Texas Education Agency

Commissioner Mike Morath

1701 North Congress Avenue • Austin, Texas 78701-1494 • 512 463-9734 • 512 463-9838 FAX • tea.texas.gov

Via E-Mail,
Certified Mail &
Regular Mail

161-921

December 11, 2025

Jill Bottelberghe, Superintendent
Steven Carter, Board President
Keith Lowrey, Board Vice President
Heather McCarty-Johnston, Board Secretary
Keith Black, Board Member
Kathy Coker, Board Member
Diane Davis, Board Member
Danny Raines, Board Member
Connally Independent School District
200 Cadet Way
Waco, Texas 76705

Re: Appointment of Board of Managers and Conservator Due to Campus Performance Ratings

Dear Superintendent Bottelberghe and Trustees:

As you are already aware, two of the Connally Independent School District ("ISD" or "district") campuses earned a fifth consecutive unacceptable academic accountability rating following the 2023-24 and 2024-25 school years, which requires me to either order closure of the campuses or appoint a board of managers to govern the district.[1] After engaging in a comprehensive analysis of district data and a thorough vetting of district systems, leadership, and student results, **I am hereby ordering the appointment of both a board of managers to govern the district and a conservator**.

The timeline for the district to engage in the appeals processes allowed under the Texas Education Code ("TEC") begins as of the date of this letter. I will appoint members of the board of managers, the conservator, and the superintendent as permitted by law after appropriate review and appeal processes have concluded.

[1] Texas Education Code ("TEC") §39A.111.

Campus Performance Rating History

The Connally Junior High (CDCN:161-921-041) campus earned its fifth consecutive unacceptable accountability rating with the public release of ratings for the 2023-24 school year earlier this year.[2] In the 2024-25 school year, Connally Junior High earned a D rating, however a D neither breaks the chain of the campus' unacceptable ratings nor impacts my requirement to take action under TEC §39A.111. The Connally Elementary (CDCN:161-921-104) campus earned its fifth consecutive unacceptable accountability rating with the 2024-25 school year ratings. With these ratings, it has been nine years since Connally Junior High earned an acceptable academic accountability rating, and eight years since Connally Elementary last met an acceptable standard.

Campus	2025	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016
Connally JH	D	F	F	Not Rated - SB 1365	Not Rated - Disaster	Not Rated - Disaster	F	IR	IR	MS
Connally El	F	F	F	Not Rated - SB 1365	Not Rated - Disaster	Not Rated - Disaster	F	IR	MS	MS

Connally Junior High

Prior to implementation of the state's current A-F accountability system in 2019, Connally Junior High was assigned a final academic accountability rating of *Improvement Required* for 2017 and 2018, which was the lowest rating in the accountability system. In 2019, the campus was assigned a final academic accountability rating of *F,* which is included in the definition of an unacceptable academic rating in the state's A-F accountability rating system. These were the first, second, and third consecutive unacceptable ratings for the campus.

As a result of the impact of COVID-19, the Texas Education Agency ("TEA" or "agency") labeled all districts and campuses *Not Rated: Declared State of Disaster* for the 2019-20 school year. Under Texas law, the designation of "Not Rated" during any school year does not break the chain of unacceptable performance. In the 2020-21 school year, districts and campuses were also issued a *Not Rated: Declared State of Disaster;* however, if any campus could demonstrate acceptable levels of performance, districts could apply to have those campuses issued an acceptable rating to break the chain of unacceptable performance. Connally Junior High could not do so that year; thus, the designation of "Not Rated" during that school year again did not break the chain of unacceptable performance.

[2] The 2023-24 school year and the 2024-25 school year academic accountability ratings were released concurrently in the TEA Login ("TEAL") Accountability application on August 13, 2025, and made publicly available on TXSchools.gov on August 15, 2025. The issuance of ratings for the 2023-24 school year was considerably delayed due to litigation. In 2024, a group of districts sued the Texas Education Agency ("TEA" or "agency") to prevent the release of academic accountability ratings for the 2023-24 school year. After TEA appealed the trial court's issuance of an injunction preventing the release of 2024 ratings, the Fifteenth Court of Appeals overturned the trial court and permitted the release of 2024 ratings in a July 3, 2025, judicial ruling. Unlike accountability results in 2023 and 2024, both of which were delayed due to litigation, 2025 preliminary A-F ratings were timely released on the dates announced in the 2025 Accountability Manual and required by state law.

In 2022, the campus was assigned *Not Rated: Senate Bill 1365*. Senate Bill 1365 (87th Texas Legislature, 2021) established that districts or campuses that did not meet the performance target to earn at least an academic accountability rating of *C* for the 2021-22 school year were assigned *Not Rated: Senate Bill 1365*. Again, the designation of "Not Rated" during any school year did not break the campus' chain of unacceptable performance.

For both 2023 and 2024, the campus was assigned an academic accountability rating of *F*, which was the campus' fourth and fifth consecutive unacceptable rating. The 2023 and 2024 ratings were delayed due to litigation that prevented the agency from releasing ratings until 2025.[3] As previously stated, in 2025, Connally Junior High was assigned a *D* rating, however a D neither breaks the chain of the campus' unacceptable ratings nor impacts my requirement to take action under TEC §39A.111.

Connally Elementary

For 2018, Connally Elementary was assigned a final academic accountability rating of *Improvement Required*, which was the lowest rating in the prior accountability system. In 2019, the campus was assigned a final academic accountability rating of *F,* which is included in the definition of an unacceptable academic rating in the state's A-F accountability rating system. These were the first and second consecutive unacceptable ratings for the campus. As previously stated, for the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years, the districts and campuses were labeled *Not Rated: Declared State of Disaster*. In 2022, in the same manner as Connally Junior High, Connally Elementary was assigned *Not Rated: Senate Bill 1365,* and the designation of "Not Rated" during these years did not break the chain of unacceptable performance.

Following the above referenced litigation delays, for both 2023 and 2024, the campus was assigned an academic accountability rating of *F*, which was the campus' third and fourth consecutive unacceptable rating. In June 2025, the campus was notified that it was required to implement the campus turnaround plan that was approved in the 2019-20 school year and may submit a request for modification to the plan. In 2025, Connally Elementary was assigned an *F* rating, marking the campus' fifth consecutive unacceptable performance rating.

District Performance History

During the 2023-24 school year—the year in which Connally Junior High earned its fifth consecutive unacceptable rating—all but one of the district's five rated campuses earned an F. Similarly, during the 2024-25 school year—the year in which Connally Elementary earned its fifth consecutive unacceptable rating— four of the district's five rated campuses earned either an F or a D, with three campuses with an F rating and one campus with a D rating. Since the 2022-23 school year, the number of campuses that have been academically unacceptable for consecutive years has doubled.

Unacceptable academic performance in a single year represents significant academic weakness – typically less than one-third of students in those campuses reach grade level and less than one-half of students on those campuses demonstrate a year's worth of academic growth. When that unacceptable performance continues for multiple years, the children in those campuses develop significant academic gaps. Multi-year unacceptable ratings represent a school district's most

[3] *Id*.

fundamental mission failure and a complete inability to take necessary action to ensure a high quality education for students.

Beyond the performance of individual campuses that are unacceptable, Connally ISD has demonstrated a chronic inability to support students to learn and achieve at high levels. Across all grades and subjects, only 24% of students in Connally ISD are meeting grade level. This is 26 percentage points below state average.

Connally ISD's low level of student achievement is a long-standing issue, predating the COVID-19 disruptions, and has gotten worse in recent years. Going back to the 2018-19 school year, only 30% of Connally ISD students met grade level.

In light of the district's current and historic data, district-level intervention is needed to improve overall performance for the students of Connally ISD.

Appointment of Board of Managers

On September 3, 2025, I notified the district that if the unacceptable 2024 and 2025 preliminary academic accountability ratings assigned to the Connally Junior High and Connally Elementary campuses became final ratings, I would be required to order the appointment of a board of managers to govern the district or closure of the campuses. The district did not appeal the preliminary performance rating assigned to the campuses. Thus, the Connally Junior High campus received a final 2024 academic performance rating of *F* and the Connally Elementary campus received a final 2025 academic performance rating of *F on* December 11, 2025, the fifth consecutive unacceptable performance rating for both campuses.

As you are aware, once any campus in a district earns five consecutive years of unacceptable academic accountability ratings, the district triggers TEC § 39A.111, which states:

> CONTINUED UNACCEPTABLE PERFORMANCE RATING. If a campus is considered to have an unacceptable performance rating for five consecutive school years, the commissioner, subject to Section 39A.112, shall order:
>
> (1) appointment of a board of managers to govern the school district as provided by Section 39A.202; or
>
> (2) closure of the campus.

Commissioner action under this section of the TEC is compulsory; the commissioner does not have discretion whether to act under this provision. Therefore, I am required to take action according to TEC §39A.111, and as stated above, I am ordering the appointment of a board of managers to lead the district.

I do not make this decision lightly. As a formerly elected school board member, I understand the importance and impact local school board members can have on the quality of schools in their districts. Ultimately, the Connally ISD school board has, collectively, through action and inaction over many years, failed its students. The inability of the district to implement effective changes to improve the performance of students in the district or at the campus necessitates the interventions announced by this letter. Furthermore, the interventions are in the public interest as the failure of

governance is demonstrated by the continual academic deficiencies at the campus and across the district.

The members of the board of managers will be named at a future date. They will consist of local community members who are committed to governing effectively to support positive change for the students of the district. Effective today, I am directing agency staff to begin the process of identifying prospective members of the community who are committed to improving the district through serving on the board of managers. Interested community members can find more information and apply to serve on the board of managers, by visiting the Texas Education Agency's website at tea.texas.gov/board-of-managers. Board of manager candidates will be required to complete an application, attend Lone Star Governance training, and participate in virtual and observational interviews.

Superintendent Appointment

State law also requires that I appoint a superintendent.[4] I will announce my decision on the superintendent appointment in future correspondence.

Conservator Appointment

I am appointing a conservator to the district. The conservator will have all authority permitted under Texas law and will ensure the district supports its low-performing campuses and implements the district's turnaround plans.[5] I will name the conservator at a future date.

Due Process Procedures

The district is entitled to due process as described in 19 Texas Administrative Code ("TAC") §157.1121. The timelines for all such informal procedures begin as of the date of this letter. To that end, the district has a right to participate in an informal review regarding the appointment of both the board of managers and the conservator.[6] Please be advised that the informal review has been scheduled for **December 17, 2025, at 1:45 p.m.** This review will be presided over by the commissioner of education and serves as an opportunity for the district to present any information or supporting documentation it desires for the commissioner to consider in his decision making related to the board of managers and conservator. All such information and documentation should be submitted to TEA no later than **December 15, 2025.**

The district is not required to attend the review; however, if the district chooses not to attend, the review will proceed, and a final decision will be made based upon the documentation that was submitted by the district.

The informal review is scheduled to take place in person as follows:

Location: William B. Travis Building
1701 North Congress Avenue
Austin, Texas 78701

[4] TEC §39A.202.
[5] TEC §§39A.002(7), 39A.051(a), 39A.102(b), 39A.102(b-1); and TAC §§97.1064(m), 97.1065(c), 97.1073(c).
[6] TAC §157.1121(4).

Room G-100G, Ground Floor

Date: **Wednesday, December 17, 2025**

Time: **1:45 p.m.**

Please note the following:

- The review will be scheduled not to exceed 60 minutes.
- Documentation for consideration will be limited to that which was submitted by the district no later than **December 15, 2025**.
- The scope of the review is limited to the appointment of the board of managers and conservator.
- No later than **December 15, 2025**, please notify the agency of the district representatives who will attend the informal review. The notice should include names and roles of representatives and should note who will present information or engage in discussions and questioning during the review. It is requested that attendees representing the district not exceed six individuals. If attendees include members of a body covered by the Texas Open Meetings Act, the number of attendees present cannot create a quorum of the body.
- The review is a closed proceeding and will not be open to the public or media.
- The district must notify the Division of Enforcement Coordination no later than **December 15, 2025** if accommodations or equipment are needed and specify the type of accommodation or equipment needed (e.g., sign language interpreters, projector, laptop, etc.)
- The review will not constitute a formal administrative hearing, and the Rules of Evidence will not apply to the review.

All responses, notices, and requests related to the content of this letter must be sent to:

Division of Enforcement Coordination
Texas Education Agency
EnforcementCoordination@tea.texas.gov

If, following the informal review of the assignment of a conservator and board of managers, the commissioner, or his designee, decides to move forward with the assignment of a conservator and board of managers, the district will have an opportunity to file a petition for review with the State Office of Administrative Hearings (SOAH).[7]

During the pendency of the review process, the board of trustees and superintendent are expected to continue to follow state laws and rules and operate the district in the best interest of the students to promote student achievement and improve student outcomes.

[7] TEC §39A.301.

Compliance and Cooperation

Notwithstanding anything contained in this letter, the agency reserves the right to implement all available interventions and sanctions under TEC, Chapters 39, 39A, and 19 TAC Chapter 97 to address the current, or any future, deficiencies identified for the campuses and district.

Throughout the process outlined in this letter, it is my sincere desire that all parties work together in a cooperative and productive manner with a focus on the district's students. Any questions regarding this correspondence may be addressed to the Division of Enforcement Coordination at (512) 463-5899 or EnforcementCoordination@tea.texas.gov.

Sincerely,

Mike Morath
Commissioner of Education

MM/lm