April 12, 2023
To: Senate Education Committee
Re: **Senate Bill 1261**
Position: For

Chairman Creighton and honorable members of the Senate Education Committee,

The Commit Partnership and the 19 organizations undersigned thank you for the opportunity to provide written **testimony in support of Senate Bill 1261 in light of the effects of COVID-19 on PK-12 learning loss and best practices that exist to accelerate students' learning**.

I. THE UNPRECEDENTED NEED FOR LEARNING RECOVERY AND ACCELERATION

Since HB 4545's passage in the 87th Legislative Session, we learned the extent to which **our state's education system now requires maintained commitments to comprehensive, research-backed strategies to accelerate student instruction** after more than two years of pandemic-induced disrupted learning.

Statewide results from the 2022 administration of STAAR (see Appendix A) show that after facing a historic decades' worth loss of academic gains, students were largely able to recover and improve in Reading (in 2022 52% of students scored at Met Grade level or Above on STAAR grades 3-8 and English I & II, with only 47% and 43% reaching that threshold in 2019 and 2021 respectively). With Math, however, student performance recovered some in 2022 but still falls far short of pre-pandemic levels (this year 40% of students scored Met Grade Level or above in Grades 3-8 Math and Algebra 1, a 5% increase from 2021 but still a 10% percentage point gap below 2019 levels), and across all subjects, achievement gaps persist.[1]

In light of these results and anemic pre-pandemic student performance, Texas still has far to go in achieving our student outcome goals. Given that **students who are behind tend to stay behind** (historically, only around 5% of students who are below grade level catch up within two years),[2] it is paramount that we intentionally support a strong, evidenced-based response that ensures Texas students get back on track.

> **"History indicates that the economic losses will be permanent unless the schools get better. Just returning schools to their pre-pandemic performance levels will not erase the lost learning. Recovering from the pandemic requires swift and decisive improvements to the schools."**
> ***-Erik A. Hanushek (Hoover Institution)***

Furthermore, without mitigating the COVID-induced learning loss there will be substantial economic impacts on Texas: research estimates significant declines in students' future earnings due to the lasting effect of lost academic skills for the COVID cohort.[3] If left unaddressed, declines in student proficiency could result in 4.9% lower lifetime earnings accumulating in a 1.6% economic loss to Texas' GDP, or $938.7 billion in present value.

[1] 2022 STAAR Results Summary, July 2022, https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/2022-staar-results-summary.pdf.
[2] 2021 STAAR Results Summary, July 2021, https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/covid/Overview-of-2021-STAAR-Results.pdf.
[3] Hoover Institution, January 2023, "The Economic Cost Of The Pandemic: Texas," https://www.hoover.org/sites/default/files/research/docs/Texas_HESI_PaperSeries_template_Final.pdf.

II. TEXAS LEADS THE NATION WITH IMPLEMENTATION OF STATEWIDE TUTORING INTERVENTION

High-impact tutoring (HIT), or tutoring over time using quality materials in regular small groups, can positively impact the trajectory of students' learning with the potential to mitigate these statewide trends. This practice has been widely recognized by education and policymakers nationally as one of the primary strategies to recover and accelerate student learning. In particular, research consistently shows that high-impact tutoring is:

- More effective than other academic interventions with "increased achievement by roughly 3-15 months of learning across grade levels;"[4]
- One of the most effective interventions for economically disadvantaged students (one of the demographic groups impacted most by the pandemic);[5]
- Impactful even when scaled to large populations of students;[6] and
- Cost-effective with about a "16:1 benefit-to-cost ratio for each dollar spent on small-group tutoring."[7]

Supported by this strong evidence-base, we applaud the Senate Education Committee and the broader Legislature's recognition that the severity of students' disrupted learning and the generational risk of lost educational attainment must be matched with equally responsive academic interventions. Although schools across the country are using tutoring to support COVID recovery, in passing HB 4545 Texas was one of the first 10 states to enact statewide tutoring legislation and set the standard for student-centered recovery.[8]

Since HB 4545's enactment, there have been early indicators that high-impact tutoring (in conjunction with other evidence-based strategies) remains a promising path for accelerating Texas students' learning. Data from the Texas Education Agency (TEA), reveals that the number of 3rd-8th Grade students who caught up to "approaching" grade-level performance in Reading and Math between 2021 to 2022 was higher–by 13% and 3% respectively–than those who caught up to that level between 2018 to 2019.[9]

At the same time, however, national trends tell us that we have more to do: a recent survey on tutoring rates reported that fewer than 10% of students who need tutoring can actually access it and of those who can only 11% are receiving evidence-based tutoring that meets the criteria known to increase academic gains–such as being provided in small groups.[10] Students with the greatest academic gaps are even less likely to have access to this transformative intervention.

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[4] "The transformative potential of tutoring for PreK-12 learning outcomes: Lessons from randomized evaluations," Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab, https://www.povertyactionlab.org/sites/default/files/publication/Evidence-Review_The-Transformative-Potential-of-Tutoring.pdf.
[5] Dietrichson, Jens & Bøg, Martin & Filges, Trine & Jørgensen, Anne-Marie. (2017). Academic Interventions for Elementary and Middle School Students With Low Socioeconomic Status: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. Review of Educational Research, 87(2), 243–282. https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654316687036.
[6] Ibid.; Nickow, Andre Joshua, Philip Oreopoulos, and Vincent Quan. (2020). The Impressive Effects of Tutoring on PreK-12 Learning: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of the Experimental Evidence. (EdWorkingPaper: 20-267). https://edworkingpapers.com/sites/default/files/ai20-267.pdf.
[7] Washington State Institute for Public Policy. (2019). https://www.wsipp.wa.gov/BenefitCost/Program/352.
[8] "Low Down on High Impact Tutoring," Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and EdSolutions.https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1aWJAWmBrng8LeLVmATaaauTlJ47MkPWD/edit#slide=id.g120a431c3a4_0_20.
[9] TEA, February 2023, "State of Education and the 88th Legislature."
[10] "School Pulse Panel" (2022). Institute of Education Sciences. https://ies.ed.gov/schoolsurvey/spp/.

III. THE PATH FORWARD: STAYING THE COURSE WITH PRINCIPLES OF HIGH-IMPACT TUTORING TO IMPROVE STUDENT OUTCOMES

Lessons learned from HB 4545's initial implementation underscore the need to **leverage data-driven acceleration strategies and also improve policy to better reflect current school system constraints**. As the Committee evaluates how to adjust the policy this Session, **we are supportive of SB 1261's intent to stay the course with what we know works for improving student outcomes and not sacrifice on data-driven research around tutoring ratios, while recognizing school system flexibility in other aspects**:

- SB 1261's maintenance of small group tutoring ratios of no more than four students per tutor is critical to catching students up and sustaining academic gains. This is because not all tutoring is *high-impact tutoring* and the research is clear that **the specific ratio of students to tutors matters**. TEA's High Impact Tutoring Toolkit mirrors national research and states that tutors are most effective when instructing a maximum of three or four students simultaneously.[11] **More than 4 students in a group is no longer considered high-impact tutoring** and instead is categorized by researchers as "small group instruction." Small group instruction that exceeds these ratios is far less valuable since its capacity for personalized instruction is diminished, and its need for higher tutor expertise is increased. The facts on the ground from implementation the past few years are also clear: school systems do not currently have the capacity for their teacher workforce alone to tutor at scale. Instead, they must deploy a hybrid approach by leveraging a diverse, non-teacher tutor pool. This further underscores the need for a low student-to-tutor ratio to ensure that tutoring experiences with non-teachers are as effective and supportive as possible for accelerating students' learning. Ultimately, **increasing the ratio from 3:1 as enacted in HB 4545 (87R) to 4:1 in SB 1261 (while allowing for parent waivers as is currently permitted) will allow school systems to more readily meet the requirement while maintaining a strong return on our investment.**
- SB 1261 also proposes meaningful changes to better support district implementation by **providing flexibility in required tutoring hours based on academic readiness** (requiring no less than 15 hours of accelerated instruction per failed test and more for those students who performed far below grade-level), and **lessening some administrative burden.**

As the Committee discusses SB 1261 and modifications to HB 4545, we respectfully ask for the following considerations to be taken into account in strengthening Texas' path forward with high-impact tutoring:

- **Better parent communication and engagement in getting students on grade level**–currently the majority of parents are unaware of their students' academic performance in relation to grade-level standards (43% of parents in the U.S. think their child did not have any learning loss during the pandemic[12] and 9 out of 10 parents believe that their child is at/above grade level).[13] Rather than removing Accelerated Learning Committees altogether with no replacement, parental engagement should be encouraged by sharing Accelerated Education Plans via multiple modalities (e.g., in print,

[11] "High Impact Tutoring Toolkit," TEA, https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/high_impact_tutoring_toolkit.pdf; "Accelerating Student Learning with High-Dosage Tutoring," Ed Research for Recovery, https://annenberg.brown.edu/sites/default/files/EdResearch_for_Recovery_Design_Principles_1.pdf.
[12] Education Next, 2022, "Program on Education Policy and Governance –Survey 2022 Parent Responses," http://www.educationnext.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/2022ednextpollparentsurvey.pdf.
[13] Learning Heroes, June 2022, "Hidden in Plain Sight," https://bealearninghero.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Parents22-Research-Deck-1.pdf.

digitally, verbally, etc.) with families after the first year of a students' unsatisfactory performance and requiring parent-teacher conferences after failures.

- **Continued investment in this intervention and effective data collection to evaluate progress**–HB 4545's funding for mandated accelerated instruction will expire once federal COVID relief funds expire over the next few years.[14] The Committee should determine which resources are needed and which funding mechanism will be utilized to continue providing this transformative intervention to all academically behind students. With increased investment, however, it is essential that **robust data collection** is required so that the best practices can be identified and scaled, and lessen the risk of the state funding poor and ineffective implementation of high-impact tutoring.

By continuing to invest in high-impact tutoring with evidenced-backed ratios while simultaneously providing increased opportunities for flexibility, more Texas school systems can implement tutoring with fidelity.

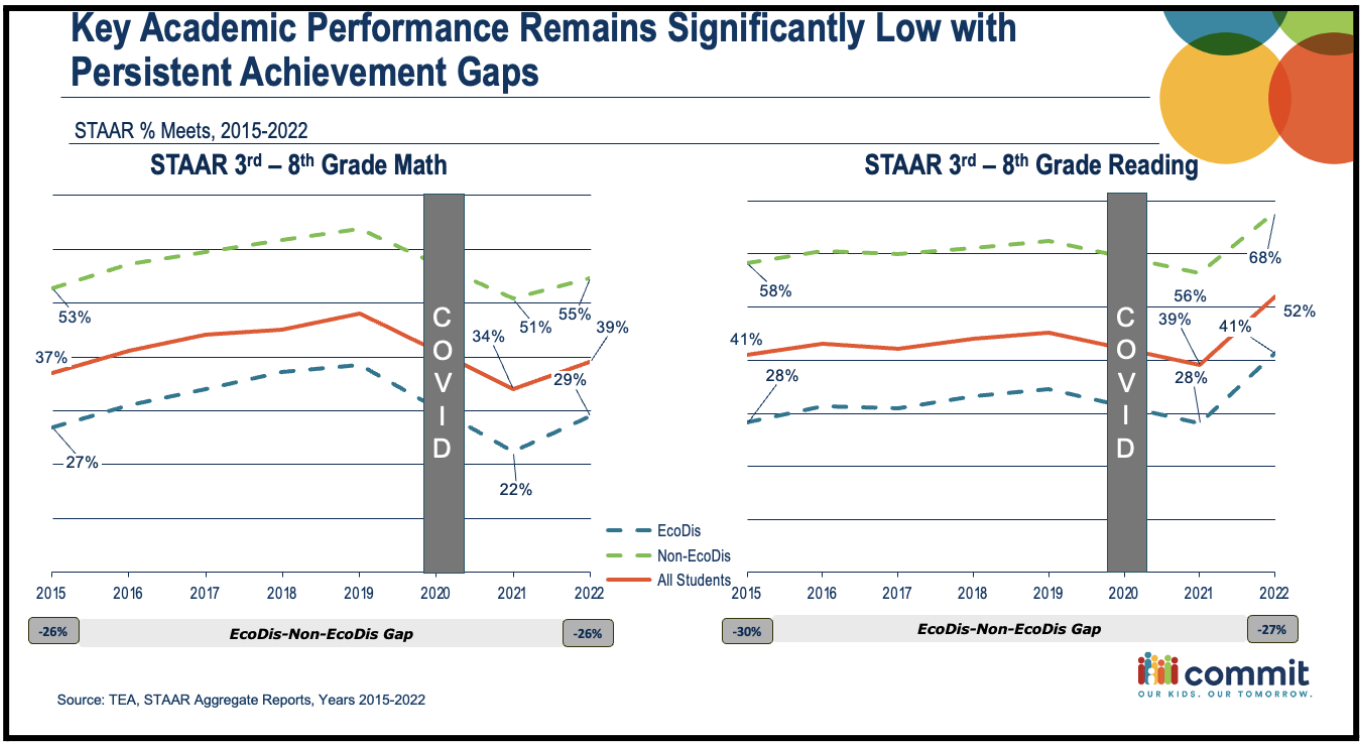
Gratefully,
Kate Greer
Policy & State Coalition, Managing Director
The Commit Partnership

Additional Supporters:

NTXTC North Texas Tutoring Coalition
Texas Business Leadership Council
Texas Association of Business The Texas State Chamber
Texas 2036
Greater Houston Partnership
RGV Partnership
CREED
Leading People. Leading Prosperity. Longview Chamber of Commerce
Kilgore Area Chamber of Commerce
Teach Plus
The Education Trust in Texas
ERN Texas
Good Reason Houston
Education Opens Doors
TeachForAmerica | Texas
Dallas Afterschool
Austin Chamber
Texas District Charter Alliance
Dallas College

[14] This Edunomics dashboard reflects LEA data on ESSER funding reported to TEA as of 12/6/22: https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/edunomicslab/viz/TXTotalESSERSummary/Texas_Summary.

APPENDIX A


Key Academic Performance Remains Significantly Low with Persistent Achievement Gaps
STAAR % Meets, 2015-2022
STAAR 3rd – 8th Grade Math
53%
37%
27%
34%
51%
55%
39%
29%
22%
COVID
2015
2016
2017
2018
2019
2020
2021
2022
EcoDis
Non-EcoDis
All Students
-26%
EcoDis-Non-EcoDis Gap
-26%
STAAR 3rd – 8th Grade Reading
58%
41%
28%
39%
56%
28%
41%
68%
52%
COVID
-30%
EcoDis-Non-EcoDis Gap
-27%
commit
OUR KIDS. OUR TOMORROW.
Source: TEA, STAAR Aggregate Reports, Years 2015-2022