

- SUBJECT:** Changes to end-of-course exams and graduation requirements
- COMMITTEE:** Public Education — favorable, without amendment
- VOTE:** 10 ayes — Eissler, Hochberg, Allen, Aycock, Dutton, Guillen, Huberty, Shelton, Strama, Weber
- 0 nays
- 1 absent — T. Smith
- WITNESSES:** For — Portia Bosse, Texas State Teachers Association; Jesus Chavez, Texas School Alliance; Alicia Thomas, North East ISD, Texas School Alliance, Texas Association of School Administrators (TASA), Texas Association of School Boards (TASB); (*Registered, but did not testify:* Amanda Brownson, Fort Bend ISD; Lloyd Graham, La Porte ISD; Cherry Kugle, Raise Your Hand Texas; Martin Pena, South Texas Association of Schools; Yolanda Rey, Texas Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development (Texas ASCD); Don Rogers, Texas Rural Education Association; Debbie Seeger, Corpus Christi ISD; Howell Wright, Rockdale ISD, Texas Association of Community Schools, Texas Association of Mid Size Schools, Texas Rural Education Association)
- Against — Bill Hammond, Texas Association of Business; Andrew Erben, Texas Institute for Education Reform; Richard Golsun, Texas Public Policy Foundation and Texas Coalition for a Competitive Workforce; Sandy Kress, Texas Coalition for a Competitive Workforce/GBC; Drew Scheberle, Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce; James Windham, Texas Institute for Education Reform; (*Registered, but did not testify:* Beth Ann Bryan; Justin Yancy, Governor’s Business Council)
- On — Criss Cloudt, Texas Education Agency; Lindsay Gustafson, Texas Classroom Teachers Association (TCTA); Gloria Zyskowski, Texas Education Agency
- BACKGROUND:** The 81st Legislature in 2009 enacted HB 3 by Eissler, which overhauled the state’s public school accountability system. The state’s accountability system rates schools and districts based on student performance. HB 3

replaced the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) with end-of-course exams as the state assessment for high school students.

Beginning in the 2011-2012 school year, high school students will take end-of-course exams in math, science, social studies, and English language arts and must earn at least the minimum score as determined by the education commissioner. Students will be scored on their overall performance on an exam and any applicable college readiness indicators. HB 3 amended the graduation requirements for the minimum, recommended, and distinguished high school graduation plans, including the requirement that a student perform satisfactorily on certain end-of-course exams.

DIGEST:

HB 500 would amend the requirements for earning a high school diploma under the minimum and recommended high school graduation programs.

**Inclusion in the final grade for the course.** The bill would remove the requirement that a high school student's grade on an end-of-course exam comprise 15 percent of the student's final course grade. The bill would require school districts to adopt a policy addressing whether or not a student's end-of-course exam score would be used to determine the student's final course grade and, if so, how it would do so. Policies developed by school districts would apply beginning with the 2011-2012 school year.

**Minimum and recommended graduation plan requirements.** In order to graduate, a student would have to meet the cumulative score requirement of performing satisfactorily on 12 end-of-course exams in math, science, social studies, and English language arts or would have to meet the performance standard on four end-of-course exams under the minimum or recommended high school graduation plan. The four end-of-course exams would be in English III; Algebra I for the minimum plan and Algebra II for the recommended plan; world geography, world history, or U.S. history; and biology, chemistry, or physics.

**Transition timeline.** The bill would require all incoming ninth-grade students during the 2011-2012 or 2012-2013 school years to take end-of-course exams for each of the following 12 courses in which they were enrolled: Algebra I, Algebra II, geometry, biology, chemistry, physics, English I-III, world history, world geography, and U.S. history. These students could not receive a high school diploma unless they performed

satisfactorily on each of those exams or unless they achieved at least the minimum score, as defined by the commissioner, for the exams in English III, Algebra II; biology, chemistry, or physics; and world geography, world history, or U.S. history.

All incoming ninth-grade students during the 2013-2014 school year would have to meet the new requirements for the minimum or recommended high school graduation plans in order to receive a diploma.

**Conversion scale.** For the purpose of calculating the scale score used to determine satisfactory performance, the education commissioner would have to provide a conversion scale for each scale score not based on a 100-point scale scoring system.

**Retesting requirements.** The bill would eliminate the requirement that a student retake an end-of-course exam for which the student did not meet the minimum score and instead make it optional. A student who failed to perform satisfactorily under the college readiness performance standard in Algebra II or English III could retake the exam. A student no longer would be allowed to retake an end-of-course exam for any reason.

**Effective date.** HB 500 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, 2011.

SUPPORTERS  
SAY:

HB 500 would reduce the number of end-of-course exams a student would have to pass from 12 to four to earn a high school diploma under the recommended high school program. This change would reduce the number of high-stakes tests taken by students and decrease the financial burden that state assessments place on school districts. The bill instead would focus testing on English III and Algebra II, which are the only two courses that consistently correlate with college readiness.

**School district accountability.** Since school districts are held accountable for student performance, they would continue to have an incentive not to allow students to ignore the importance of end-of-course exams.

**Inclusion in the final grade for the course.** The bill would allow local school districts to use their discretion to determine whether or not a student's end-of-course exam score would be included in the student's final course grade. Rather than imposing a rigid one-size-fits-all system,

HB 500 would give districts the flexibility to adapt their local policy to local needs in determining how to count the end-of-course exam in determining a student's final course grade. The transition period included in the bill would give school districts the opportunity to gather data to align their curricula with the end-of-course exams.

**Graduation program requirements.** The bill would provide flexibility in the graduation requirements for students choosing to graduate under the recommended or minimum high school graduation plans, which would allow them to focus on the exams measuring college and workforce readiness.

**Conversion scale.** The conversion scale provided in the bill would ensure that all exam scores were comparable.

OPPONENTS  
SAY:

HB 500 would abdicate the state's commitment to ensuring that all students graduated college or career ready. By reducing the state's expectations of public school students, the changes in end-of-course exams made by this bill would decrease the quality and value of their education.

Students need the incentive that end-of-course exams provide. It is rational to expect that all lessons will culminate in comprehensive tests. The expectations of foreign countries far exceed Texas' expectations for its students. Texas students deserve to be held to a standard that will allow them to be competitive internationally.

**Inclusion in the final grade for the course.** While the conversion scale would make exam scores comparable, it would not ensure that all high school grade point averages were comparable. If each school district did not include the end-of-course exam scores in final course grades, then overall grade point averages would be impossible to compare. If all grade point averages were not comparable, the fairness of the state's top 10-percent law — allowing students who graduate in the top 10 percent of their high school class to be admitted automatically to any public higher education institution in Texas — would be called into question.

**School district accountability.** The state has only just begun to implement the provisions of HB 3 by Eissler, enacted last session, which is considered a national model for high expectations for student performance and school district accountability. Current law already

provides enough transition and flexibility. The state should wait at least four years to implement the provisions of the new law and examine how well it works before considering major revisions.

NOTES:

According to the fiscal note, HB 500 would save about \$3.7 million in fiscal 2012-13 by reducing the costs of administering end-of-course exams.