

January 11, 2016

Commissioner Mike Morath  
Texas Education Agency  
1701 N. Congress Avenue  
Austin, Texas, 78701

Dear Commissioner Morath:

In 2014 the Texas Education Agency convened a steering committee of education practitioners to assist in the development of new teacher standards and a new recommended appraisal system for Texas. Late last year, an additional committee was convened to provide input on the rule-making process associated with the newly developed teacher standards and appraisal system, the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS). As Texas educators who served on those committees, we ask you to consider our comments and requests regarding a delay in implementation of the proposed rules for 19 TAC Chapter 150, Commissioner's Rules Concerning Educator Appraisals, Subchapter AA, Teacher Appraisal.

In light of recent developments involving education policy within the U.S. Congress and U.S. Department of Education (ED), we encourage you to eliminate the inclusion of value-added data or student standardized assessment results as a means for measuring student growth under T-TESS. When developing the new model and rules governing the model, we understood that the inclusion of state standardized test scores as a means to evaluate a teacher's performance was a requirement set by ED in exchange for maintaining the Texas waiver providing necessary flexibility from the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). At that time, we were willing to accept that our hands were tied and this was not a topic of debate. However, we were freed from the federal waiver restraints when President Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) last month, and reconsideration is crucial to the success of T-TESS.

Using standardized tests to evaluate a teacher's performance remains an unproven and controversial method. Research continues to warn against using value-added measurement (VAM) for high-stakes decision making and suggests that such data provides an inaccurate picture of a teacher's performance. Texas should not fall victim to the inappropriate use of testing data due to policies pushed by the federal government.

We ask you to delay implementation in order to reconsider inclusion of value-added data as a means to measure student growth. We are proud that the inappropriate use of standardized tests in the public education system has been recognized and change is underway. Please help us continue that effort for the betterment of the 5 million schoolchildren across Texas.

Sincerely,

Richard Wiggins, Boerne ISD  
Ginger Franks, Martinsville ISD  
Jeremy Wagner, Frenship ISD  
Stephanie Stoebe, Round Rock ISD  
Libbie Payne, Corpus Christi ISD  
Carlos Diaz-Rivera Jr., Mansfield ISD