

**SUBJECT:** Reducing STAAR testing in grades 3 through 8

**COMMITTEE:** Public Education — committee substitute recommended

**VOTE:** 13 ayes — Huberty, Bernal, Allen, Allison, Ashby, K. Bell, Dutton, M. González, K. King, Meyer, Sanford, Talarico, VanDeaver

0 nays

**WITNESSES:** For — (*Registered, but did not testify:* Andrea Chevalier, Association of Texas Professional Educators; Jacquie Benestante, Autism Society of Texas; Traci Berry, Goodwill Central Texas; Laurie Filipelli, League of Women Voters of Texas; Paige Williams, Texas Classroom Teachers Association; Mark Terry, Texas Elementary Principals and Supervisors Association; Suzi Kennon, Texas PTA; Jerod Patterson, Texas Rural Education Association; Dustin Cox; Felicia Miyakawa)

Against — (*Registered, but did not testify:* Drew Scheberle, The Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce)

On — Kara Belew, Texas Public Policy Foundation; (*Registered, but did not testify:* Hannah LaPorte, IDEA Public Schools; Pablo Barrera, TCSA; Chris Jones, Tyson Kane, Eric Marin, and Monica Martinez, Texas Education Agency; Dee Carney, Texas School Alliance; Heather Smith)

**BACKGROUND:** Using the STAAR instrument, public school students in grades 3 through 8 are assessed every year in reading and mathematics. Students in grades 4 and 7 take a writing test; students in grade 5 take a science test; and students in grade 8 take science and social studies tests. Federal law requires states to test students yearly in math and English/language arts.

**DIGEST:** CSHB 2983 would reduce STAAR testing requirements for students in grades 3 through 8 who met certain performance thresholds. The bill would eliminate the requirement that all students in grades 4, 6, and 7 be assessed in mathematics and reading. It also would move the grades 4 and 7 writing exams to grades 5 and 8.

Under the bill, students in grade 3 would take math and reading exams; students in grade 5 would take math, reading, science, and writing exams; and students in grade 8 would take math, reading, science, social studies, and writing exams.

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) would determine for each periodic statewide test and each test administered in grade 6 for retesting purposes a minimum satisfactory adjusted scale score, designed to predict within a 3 percent margin of error that a student would achieve satisfactory performance on an exam in the same subject the following year. Students in grades 3 and 5 who did not achieve the satisfactory score on their math or reading exams would be required to take the same subject-area tests in grades 4 and 6. Students in grade 7 who had not achieved the satisfactory score during their grade 6 retests would have to take the same subject-area tests in grade 7.

CSHB 2983 would give school districts and charter schools discretion to administer the appropriate grade-level tests to students who were not required to test in order to determine whether students were performing at a satisfactory level. These optional tests would be administered in the same manner and at the same cost as those administered to students who were required to test. TEA could not count the scores of students administered optional tests for campus or district accountability measures.

If any portion of the bill violated federal testing requirements, the commissioner of education would be required to seek waivers from the conflicting federal requirements. In seeking a waiver, the commissioner would have to submit all relevant data, including data relating to:

- the likelihood that a student who achieved a score on an exam that was equal to or greater than the minimum satisfactory adjusted scale score would in subsequent years perform satisfactorily on exams in the same subject;
- the costs associated with ongoing assessment of students who had proven likely to perform successfully on subsequent exams; and

- the benefit of redirecting resources from assessing students who had proven likely to perform successfully on subsequent exams toward enabling lower performing students to perform successfully on exams after one school year.

The bill would take effect on any date not later than September 1, 2021, on which the education commissioner obtained any necessary waiver from the federal government or received notification from the U.S. Department of Education that a waiver was not required. A waiver or notification would have to be published in the Texas Register. The bill would apply beginning with the first school year that began after the act took effect.

**SUPPORTERS  
SAY:**

CSHB 2983 would lower the testing burden on schools and students by allowing high-performing elementary and middle school students to skip STAAR testing in grades 4, 6, and 7 if they had performed satisfactorily on their exams in previous grades. This would allow these students to focus their time and energy on learning new concepts instead of taking STAAR exams that they were expected to pass with a great deal of statistical certainty.

Texas has long been a leader in standardized testing and school accountability, and the state has accumulated data which demonstrates that a student who performs well on a test one year will likely perform as well in the next year. School districts would have the option to test any student at any grade level in the years they were not required to test in order to ensure they were keeping pace, but those scores would not count toward campus or district accountability.

A similar bill enacted by the 83rd Legislature in 2013 was signed into law but expired in 2017 after the U.S. Department of Education did not grant a waiver from federal testing requirements. CSHB 2983 would reinstate the expired statutory language so that a waiver request again could be presented to federal authorities.

While the bill would have costs associated with developing new writing exams, those costs would be partially offset by savings from eliminating

the grade 4 and 7 writing exams.

OPPONENTS  
SAY:

CSHB 2983 would require the education commissioner to request a waiver from federal testing requirements in order to allow the state to eliminate certain testing requirements, which would be both inappropriate and likely ineffective. Texas should not retreat from annual testing requirements for all students in grades 3 through 8. Federal law requires annual assessments in math and reading at every grade, and there is no indication the U.S. Department of Education would grant Texas a waiver of those requirements.

CSHB 2983 could create a stigma for lower-performing students who had to retest in grades 4, 6, or 7. Despite the efforts of schools to keep this information confidential, students could easily determine who was required to retest and who was not, which could lead to the some students being labeled.

Moving the current STAAR writing exams from grades 4 and 7 to grades 5 and 8 would require the development of unnecessary and costly new exams.

NOTES:

According to the Legislative Budget Board, the bill would have a negative impact of \$2.9 million to general revenue related funds through fiscal 2020-21 for the Texas Education Agency to develop new writing assessments for grades 5 and 8.