



## TEXANS ADVOCATING FOR MEANINGFUL STUDENT ASSESSMENT

November 20, 2020

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

Dear Governor Abbott,

Texans Advocating for Meaningful Student Assessment (TAMSA) is following up on our July 3<sup>rd</sup> letter to you regarding testing in Texas public schools (attached for your convenience). With the growing uncertainty in schools in the midst of this pandemic, Texans need to come together to support Texas students with sensible testing protocols and implementation. Although schools have reopened, there is little semblance of normalcy. Students, parents and teachers are working hard to make the best of a difficult situation, despite the ongoing rise in COVID-19 cases.

In July we asked that you 1) direct TEA to seek a waiver of federal testing requirements for the 2020-21 school year and 2) identify removal of high stakes from students as a priority legislative mandate, and 3) remove high stakes on students for the 2020-21 school year.

Today, we ask you again to address the issue of high stakes on students. Standardized test high stakes on students include a requirement of a certain score for both grade promotion and high school graduation. While the Commissioner has waived the grade promotion requirement, the high school graduation requirement remains in effect. Individual Graduation Committees, while beneficial, still do not remove high stakes on students. TAMSA respectfully requests that you waive the high school graduation requirement tied to standardized testing pursuant to your statewide emergency order declaration for the 2020-21 school year.

It is important to understand the background and reasons for this request. There is state precedent to waive this requirement. In 2011 and 2012 there was a statewide uproar related to the requirement that standardized tests must count as 15% of a student's grade. In February of 2012, Senators Dan Patrick, Kel Seliger, Royce West and Florence Shapiro sent a letter to then TEA Commissioner Robert Scott directing that he should waive the inclusion of the 15% into grades until the legislature could resolve the situation in 2013, and they eventually eliminated this requirement. Similarly, in 2020, because of the widespread effects of COVID-19 on public education, there is *again* an outcry that standardized testing should not count toward graduation requirements. Again, there should be an opportunity for the legislature to address the high stakes on students and ensure they are held harmless during the pandemic. Your



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emergency order is ample legal authority to waive the graduation requirement on students. Most importantly, your administration has already waived the applicability of high stakes for the 2019-20 school year. Good public policy, as well as good common sense, support an additional waiver of high stakes on students for 2020-21.

From a practical perspective, now is the time to remove high stakes on students related to STAAR. Others have requested accountability waivers related to campuses and school districts. In this request, TAMSA focuses specifically on the needs of our students struggling with an uncertain education paradigm. For further perspective, note that the high stakes on students are not mandated by any federal law. When TAMSA began, a little over half of the states required testing for graduation. Today, the majority do not, and the highest performing states have dropped testing requirements for graduation. Only 11 states, including Texas, require high stakes on students.

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 environment 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 all high stakes, including high school graduation requirements, 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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cc: Commissioner Mike Morath