



RUNGE INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Dear Runge ISD Community,

For the first time in nearly three years, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) has released A-F accountability ratings for school districts and campuses across the state.

Many school districts across Texas have filed lawsuits against the Commissioner of Education related to accountability and testing-not to avoid accountability, but to hold the Commissioner accountable for following the law.

The 15th Court of Appeals of Texas ruled on April 3, 2025, to reverse a lower court's decision blocking the release of the 2023 Texas Education Agency (TEA) A-F accountability ratings. Their release had been on hold due to a lawsuit brought by more than 100 school districts across Texas.

The court ruled that the system was unfair and unreasonable. The lawsuit was in response to TEA not following the Texas Education Code on when the accountability manual should have been made available to school districts. The approved manual was released on October 31, 2023-months after the 2022-2023 school year was complete.

Additionally, TEA changed the rules after students have completed STAAR/EOC testing for the 2022-2023 school year, applying new methodology to a group of students (class of 2022) who had already graduated from high school. One of the biggest changes was related to the college, career, and military readiness (CCMR) metric, increasing the required points to earn an "A" from 60 to 88.

We also discovered that the 2023 STAAR tests were scored through a "hybrid scoring model" involving an automated scoring engine using artificial intelligence. Responses are routed through the new system, and at least 25% of student responses are routed to human scorers. An investigation is underway as to whether this is contributing to unusually larger scores of "0" on some of the responses.

The new "STAAR 2.0" assessment was mandated to be taken online with an expectation that students in third grade and older would have expertise in manipulating online tools including drag-and-drop, graphing, drop-down menus, highlighting and keyboarding for extended and short constructed responses.

All of these factors combine for a concerning precedent by the state that has a devastating trickle-down effect on districts and campuses:

- Students are punished with no knowledge or control over the change in rules they were playing by. This is equivalent of winning a close football game, then discovering your touchdowns were only worth 3 points each instead of 6-so now you lost the game;

- Campuses spent time preparing students for a test they thought would be scored in a certain manner that was later changed;
- The CCMR scoring change negatively impacted high school letter grades, which comprise a significant percentage of our overall district grade;
- Elementary students faced a significantly more difficult test;
- A flawed Artificial Intelligence (AI) grading system scored the short-constructed and extended-constructed test responses; and
- We were held accountable in a year when a new test was released, instead of a phased-in approach.

During the first year of a test change, the state has historically provided districts a year to analyze and make adjustments to curriculum before the scores count for the following year. Consider, for a moment, if RISD were to change graduation requirements. This change would be implemented with an incoming freshman class, not juniors already on their graduation path. This would be patently unfair. And akin to the magnitude of this shift in testing.

Our campuses may receive lower letter grades, not because of a lack of effort, progress, or success, but because of how the system was designed. As I shared in 2023, changes in how scores are calculated, adjustments to testing formats, and reliance on outdated data could negatively impact ratings, even in schools where students have improved.

Despite the challenges associated with these shifting accountability metrics, I want to remind you of the proactive steps we have taken. We implemented a revised curriculum strategy and launched our Grow-Your-Own program. These efforts are producing results. We have students who have never passed the STAAR test who are now passing, and many of our students are moving to the MEETS and MASTERS categories. Our students continue to show measurable growth, and we are closing gaps in unfinished learning year over year due to COVID-19.

One of our most significant milestones is that all PK-2nd-grade students perform on grade level. This speaks volumes about the commitment of our educators and the strength of our strategic plan.

Let me also emphasize that our district will not be defined by a single day of testing. Our students continue to excel academically and thrive in extracurricular activities.

The state's accountability system reduces student growth and complexity of school achievement to a single letter grade. It's primarily based on STAAR testing results, but student success is more than one test.

As I have said before, I believe in assessing our students. It's how we help students grow and meet new academic goals. But accountability should be fair, transparent, and truly reflective of student achievement.

Thank you for trusting RISD with your child's education. We remain committed to your family and to every student we serve.

Thank you for partnering with us to help your child succeed.

For the Educationally Yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "H. O. Dominguez, Jr.", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Hector O. Dominguez, Jr.
Superintendent