



TEXANS ADVOCATING FOR MEANINGFUL STUDENT ASSESSMENT

July 1, 2020

The Honorable Greg Abbott
Governor of Texas
Office of the Governor
P.O. Box 12428
Austin, Texas 78711-2428

Re: High Stakes Testing in 2020-21

Dear Governor Abbott,

Texans Advocating for Meaningful Student Assessment (TAMSA)¹ respectfully requests that Texas seek a waiver from the US Department of Education from mandatory federal testing requirements for the 2020-2021 school year. As the vice-president of TAMSA and a physician, I have grave concerns about the steep rise of COVID-19 cases in our state. As we approach the new school year, the health and safety of our students and educators in the public school system are paramount to us all. While Commissioner Morath has done a noble job responding to daily challenges and a changing environment posed by the virus, the fact remains that the number of new cases keeps rising in our state. There are still many unanswered questions concerning how schools can reopen safely in the midst of a pandemic.

Your declaration of a statewide emergency order in Texas allows you to act in the best interest of Texas citizens' health and safety. TAMSA asks that you seek a waiver from the Department of Education of the administration of the STAAR tests for the 2020-2021 school year. Other states are seeking similar waivers. Given the very concerning trends of the pandemic in our state, we need the maximum level of flexibility from the federal government when it comes to imposing standardized testing. Standardized testing is not mandatory for learning to occur. In fact, districts around the state have done an admirable job of ensuring that curriculum was delivered to students during the shutdown. Thus, TAMSA requests that you direct the Texas Education Agency to seek a federal waiver of mandatory standardized testing for school year 2020-21.

Concurrently, TAMSA requests that you add the removal of high stakes from state standardized testing such as STAAR to your emergency item agenda for the 2021 legislative session. High stakes include grade advancement and graduation requirements tied to performance on a standardized test, as well as state accountability rankings. TAMSA supports testing as long as it is **meaningful**: utilized to help identify gaps and support all student learning. Standardized

¹ TAMSA is a state wide all volunteer parent advocacy group.



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testing can be used, as it is in private schools, as an informational tool, not as a punitive element. The federal government does **not** require that high stakes be applied to the state-designed standardized tests for student achievement and state accountability. Indeed, over recent years, the highest performing states have moved away from high stakes. Currently only 11 states, including Texas, require high stakes. In recent legislative sessions, several leading Texas Republican legislators have advanced bills removing the high stakes. If you were to add removal of high stakes on standardized tests to your emergency agenda, that leadership would enable the issue to be addressed during a critical time in our state.

In any case, regardless of the legislative outcome in 2021, current health and safety threats require swift action. TAMSA requests that you waive the applicability of high stakes for the 2020-21 school year, as you wisely did already for the 2019-20 school year.

Until every student has the opportunity to return to learn in their usual way at school, we believe it is prudent, advisable and supportive of Texas families and schools that you seek a waiver of testing for the 2020-2021 school year, and that you proactively waive high stakes on testing that may occur in 2020-21.

We are available at any time to discuss these important issues with you and your staff.

Sincerely,

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