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TSTA: State leaders' failing grades on school funding are a bigger concern for school kids and parents than commissioner's dubious school accountability ratings

Texas State Teachers Association President Ovidia Molina released the following statement:

Educators wish Gov. Abbott and his legislative allies were as eager to adequately increase state funding for public school classrooms as the education commissioner is to release outdated test scores and dubious school accountability ratings.

Even under normal circumstances, STAAR test scores are an inadequate and unfair way to measure student progress and assign A-F grades to schools and school districts. They are particularly unfair to schools in low-income communities, where many children are in critical need of additional resources, not only for their schools but also for health care and other needs. These kids often get the lowest STAAR scores, and their schools get most of the Ds and Fs on their accountability scorecards.

These tests, taken in 2023, as students and their teachers were still recovering from the pandemic, were not scored under normal circumstances. The commissioner changed the grading rules after the tests were taken. He retroactively raised the required passing scores for one key element in the ratings – the college, career and military readiness of a school district's high school graduates – resulting in lowered accountability grades for many districts.

Accountability ratings, which are mostly tied to STAAR scores, are more about blaming educators for low scores than they are for measuring student progress. The state must find a more meaningful way to measure student success and evaluate schools, one developed with meaningful input from educators, not consultants.

Meanwhile, in the accountability ratings that mean the most for Texas schoolchildren, the governor and his legislative allies continue to get an F in school funding. Texas spends about $5,000 less per student in average daily attendance than the national average, ranking near the bottom of the states, and so far this session neither the House nor the Senate has done much to bridge that gap.

The House has approved a $395 per student increase in the basic school allotment, which won't come close to meeting the inflationary losses schools have suffered during the six years the allotment has been frozen. The Senate doesn't want to increase the allotment at all, and Abbott allies in both chambers have passed a voucher bill to squander $1 billion on private schools for a relative handful of students.

The questionable 2023 school accountability ratings the commissioner just released don't mean nearly as much for the future of Texas children, or hurt them as much, as the failing grades our state leaders continue to get on school funding.