

SUBJECT: Reducing STAAR testing in grades 3 through 8

COMMITTEE: Public Education — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 11 ayes — Aycock, Allen, J. Davis, Deshotel, Dutton, Farney, Huberty, K. King, Ratliff, J. Rodriguez, Villarreal

0 nays

WITNESSES: For — Barbara Beto, Texas PTA; Scott Hochberg; Guy Sconzo; Humble ISD; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Portia Bosse, Texas State Teachers Association; Ramiro Canales, Texas Association of School Administrators; Harley Eckhart, Texas Elementary Principals and Supervisors Association; Lindsay Gustafson, Texas Classroom Teachers Association; Dwight Harris, Texas AFT; Ken McCraw, Texas Association of Community Schools; Don Rogers, Texas Rural Education Association; Julie Shields, Texas Association of School Boards; Theresa Trevino and Laura Yeager, Texans Advocating for Meaningful Student Assessment; Paula Chaney Trietsch; Maria Whitsett, Texas School Alliance; Howell Wright, Texas Association of Mid-Size Schools)

Against — Socar Chatmon Thomas; Zenobia Joseph (*Registered, but did not testify*: Bill Hammond, Texas Association of Business; Justin Yancy, Texas Business Leadership Council)

On — Kathi Thomas; (*Registered, but did not testify*: David Anderson and Gloria Zyskowski, Texas Education Agency)

BACKGROUND: The 81st Legislature in 2009 enacted HB 3 by Eissler, which replaced the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) with a new series of assessments in grades 3-8. The State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) exams were administered for the first time in the spring of 2012.

Students 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.

DIGEST:

CSHB 866 would reduce State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) testing requirements for students in grades 3-8 who met certain performance thresholds. It would eliminate the requirement that students in grades 4, 6, and 7 be assessed in mathematics and reading. It also would eliminate the writing exams in grades 4 and 7 and the grade 8 social studies exam.

Third graders would continue to take mathematics and reading exams. Fifth graders and eighth graders would continue to take mathematics, reading, and science exams.

In addition to a scale score indicating satisfactory performance, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) would determine for each required test 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 assessment in the same subject the following year.

Students who did not achieve the performance threshold on any of their grade 3 or grade 5 STAAR tests would be required to take the same subject-area tests in grades 4 and 6. Students who failed in grade 6 to meet a performance threshold would be retested in the same subject in grade 7.

TEA would be required to develop new science tests to be administered in grades 6 and 7 to students who failed to meet performance thresholds in grades 5 and 6, respectively.

CSHB 866 would give school districts and open-enrollment charter schools discretion to administer the appropriate grade-level tests to any student in order to determine whether students who were not required to test were performing at a satisfactory level. These optional tests would be administered in the same manner and at the same cost as tests 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 federal requirements.

CSHB 866 would take immediate effect if passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect

September 1, 2013 and apply beginning with the 2013-14 school year.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

CSHB 866 would allow high-performing elementary and middle school students to skip STAAR testing in grades 4, 6, and 7. For example, if a child performed satisfactorily on the grade 3 STAAR mathematics test, he or she would not be required to take the corresponding test in grade 4. This would reduce the number of tests administered to high-performing students from 17 to as few as eight.

The bill also would address excessive testing of all students by eliminating writing tests in grades 4 and 7, as well as the grade 8 social studies test. Students can best improve their writing through classroom assignments graded by teachers instead of through a standardized exam scored by temporary workers for a testing contractor. Social studies is not an exam required to be administered under federal law. Even if a provision of CSHB 866 did conflict with federal requirements, the bill would instruct the commissioner to seek a waiver.

TEA data from the TAKS program show that students who performed at a certain scale score level in one year tended to perform at similar levels in the following school year, with less than a 3 percent margin of error. For example, data from Humble ISD show that 87 percent of students who passed their TAKS reading test in 2009 also passed their TAKS reading test the previous year. These data show that it is not necessary to test high-performing annually to ensure that they are performing at grade level. These resources would be better spent focusing on kids who have difficulty meeting grade-level assessment standards and need to test every year.

The bill would allow high-performing students to focus their time and energy on learning new concepts instead of focusing every year on a test that they are expected to pass with a great deal of statistical certainty. Nevertheless, the bill would give school districts the option of testing any student in any available subject area test at any grade level to ensure they were keeping pace in the years they were not required to test.

The reduced testing requirements in CSHB 866 would save the state \$13.4 million in fiscal 2014-15, according to Legislative Budget Board (LBB) estimates. There would be additional savings from districts that opted not to administer discretionary tests, although the LBB could not estimate that amount.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

Texas should not back away from its expectations that all students in grades 3 through 8 meet high standards every year in all the subjects required under the new, more rigorous STAAR program. Annual testing requirements help ensure that teachers are following the state curriculum and that students are learning the knowledge and skills they are expected to master at each grade level.

Eliminating the two writing assessments and the social studies test in grade 8 would deprive parents of important information about how their students were performing in school. It also could leave students less prepared for high school, where they will be required to meet end-of-course assessment requirements in both subject areas.

CSHB 866 would create a stigma for lower-performing students who had to test in grades 4, 6, and 7. Despite the efforts of school districts to keep this information confidential, as they are required to under federal law, students could easily determine who was required to test in the grades when testing was not mandatory for everyone, which could lead to classmates being labeled as “smart” or “dumb.”

The LBB estimates that the state would spend \$3.8 million in fiscal 2014 and \$2.6 million in subsequent years developing science assessments that do not currently exist for students in grades 6 and 7. The fiscal note also estimates that TEA would lose \$12.6 million annually in federal funds if the bill violated federal law and the commissioner failed to get a waiver from federal testing requirements.

NOTES:

Unlike the committee substitute, HB 866 as introduced would have preserved the grade 8 social studies test and replaced the writing tests in grades 4 and 7 with writing tests in grades 5 and 8.

The LBB estimates the bill’s reduced assessment requirements would save the state \$13.4 million in fiscal 2014-15.