the Foundation High School Program with an endorsement (FHSP-E) or the distinguished level of achievement (FHSP-DLA).

  The percentage that contributes the most points to the Domain IV score will be used. If no longitudinal rate is available, the annual graduation rate will be used.

- The college and career readiness indicator score is calculated as the percentage of annual graduates who accomplish at least one of the following:
  - Meet or exceed the Texas Success Initiative (TSI) criteria in both English language arts (ELA) and mathematics on the TSI assessment, SAT, or ACT
  - Complete one or more AP or IB courses
  - Earn 12 or more hours of postsecondary credit
  - Complete a coherent sequence of CTE courses (including courses in a tech prep program)

Additional Indicators Considered

HB 2804 grants the commissioner the authority to use indicators in Domain IV in addition to those established in statute, specifically "any additional indicators of student achievement not associated with performance on standardized assessment instruments determined appropriate for consideration by the commissioner in consultation with educators, parents, business and industry representatives, and employers."

Two accountability advisory groups began considering additional indicators for Domain IV in fall 2015. The table below lists the indicators that were considered for use for elementary and middle school campuses. For each indicator, committee members reviewed options for the definition and data-collection requirements including the advantages/disadvantages of each option. Most of these did not receive further consideration due to concerns with their reliability as indicators of postsecondary readiness, validity as a measure of student achievement, or inherent data collection constraints.