SB 2201
Testimony Before the
Texas Senate Education Committee

by Kara Belew, Senior Education Policy Advisor

TPPF Position: On

Rationale:

The most fundamental obligations of our schools is to teach our children to read and do math at grade level or above. Yet, hundreds of thousands of Texas children are reading or performing math below grade level in critical grades, and results are declining. Therefore, the Legislature should encourage the adoption of research-based best practices likely to improve student results.

There is a significant body of recent research providing that school boards that focus on student achievement can improve student outcomes and that school board members have the power to be transformative in the outcomes of our students.

Nonetheless, many well-meaning Texas school board members do not know for their school district or individual schools:

- How many children are reading or performing math below grade level;
- Whether reading and math results are improving or declining over time.

To the extent school boards do have goals for their students, their goals are often very vague. Specifically, the goals will lack a student performance current baseline, target for student improvement, deadline to measure success, and/or **method to hold school district administrators responsible for improvement**. For example, a typical school board goal might provide:

- Students will improve academically; or
- Students will graduate career- and college-ready.

To help encourage school boards to adopt meaningful student achievement goals, implement best practices, and

2018 Texas Student Performance STAAR			
	Estimated Number of Students Below Grade Level	**Percent Below Grade Level**	**Change From 2017**
3rd Grade			
Reading	233,565	57%	Declining
Math	217,174	53%	Declining
8th Grade			
Reading	203,224	51%	Declining
Math	195,255	49%	Improving
Science	191,270	48%	Improving

2017 Texas Student Performance - Nation's Report Card (NAEP)			
	National Rank	**Percent of Students Below Proficient**	**Change From 2015**
4th Grade			
Reading	46th lowest	71%	Declining
Math	19th lowest	59%	Declining
8th Grade			
Reading	42nd lowest	72%	Declining
Math	25th lowest	67%	Declining

hold school district administrators accountable for student performance, over the last three years the Texas Education Agency has adopted the Lonestar Governance program and routinely trains and advises school boards on the benefits of student outcome goal adoption.

Further, to ensure school boards start focusing on student results, after months of testimony, the [Texas Commission on Public School Finance's number one recommendation](#) was that:

> " … each public school district or charter network be required to establish at least a three-year and five-year locally developed [school] board goal … disaggregated by and within various student groups, including by family income, by native language, by ethnicity, by gender, and by special population and annually report their progress publicly toward these two goals along with any other board goals that they measure their progress against. This data should be made available at the district and campus level."

School boards can adopt student achievement school board goals at no cost, and their adoption might encourage a much better alignment of taxpayer money to focus on student achievement, from the school board room to the classroom. Because of the research support and cost-effectiveness of adopting school board goals, the Foundation included requiring school boards to adopt student outcome goals in its legislative agenda [Right on Public Education: Texas' Agenda to Restore Money to the Classroom and Eliminate the Main School Property Tax](#).

Importantly, SB 2201 would achieve the number one recommendations of the [Texas Commission on Public School Finance](#) and the Foundation's legislative agenda by requiring:

- Our Texas school boards to establish public student outcome goals in reading and math in third and eighth grade and for career, college, and military readiness;
- For student outcome goals to be aligned with Texas' new A-F Accountability System objectives to improve reading and math scores for all Texas student groups; and
- For school boards to publicly monitor and report results.

In addition, SB 2201 provides that the Texas Education Agency can make rules; this should help ensure that the student outcome goals are consistent with research-based best practices, and aligned with other state resources, programs, and strategies to improve student outcomes. ✫

Kara L. Belew, J.D., CPA, is an attorney and accountant with expertise in public education finance and policy. She served both Gov. Perry and Gov. Abbott in key education and budget positions. She recently served as Gov. Abbott's statewide budget director, focusing on franchise and property tax relief. As the senior education advisor at the Texas Public Policy Foundation's Center for Innovation in Education, Belew is devoted to ensuring that the $114 billion in taxpayer dollars spent on public education each biennium is utilized to improve student outcomes across Texas, and not on water parks and expensive administration buildings. In addition, Belew works to ensure that taxpayers, parents, legislators, and educators are informed about Texas' dismal student results. She also focuses on policies that will support every child in Texas having good school options in their neighborhood, because no child should be trapped in a failing Texas school.

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