

April 20, 2023

To: House Public Education Committee

Re: **House Bill 4402**

Position: Against

Chairman Buckley and honorable members of the House Public Education Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in opposition to House Bill 4402 as-filed. The coalition of 8 undersigned organizations represent business, nonprofit, and education entities with a widespread interest in supporting Texas students to graduate high school ready for the next step.

Though we support House Bill 4402's provisions around extending the Texas Through-Year Assessment Pilot (TTAP) and providing a path to replace the current STAAR exam upon valid data, as well as increased support for Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to pursue the state's Local Accountability System via technical assistance grants, **we regretfully are unable to support the bill as a whole.**

We have grave concerns about the consequences of House Bill 4402, including:

#### **I. WATERING DOWN OF THE HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA**

Various provisions of HB 4402 remove the requirement for satisfactory completion of a performance assessment to receive a high school diploma. Data from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board shows roughly 1 in 4 Texas students complete any kind of postsecondary degree (including an industry credential) within six years of graduation. Texas ranks last among its 12 peer states in terms of degree attainment for young adults aged 25-34, and readiness is a key indicator for postsecondary attainment.<sup>1</sup>

Texas boasts a four-year graduation rate of 90%. Removing academic readiness from the graduation requirements would inevitably result in Texans who are not adequately prepared to compete in our state's economy.

#### **II. MODIFYING TEXAS' A-F FORMULA TO INCLUDE NON-ACADEMIC INDICATORS**

Meaningful, fair, and transparent accountability systems (including reporting, ratings, and consequences) define excellence and spur continuous improvement. We agree that surveys, extracurricular access, and fitness may hold important information for community members and should therefore be included on [txschools.gov](https://txschools.gov) to transparently communicate results by campus.

However, including these provisions within the A-F formula at a weight of 40% will ask parents and community members to **untangle academic preparedness from a variety of nonacademic indicators**. Counting these as nearly half of a campus' or district's overall A-F score waters down the academic integrity of our A-F rating system, which carries consequences for underperforming schools. At a time when only 50% of Texas 3rd graders meet reading expectations, we must focus our accountability system's letter grades on academic readiness.

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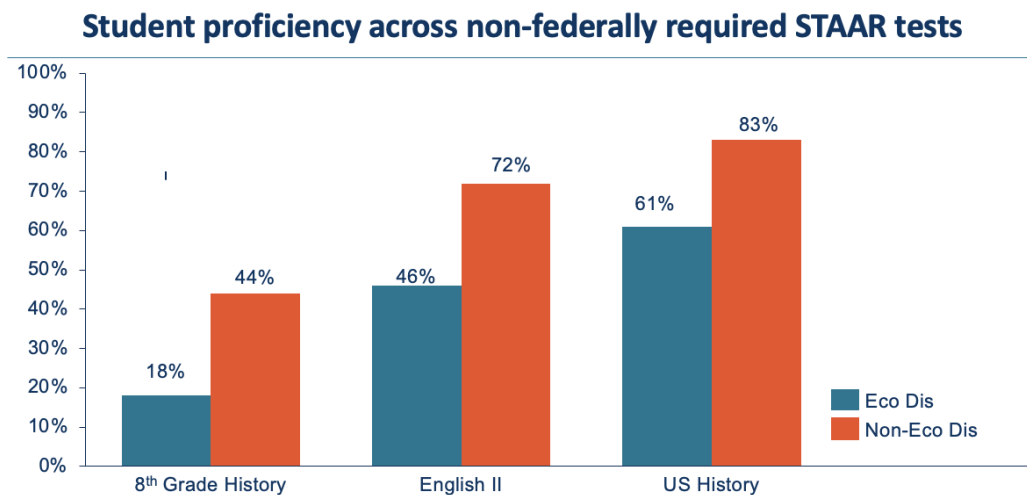
<sup>1</sup> Texas 2036: Peer States Rankings

### III. RISKING HYPERINFLATING SCORES AT A TIME WHEN STUDENT PROFICIENCY REMAINS LOW

Though including non-STAAR indicators into A-F at some weight is a worthy goal, we urge the Committee to reject any indicators that are not valid, reliable and comparable across Texas' 1200 school districts. Reporting these indicators provides helpful insight into school offerings in a clearer, concise way. Further, it helps ensure the formula accurately reflects the true performance of a school. For example, since Louisiana adopted extracurriculars into its letter grade, all campuses have received full points in the extracurricular measurement, signaling no meaningful differentiation. Not only does this fail to differentiate quality by simply rewarding participation, it subsequently obscures academic performance. We urge the Committee to be cautious about rewarding participation without a sense of the quality or variety of offerings.

### IV. REMOVING COMPARABILITY OF PROGRESS FOR KEY SUBJECTS

The removal of non-federally required STAAR tests for state assessments removes three tests in Texas: 8th Grade Social Studies, English II, and U.S. History. According to 2022 data from TEA, the proficiency rates for these three tests are as follows:



With wide-ranging achievement gaps in each tested subject, we urge the Committee to continue the state's commitment to academic excellence, including in key subjects not required by federal law. In addition, voters do not support removing history assessments, with close to seven in 10 voters against eliminating standardized testing of U.S. history.<sup>2</sup>

In conclusion, we remain convinced that one of the best ways we can ensure continued improvement of student outcomes is through a robust system of **strong academic standards, comparable statewide assessments, and valid and reliable school accountability**. The data bears this out: Between 2015 and 2019, Texas enacted a series of students-first policy changes, including transparent accountability through HB 22 (85R), robust funding overhauls in HB 3 (86R), and marked testing improvements through HB 3906 (86R). These changes resulted in a marked improvement in Texas' scores, with reading scores improving 12% and math

<sup>2</sup> Texas 2036. (2023). New poll spotlights Texans' day-to-day concerns. <https://texas2036.org/posts/new-poll-spotlights-texans-day-to-day-concerns/>.

scores improving 5% on the STAAR exam. From 2016 to today, the state has also seen an 11% increase in the number of students who are College, Career, or Military Ready. But we are still not where we need to be.

**Texas students can achieve at high levels.** It is incumbent upon the state to maintain an accountability system that provides aligned incentives to improve student outcomes in every school district and equip teachers and students to succeed. The current system and forthcoming administrative improvements gets us closer to this goal than we have ever been. We respectfully ask you to reject changes outlined in the as-filed version of HB 4402, and ensure Texas has a clear picture of progress for the investments in our public education system.

Sincerely,

