



August 27, 2020

Dear Commissioner Morath,

In recent weeks you announced Texas will move forward with administering the STAAR for the 2020-2021 school year, but the testing will have some changes, including waiving the grade promotion requirement, an expanded window, and an extended period for online testing.

We, the undersigned, support student success in all facets of academic achievement, advocating for excellence, opportunity, and equity for all students.

STAAR and End-of-Course exams provide valuable information about individual student learning, as well as patterns of achievement for groups of students. These tests are used to describe individual students' academic achievement and growth over time, to judge student performance relative to standards, to track disparities in the performance of different demographic groups, to compare and evaluate the performance of schools and teachers, and to evaluate educational curricula, programs, and policies.

Assessments are critically important for: (1) making sound decisions about teaching and learning, (2) identifying significant concerns that may require focused intervention for individual children, and (3) helping programs improve their educational and developmental interventions.

Finally, assessment in 2020-2021 is critically important as an equity issue for our highest-need schools. These schools typically benefit in accountability ratings through student growth measures rather than absolute percentage of achievement. Students in high-need schools are most likely to have been negatively impacted by school closings and remote learning due to the COVID-19 virus. If assessment is not provided in 2021, when these negative impacts are likely to be apparent through standardized tests, future accountability growth measures would be unfairly based on change from 2019 scores. As a result, our highest-need schools would be at a great disadvantage as they struggle with demonstrating progress on growth measures.



However, you continue to receive great pressure from many Texas groups to forego testing this academic year. Perhaps, these groups conflate assessment with high stakes accountability.

We support the administration of the STAAR and End-of-Course exams for the 2020-2021 school year for the above reasons, but urge Commissioner Morath and TEA to suspend the school accountability system for the upcoming school year. Spring 2019 and throughout 2020 the gap that exists between students who have access to technology and those who lack access could further hinder students from low-income households. These students already struggle to keep up with their peers from non-low-income households. For students that do not have regular access to technology, we fear that the test may actually measure lack of access rather than their academic knowledge. In addition, COVID-19 outbreaks have negatively impacted some parts of the state more than others; comparing schools across regions with such vastly different uncontrollable circumstances is not valid during this time.

In summary, we appreciate TEA's commitment to fair assessment and support resuming assessment exams for the 2020-2021 school year, but believe that student, teacher, school, and district accountability measures linked to testing should be suspended for this school year.

