

August 21, 2025
To: House Public Education Committee
RE: HB 8

Dear Chairman Buckley and honorable members of the Committee:

Thank you for inviting me to speak in support of House Bill 8. I'm here on behalf of EdTrust, which advocates on behalf of students of color and students from low-income backgrounds. EdTrust was founded 30 years ago on the belief that strong assessment and accountability systems are an essential foundation for ensuring all students are held to the same rigorous academic standards and have equitable opportunities to meet these standards.

Without well designed systems, students from systemically underserved groups risk having their outcomes and opportunities become invisible, increasing the likelihood that their needs will go unaddressed. Data from assessment and accountability systems cannot, on their own, drive the change we want to see in our schools and classrooms. But they provide the information needed to understand where to target resources, support, and changes in practice.

For decades, Texas has led the nation in its approach for strong assessment and accountability systems, assessing students against rigorous state standards that many states have replicated, and eventually served as the basis for federal backstops. **HB 8 provides Texas with an opportunity to continue to lead the field with innovations to assessments designed to provide parents, educators, and school and district leaders with standards-aligned data throughout the year to help improve instruction and provide more targeted supports for students.**

Change of the magnitude proposed in HB 8 holds incredible potential to be transformative for students, families and educators. But policy is only as effective as quality implementation, and states will be closely watching how the state agency and stakeholders implement this bill to ensure it meets legislative intent. As an advocate working for nearly a decade at the national level on state A&A systems, I'm here to share information about how other states are pursuing similar assessment goals, to contextualize the changes proposed in HB 8, and to share lessons to consider as you set the future of assessment for Texas.

First and foremost, HB 8 charges the state with adopting instructionally supportive assessments, which means providing timely, actionable data while limiting impacts on instruction time.

By administering the assessments a few times a year, tests like the ones proposed in HB 8 can get data back to educators in a matter of hours or days – not weeks or months after the school year is over. This means educators can make data-driven adjustments to instruction to meet the individual needs of students, and parents can provide at-home learning support to ensure their child reaches their full potential– all before the end of each school year.

Implementation will matter here. It's essential that the reports produced by these assessments be easily understood and actionable. In addition to having Texas educators review test items, Texas Education





Agency (TEA) and the selected vendor should work closely with educators—as well as parents and families—to ensure the data provided is clear and appear alongside actionable insights.

HB 8 supports limiting impact on instructional time by including clear limits on the length of new assessments. Ideally, beginning of year (BOY) and middle of year (MOY) tests can be administered within a single class period to eliminate the need for disruptive adjustments to schedules.

Importantly, the bill also includes a ban on other assessments outside of regular classroom tests and important screening instruments for dyslexia. While well meaning, districts around the country often add additional testing—as much as 100 hours across 15 or more different assessments—that take away from valuable instructional time. Instead, HB 8 aims to provide a single assessment system that provides actionable standards-aligned data throughout the year to complement teacher administered assessments.

The multi-year rollout included in the current version of HB 8 will allow for thoughtful development in partnership with Texas educators and families so results are instructionally supportive, so they can better meet the needs of students.

HB 8 also charges TEA to develop a first of its kind within-year growth model for accountability. Given the unprecedented nature of this measure, the inclusion of safeguards in the current version are essential. First, the bill requires that all assessments, including any alternative BOY/MOY assessments, be approved by the state and aligned to state standards. This will ensure that any commercially available interim assessments can only be used if they are truly aligned to grade level standards. This can help build trust in the new assessment system, rather than delivering unclear or confusing results.

Additionally, HB 8 now includes provisions to ensure a through-year growth measure is implemented into the accountability system effectively by providing a deliberate timeline for review and oversight structure to ensure careful deliberation. These protections are necessary given the intent to allow districts to choose from other approved BOY/MOY tests that would all be used to measure within-year growth.

Even beyond the adoption of within-year growth, it will be essential that Texas retain its year-over-year growth measure. This will remain the only way to track student growth across school years, as well as capture schools' ability to mitigate and address summer slide.

Finally, I want to emphasize why criterion-referenced summative assessments are so important. Nearly 30 years ago, Texas led the nation by pioneering the creation of standards-based assessments designed to measure every student's mastery of the same knowledge and skills used to guide classroom instruction. Prior to that, states used norm-referenced tests as their statewide achievement test. Because these tests are designed to compare students to each other, rather than against specific learning standards, the results were used to inflate performance and hide disparities, allowing states to feel good about their performance even if many didn't deserve it.

In contrast, criterion-based assessments and results are an essential civil rights tool. They allow us to understand how the public school system is serving all students and show whether students in systemically underserved student groups are meeting grade level standards.





By providing comparable data of performance against standards, criterion-referenced assessment results are the only way to track progress towards closing achievement gaps and ensure all students can meet their full potential. The fact that HB 8 maintains the essential equity backstop of criterion-referenced, standards-aligned assessment data is just as important as its strides toward innovation.

The assessments developed by HB 8 will allow TX to pursue innovative ways to provide more timely, actionable feedback to parents and educators, as well as school leaders and policymakers. This timely data can support improved classroom instruction, identification of students for additional supports, ongoing evaluations of new initiatives or curriculum materials, and targeted allocation of resources—including both funding and staff time and capacity to the students and schools with the most need.

There is no perfect test nor a flawless accountability system. The foundation of these systems is valid, reliable, and comparable data. But the value of these systems lies in the ways in which this data shines a light on the areas of highest need and then is leveraged by education leaders from the state house to the schoolhouse to direct the resources and supports needed to meet the needs of all students.

Past legislation has helped many high-need students receive targeted, state-funded supports to close achievement gaps. With careful implementation, the current version of HB8 can help Texas be a national leader in leveraging timely, actionable data to equip all students for life after high school.

Sincerely,

Nicholas Munyan-Penney
Assistant Director, P12 Policy
The Education Trust

edtrust

