



ATPE Opposition to SB 6

Relating to public school performance ratings of A through F at the campus level

March 30, 2015

ATPE opposes assigning letter grades to schools and labeling them as failures, because we believe doing so would harm the students who attend those schools. When a school is labeled as a failure the children in that school are also labeled failures, and the stigmatism associated with a failing label, particularly when it is misguided and meaningless, is detrimental to schools and students.

If the goal is to provide parents with a clear and easily understood picture of a school's performance, then this approach is wrong. Changing the label doesn't provide parents the full picture; rather, it continues to give parents a misguided, narrow snapshot based primarily on the state standardized testing system, of which parents and education experts alike increasingly question the effectiveness.

We should be focused on providing parents with an accurate picture of their local schools, and the proposed A through F rating system does not offer parents clarity. For example, Navarro Elementary in Lockhart ISD would be rated as failing under the proposed legislation despite the fact that over 70 percent of its students passed the STAAR exam. Will a D or F rating help parents better understand Navarro Elementary? Clearly not, but it will serve to further stigmatize the school and its students with an inaccurate failing label.

Furthermore, about 85 percent of students in the lowest-performing schools across the state are classified as economically disadvantaged. This and per-pupil funding inequities are examples of important measures parents deserve to know. However, these are not considered when painting a picture of their school's performance.

A simple and meaningless label will not change a parent's accurate understanding of their school; it will merely stigmatize some schools and further emphasize the flawed high-stakes testing system instead of providing districts and parents a true understanding of the successes and struggles of a school.

The Virginia Example

With bipartisan support, the Virginia state government recently overturned the state's A through F system. The bill's author, a Republican who initially voted for the system, acknowledged the stigmatization of schools as a reason for upending the law. He also said the system would make it hard for schools to recruit teachers, among other things.

Instead, the state is now moving toward providing a clearer picture to parents through data that includes school safety and per pupil funding in addition to performance on state standardized tests and student growth measures.

ATPE respectfully urges legislators to oppose SB 6.