

SUBJECT: Reducing STAAR testing for public school students

COMMITTEE: Public Education — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 9 ayes — Allen, Allison, K. Bell, Bernal, Buckley, M. González, Meza, Talarico, VanDeaver

3 nays — Dutton, Huberty, K. King

1 absent — Lozano

WITNESSES: For — Ossa Fisher, Istation (Imagination Station); Rick Westfall, Keller ISD; Dallas Kennedy; (*Registered, but did not testify:* David Anderson, Arlington ISD Board of Trustees; Chloe Latham Sikes, Intercultural Development Research Association; Naomi Miller, Northside ISD; Charles Gaines, Raise Your Hand Texas; Richard Webster, Spring Branch ISD; Grover Campbell, TASB; Kristin Mcguire, TCASE; Theresa Trevino, Texas Advocating for Meaningful Student Assessment; Barry Haenisch, Texas Association of Community Schools; Casey McCreary, Texas Association of School Administrators; Paige Williams, Texas Classroom Teachers Association; Dee Carney, Texas School Alliance; Michelle Cline, Throckmorton ISD; and nine individuals)

Against — (*Registered, but did not testify:* Madison Yandell, Texas 2036; Gregg Vunderink)

On — (*Registered, but did not testify:* Eric Marin, Justin Porter, and Monica Martinez, Texas Education Agency)

BACKGROUND: Education Code sec. 39.023 requires the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to adopt and develop appropriate instruments to assess essential knowledge and skills in reading, writing, mathematics, social studies, and science. The current testing program, known as the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness, or STAAR, tests students as follows:

- math and reading, annually in grades 3 through 8;
- social studies, in grade 8;
- science, in grades 5 and 8; and
- any other subject and grade required by federal law.

TEA is required to adopt end-of-course exams for high school courses in Algebra I, biology, English I, English II, and U.S. history.

DIGEST:

CSHB 764 would remove requirements for the administration of statewide standardized tests in writing in grades 4 and 7, in social studies in grade 8, and in any additional subject and grade required by federal law.

The bill would remove requirements that the Texas Education Agency (TEA) adopt end-of-course tests for Algebra I, biology, English I, English II, and U.S. history. TEA instead would be required to provide tests for each federally required secondary-level subject, including English language arts, mathematics, and science. The commissioner would have to identify a procedure for a school district to select as a secondary-level test the SAT, the ACT, or any other nationally recognized, norm-referenced test designated by the commissioner of education. A district would have to select one or more tests. A district that selected more than one test would have to administer the same test uniformly to students in the district to satisfy the requirement for the same subject.

The district-selected secondary test would have to be a secured test. The commissioner would have to contract with a vendor to administer the test, complete the scoring of the test, and distribute the results to TEA and the relevant results to each district. A district would have to distribute the relevant results to each of its campuses and to provide written notice to the student and the person standing in parental relation to the student.

If changes were made to the federal Every Student Succeeds Act that reduced the number or frequency of assessment instruments required to be administered to students, the State Board of Education would have to adopt rules reducing the number or frequency of required state exams. The commissioner would have to ensure that students were not assessed in

subject areas or in grades that were no longer required to meet the federal minimum requirements.

Alternative assessments. CSHB 764 would require TEA to adopt alternative adaptive assessment instruments that a school district could administer to satisfy state or federal law requirements. The alternative assessments would have to be administered electronically and meet certain requirements as specified in the bill. The alternative assessments would have to be adopted as soon as practicable after the effective date of the bill.

TEA could contract for services to develop or administer alternative adaptive assessments. School districts would have to be reimbursed for all costs associated with the administration of an alternative adaptive assessment.

Transition plan. The commissioner would be required to adopt a transition plan to implement the requirements of CSHB 764 regarding end-of-course exams beginning with students enrolled in grade 9 for the first time during the 2021-2022 school year.

Except for the requirements for TEA to adopt the alternative adaptive assessment instruments, the bill would apply beginning with the 2022-2023 school year.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2021.

SUPPORTERS
SAY:

CSHB 764 would reduce the burden of STAAR tests currently administered to students in grades 3 through 8 by eliminating the 4th and 7th grade writing and 8th grade social studies exams. The exams that would be eliminated are not federally required. The bill also would reform high school end-of-course exams and comply with federal reporting standards by instead administering post-secondary exams such as the SAT or ACT.

Texas has spent considerable time and money administering STAAR exams, which have not proved to be a valid method for assessing student's learning. The high-stakes nature of STAAR is stressful for students and teachers. In April, thousands of Texas students experienced technical difficulties taking their STAAR exams online. Students in districts across the state were kicked out of the exams and unable to log back in.

CSHB 764 would create alternative adaptive assessments that would be shorter in length and given at regular intervals throughout the school year as opposed to STAAR exams given near the end of the school year. Teachers could use the real-time data they would get from the adaptive assessments to provide remediation to students throughout the school year.

Eliminating STAAR exams would improve campus culture by eliminating the steps schools must take to prevent cheating and requirements that students remain at their desks during the duration of the hours-long exam. The bill also would reduce time that teachers spend preparing students for STAAR exams.

For high school students, there are more dependable exams for assessing college readiness such as the ACT and SAT. Those exams meet federal requirements for assessing secondary students and many already take the SAT or ACT for college admission.

Many Texas parents and teachers have been voicing concerns about STAAR exams for years. CSHB 764 would provide an opportunity to walk away from STAAR testing and try a new way of measuring student's academic progress.

**CRITICS
SAY:**

By reducing state testing requirements, CSHB 764 could diminish the ability of educators to accurately diagnose student achievement gaps and address identified needs. The results of STAAR exams provide vital information to students, parents, educators, and policymakers about student learning. The exams are an important factor in grading school

districts and charter schools, allowing taxpayers and policymakers to see if investments in public education are making a difference in student outcomes. This information is particularly helpful in seeing if Texas schools are making progress in closing achievement gaps for low-income and minority students, a growing portion of public school students.

School closures and disruptions to education caused by the COVID-19 pandemic make this an important time to take stock of learning losses that some students may have suffered. The Legislature made a significant investment in public education during the 2019 session, and STAAR data could show if higher per-student spending and spending that targets certain student populations is paying off.

Texas students have not compared favorably to students in other states on certain national tests. According to the Nation's Report Card, between 2005 and 2019 Texas dropped from 36th to 46th among states in fourth-grade reading proficiency on a national assessment. Now is not the time to retreat in efforts to improve student achievement.

NOTES:

According to the Legislative Budget Board, the bill would have a negative impact of \$68.3 million to general revenue through fiscal 2023.