



## Message from the Superintendent

Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District



May 11, 2009

Dear Key Communicator:

During this legislative session, one of the major education issues has been the design of a **new accountability system**. Both the Senate and the House have written their own proposals for the new system.

The House Public Education Committee will hear/review the proposed Senate substitute early this week and likely find it unacceptable. At that point, the Conference Committee members will be appointed, possibly as early as Tuesday. If this is the case, it will be Wednesday before they begin working on the bill.

Please review the following critical issues in the accountability proposals that would be positive for CFISD. I have also denoted elements that are concerns that could negatively impact the district.

End-of-Course  
examination  
requirements for  
graduation

- **Positives**

- **House** language that establishes exam requirements appropriate to students' graduation plans and that focuses on areas most needed for postsecondary success, rather than requiring all students to master 2 out of 3 examinations in each of four core areas
- **House** language that accepts completion of dual credit as evidence of college readiness, which fosters students' orientation to postsecondary education and de-emphasizes their having to take one test, on one day

Determination of  
accreditation status  
based on 85% of  
measures met

- **Positives**

- **House** language that provides for accreditation determinations to be made on a level playing field for all sizes and types of districts
- **House** language that affords the commissioner flexibility to consider alternative criteria in atypical circumstances
- **House** language that permits the commissioner to apply appropriate performance floors as new measures are introduced and standards become more rigorous over time

Dropout provisions

- **Positive**

- **Senate** provisions that exclude specific groups of students from being counted as dropouts for situations largely beyond districts' control

Assessment exemptions  
provisions

- **Positives**

- **Senate** language that acknowledges the need for instructional time prior to assessment, *provided that it includes a technical amendment to re-establish the initial one-year LEP exemption period.*
- **House** language that permits the Commissioner to exclude scores for certain students from being included in the accountability subset

Grade-level  
advancement  
determinations and  
accelerated instruction

- **Positives**

- **House** language that requires parents to be consulted in development of accelerated instruction, rather than to serve as approvers
- **House** provisions concerning accelerated instruction, *provided that the provision for it to begin "immediately" be clarified or removed*

Additional measures in  
"base" accreditation  
determinations

- **Concerns**

- **Measures from either bill** that would be used to determine accreditation because 10 more "base" measures are already being

added. Examples are the progress of socially promoted students **(Senate)** or gaps in percentages of students graduating on Recommended or Distinguished graduation plans **(House)**. These add complexity and are duplicative: districts are already being held accountable for the performance of students through test-based and completion rate measures.

AMENDMENTS proposed for the bill that could negatively impact CFISD:

HB 3 Floor Amendment #29 requires districts to adopt policies that require **counselors to spend no more than 10% of their time on assessment-related responsibilities.**

- This provision does not distinguish between assessments that relate to primary guidance and counseling responsibilities and assessments mandated by the state or district.
- It erodes campus- and district-based decision making with regard to assignment of responsibilities.

SB 3 Floor Amendment #2 requires students to complete **four semesters of fine arts in middle school grades.**

- For students who need intensive academic support, this provision actually reduces district and campus opportunity to incorporate “double doses” of core subject area instruction into the regular school day.
- The requirement could have staffing and other scheduling/facilities implications as well. (Does the campus have enough art room space to accommodate that many classes in fine arts?)

SB 3 Floor Amendment #11 **prohibits districts from requiring teachers to assign certain minimum grades.**

- This requires districts to abandon grading practices that support students’ opportunity to get back on track academically and that are an integral part of dropout prevention efforts.
- Eliminating local control on this issue could result in a mire of additional district policies to support students’ opportunities to get back on track, such as unlimited opportunities to make up work, to retake examinations, etc.

HB 3 Floor Amendments #42 and #43 require districts to post, on their websites, general ledgers and adopted budgets and to keep the material posted for a three-year period.

- The volume of information to be posted annually is huge, risks being unmanageable to download, and may clog district server capacity, especially as multiple years’ worth of data is posted.
- People who are not already familiar with accounting coding and procedures will not be able to understand what they see.

As key communicators, please contact our legislative delegation about the issues you feel are important. When this bill comes out of Conference Committee, both houses will vote on it. It is important to urge our elected officials to take time to review and talk to school officials about its implications for school districts.

Sincerely,  
David Anthony, Ed.D.  
Superintendent of Schools