

TEXAS PUBLIC POLICY FOUNDATION

2019-20
**LEGISLATOR'S
GUIDE**
to the issues



TEXAS PUBLIC POLICY
FOUNDATION

Copyright ©2018 by the Texas Public Policy Foundation

Permission to reprint in whole or in part is hereby granted, provided the Texas Public Policy Foundation and the author are properly cited.

The Texas Public Policy Foundation is a 501(c)3 non-profit, non-partisan research institute.

The Foundation's mission is to promote and defend liberty, personal responsibility, and free enterprise in Texas and the nation by educating and affecting policymakers and the Texas public policy debate with academically sound research and outreach.

Funded by thousands of individuals, foundations, and corporations, the Foundation does not accept government funds or contributions to influence the outcomes of its research.

The public is demanding a different direction for their government, and the Texas Public Policy Foundation is providing the ideas that enable policymakers to chart that new course.

TEXAS PUBLIC POLICY FOUNDATION
901 Congress Ave., Austin, TX 78701
(512) 472-2700 Phone (512) 472-2728 Fax
www.TexasPolicy.com

A-F Accountability

The Issue

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

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

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

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

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

- Uses easy-to-understand and meaningful A-F letter grades for districts and schools.
- Allows for a school district to design its own "local" campus accountability ratings.
- Relies in part on the STAAR test, which is developed with Texas teachers and is the only assessment that allows for statewide, uniform student performance measurement and growth comparisons.
- Provides that all school districts and schools can earn an A grade. There is no forced bell curve.

- Will remain the same for at least five years so that school districts and campuses that improve will receive higher grades over time. (This assumes no significant legislative changes.)

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

The Facts

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

Recommendation

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

Resources

- [“Texas Public Education Outcomes,”](#) Testimony of Texas Commissioner of Education Mike Morath, Senate Higher Education Committee (April 25, 2018).
- [“The Big Idea of School Accountability”](#) by William McKenzie and Sandy Kress, George W. Bush Institute (Feb. 2015).
- [House Bill 22 Overview,](#) Texas Education Agency (June 2017).
- [“House Bill 22, Implementation of A-F Accountability,”](#) Testimony of Texas Commissioner of Education Mike Morath, House Public Education Committee (April 18, 2018).
- “NAEP 2017 Mathematics and Reading Results,” NAEP Texas (April 2018). Available at the Texas Education Agency.
- [“Nation’s report card: ‘Something very good is happening in Florida’](#) by Leslie Postal, *Orlando Sentinel* (April 10, 2018).
- [“Texas Public Education Outcomes,”](#) Presentation by Texas Commissioner of Education Mike Morath, Texas Commission on Public School Finance (Jan. 23, 2018).

Experts

Kara Belew, *Senior Education Policy Advisor, Center for Innovation in Education*
kbelew@texaspolicy.com AREAS OF EXPERTISE: State Budget, Taxes, Public Education Finance and Policy, Public Education Accountability

Derek Cohen, Ph.D., *Director, Center for Effective Justice and Right on Crime*
dcohen@texaspolicy.com AREAS OF EXPERTISE: Juvenile Justice Reform, Victims' Rights, Overcriminalization, Constitutional Limitations on Corrections

The Hon. Chuck DeVore, *VP of National Initiatives; Senior Fellow for Fiscal Policy*
cdevore@texaspolicy.com AREAS OF EXPERTISE: Tax and Fiscal Policy, Elections, Foreign Affairs, Military Affairs, Energy and Environmental Policy

Vance Ginn, Ph.D., *Director, Center for Economic Prosperity; Senior Economist*
vginn@texaspolicy.com AREAS OF EXPERTISE: State Budget and Tax Reform, National and State Labor Market Trends, Tax and Expenditure Limits, Energy Markets and Policy

Michael Haugen, *Policy Analyst, Center for Effective Justice and Right on Crime*
mhaugen@texaspolicy.com AREAS OF EXPERTISE: Civil Forfeiture, Overcriminalization, Substance Abuse Policy

The Hon. Talmadge Heflin, *Director, Center for Fiscal Policy*
theflin@texaspolicy.com AREAS OF EXPERTISE: State Budget and Taxation, Economic Stabilization Fund, Local Government Spending, Pension Reform, Federal Funds

Haley Holik, *Attorney, Center for Effective Justice and Right on Crime*
hholik@texaspolicy.com AREAS OF EXPERTISE: Juvenile Justice, Grand Jury Reform, Constitutional Limitations on Search and Seizure, Overcriminalization

Marc Levin, Esq., *VP of Criminal Justice and Right on Crime*
mlevin@texaspolicy.com AREAS OF EXPERTISE: Adult Corrections, Juvenile Justice, Overcriminalization, Victim Empowerment and Restitution, Law Enforcement, School Discipline

Thomas Lindsay, Ph.D., *Director, Center for Innovation in Education*
tlindsay@texaspolicy.com AREAS OF EXPERTISE: Higher Education, Culture Wars (Political correctness, cultural decline, etc.), America's Founding Principles, Online Learning, Federalism, Tenth Amendment, Interstate Compacts

Brandon J. Logan, Ph. D., *Director, Center for Families & Children*
blogan@texaspolicy.com AREAS OF EXPERTISE: Child Welfare Policy, Foster Care, Adoption, Family Law, Parental Rights

Bryan Mathew, *Policy Analyst, Center for Local Governance*
bmathew@texaspolicy.com AREAS OF EXPERTISE: Local Economic Regulation, Local Economic Development, Municipal Annexation, Housing Affordability, Property Rights, Special Districts

Stephanie Matthews, *VP of Public Affairs*

smatthews@texaspolicy.com AREAS OF EXPERTISE: Workforce Development, Charter Schools, School Choice, Virtual Learning

Jennifer Minjarez, *Policy Analyst, Center for Health Care Policy*

jminjarez@texaspolicy.com AREAS OF EXPERTISE: Medicaid Reform, Mid-Level Providers, Medical and Dental Licensure Reform

Bill Peacock, *VP of Research*

bpeacock@texaspolicy.com AREAS OF EXPERTISE: Electricity Markets and Renewable Energy, Insurance, Technology and Telecommunications, Tort Reform, Property Rights, Economic Development, Consumer Issues

Randy Petersen, *Senior Researcher, Center for Effective Justice and Right on Crime*

rpetersen@texaspolicy.com AREAS OF EXPERTISE: Policing Policy, Diversion Programs, Civil Asset Forfeiture

James Quintero, *Director, Center for Local Governance*

jquintero@texaspolicy.com AREAS OF EXPERTISE: Budgets, State and Local Spending, Debt, Taxes, Transparency, Pensions

Kevin D. Roberts, Ph.D., *Executive Director*

kroberts@texaspolicy.com AREAS OF EXPERTISE: K-12 Education Growth, Increasing Public School Efficiency, Education Choice, Higher Education, Tenth Amendment

Emily Sass, *Policy Analyst, Center for Innovation in Education*

esass@texaspolicy.com AREAS OF EXPERTISE: K-12 Education, Education Choice, School Finance, Civic Education, Charter Schools

Deane Waldman, Ph.D., *Director, Center for Health Care Policy*

dwaldman@texaspolicy.com AREAS OF EXPERTISE: Health Care, Medicaid, Telemedicine, Scope of Practice, Regulatory Issues

The Hon. Kathleen Hartnett White, *Distinguished Senior Fellow-in-Residence; Director, Center for Energy & the Environment*

khwhite@texaspolicy.com AREAS OF EXPERTISE: EPA Regulation, Energy and Environmental Policy, Free Market Environmental Policies, Endangered Species Act, Water Rights

The Texas Public Policy Foundation is a 501(c)3 non-profit,
non-partisan research institute.

The Foundation's mission is to promote and defend liberty,
personal responsibility, and free enterprise in Texas and
the nation by educating and affecting policymakers and
the Texas public policy debate with academically
sound research and outreach.

Funded by thousands of individuals, foundations, and
corporations, the Foundation does not accept government
funds or contributions to influence the
outcomes of its research.

The public is demanding a different direction for their
government, and the Texas Public Policy Foundation is
providing the ideas that enable policymakers
to chart that new course.



901 Congress Ave., Austin, Texas 78701 | 512.472.2700 phone 512.472.2728 fax
www.TexasPolicy.com