



TEA Time: A-F Accountability with Commissioner Mike Morath (continued) – August 2018

Narrator: Welcome to TEA Time... A podcast about all things about public education from the Texas Education Agency.

Host: Welcome back to another edition of TEA Time. We continue our visit with Commissioner of Education Mike Morath regarding the new A-F Accountability system for school districts that will be launched on August 15th. Commissioner, what input did you use to develop this system?

Commissioner of Education Mike Morath: So the transition of our accountability system from where it was to the new A-F Accountability system has been a two-year work in progress, more than two years. I personally had meetings in every region of the state with superintendents and board members, parents and teachers and students themselves, principals, community advocates, you name it, to try and balance the factors of how we evaluate our schools. It has been a very expansive stakeholder engagement process to determine exactly what we want to put into the A-F system. What we want to draw the most attention to and how we want to align it to the things that are of a best interest for our students - long term.

Host: That is an important point because this accountability system will take in to account things other than STAAR test. Correct?

Commissioner Morath: That is correct. In fact, we tried to benchmark or align the A-F system to the 60x30 plan. Texas' 60x30 plan was originated by the Higher Coordinating Board and we have adopted it statewide. 60x30 means that by the year 2030, we want 60 percent of young people to have some post-secondary credential. That could be an Associate's degree, Bachelor's degree or could be a trade credential. In this case, by young people, we are talking about 25 to 34 years old. So, what we have done is knowing that is what the economy requires but what our kids require to be prepared to make meaningful wages to take care of themselves and their families.

We have aligned the goals of A-F around that so that when we look at evaluating districts or high school campuses for A-F, it is much more than just looking at the STAAR test. We are looking at the percentage of students that are prepared for college as evaluated on the SAT or AP exams. Kids taking dual credit classes. How many kids are prepared to go right into industry in a way that will advance their career. It is so they can have a computer science credential in a specific field or a welding or plumbing license for industries that pay well or in demand. We know that some of our kids are going to be interested in or want to pursue.

Likewise, are they ready for military enlistment. The military evaluates students both on their academic preparation as well as their physical fitness and even their character. Are we getting kids ready for that? So, when we look at how A-F has been designed, it includes the STAAR test but also includes a lot more than that.

Host: I'm sure you have heard the concern that A-F will be a reflection of poverty in a district or a campus. You have worked to address that, correct?

Commissioner Morath: I think some believe that an A-F system or school performance information is simply a reflection of poverty. The data would indicate that that is just not true. We have hundreds of high performing poverty campuses throughout the state of Texas. That is what we are seeing in the A-F system results. But when you look at the design of the system, you can even think about the way the system was designed doesn't really reflect that kind of philosophy. Campuses and districts are given the better of either student achievement – what students know and can do – or school progress. How much they grew, year over year. Relationship between school progress and poverty is almost non-

existent when you look at the actual correlation scores. So, the relationship between a campus or district's overall score and the underlying level of student poverty is not strong.

Host: Another concern that has been voiced is that the system is going to force a certain number of F's, a certain number of D's, or a certain number of each of the grades each year. Is it mathematically possible for everyone to make an A? If so, how is that?

Commissioner Morath: The system has been designed so that it is mathematically possible for every campus to get an A. We looked at the level of performance that existed in the state of Texas during in the 2016-2017 school year. We set cut points based upon what we thought was excellent versus what we thought needs improvement and of course, based upon stakeholder feedback as well. Those cut points are intended to be frozen for the next five years. What you can imagine is that as campuses get better and better, more of them will score in the A range. It is certainly not mathematically set up to force a specific number of A's or a specific number of F's. It is possible for all campuses to achieve an A. Although it is not easy. This are rigorous standards.

We want to encourage our absolute best. It will take some time for educators to adjust but we would expect to see that. In fact, when I hear that some criticize the system for being set up to force a certain number of F's, our goals at TEA would not be compatible with that because we want to but the number of D and F campuses in half in the next five years. If there was a fixed number of D's and F's every year, it would be impossible for us to achieve our goals as an agency.

Host: Finally, is there anything that you want people or especially parents to know as we approach August 15th? On that day, they see their A-F ratings for their districts and accountability ratings for their campuses.

Commissioner Morath: I think parents should take advantage of this information. We are going to provide them with information about either their child's current campus or prospective campus. They can evaluate how they support their students as possible. Of course, they are not necessarily the end-all, be-all. They're not every piece of information about a school but they are very useful. They are a very useful benchmark about this campus's overall performance academically.

Host: Thank you Commissioner for joining us on TEA Time.

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