



Overview

Senate Bill 1557

The 82nd Texas Legislature approved Senate Bill 1557 in 2011, calling for the commissioner of education to select schools for the Texas High Performance Schools Consortium. After an application process, 23 Texas school districts were selected in September 2012 by Commissioner Michael Williams to comprise the Consortium.

According to SB 1557, the Consortium is charged with improving student learning in the state of Texas by developing innovative high-priority learning standards and assessment and accountability systems. The major work of the Consortium includes developing a system that has high priority learning standards, includes the use of multiple assessments with accountability at the local level, and integrates the use of technology into student learning.

Visioning Institute

SB 1557 is an extension of the work of the Visioning Institute that began in 2006 when a group of 35 superintendents from across the state of Texas came together and asked the question, “What should curriculum, instruction, assessment and accountability include as districts work to meet the needs of students?” From the work of the Visioning Institute, ideas emerged that included the importance of a) integrating technology into the learning process on a routine basis, b) using a curriculum that includes high-priority learning standards as opposed to a curriculum that is “a mile wide and an inch deep,” c) broad-based accountability that relies on a variety of measures, d) authentic assessment of students as a powerful tool that enables educators to customize learning, and e) local communities maintaining the lion’s share of control in determining the success of schools.

We believe in the appropriate use of standardized tests and the role they play in measuring educational inequities and the system as a whole, but the current assessment and accountability system is much too reliant on high-stakes, standardized testing. Based on the work of the Visioning Institute, the work of the Consortium, as charged by SB 1557, is to create a balanced assessment and accountability system that insists upon high standards for all students and provides flexibility to local communities.

The Consortium

The goal of the Consortium is to transform education so that all Texas students are future ready. Students should be given the power to create and innovate, and teachers should be given the opportunity to use feedback and assessments to design learning that is both relevant and rigorous. Parents, members of the local business community, and individuals from higher education, agree that they are looking for students who are critical thinkers, innovators, problem solvers, collaborators, and good communicators.

Unfortunately, our current system focuses on teaching to the high-stakes tests, not fostering the skills needed to be future ready.

The preferred future for Texas schools includes an educational system that is built around:

- Dynamic curriculum standards in each content area;
- A variety of assessment alternatives that are not limited to paper and pencil tests;
- The use of technology that is integrated into the learning for students;
- Student interests;
- Involving local communities in determining the accountability features that are important to that community; and
- A variety of pathways to graduation.

Having such a system will prepare students for post-secondary education, the workforce and to be productive citizens.