

HOLD HARMLESS CAN AND SHOULD BE BETTER (SB7001/HB7003)

The bill contemplates conducting Spring state assessments. TEA believes the suspension of state mandated tests is best for students, saving weeks in test administration to be used in direct instruction of students.

Early reports indicate the incoming administration at the USDE will grant waivers on testing for states that request it.

Former Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos suspended federal NAEP testing for 2021, postponing the administration of these tests until 2022, citing disruptions caused by the coronavirus and an inability to properly administer tests. Tennessee should follow this example.

State standardized assessments will not be reliable or valid

Under ESSA, the federal government demands 95% of students take state mandated standardized tests. Lower than 95% participation decreases validity and reliability of test data. The lower the participation the less valid the data becomes, to a point where the data is useless.

TNDOE proposes an 80% threshold for participation in state mandated tests for 2021. For districts that achieve >80% participation, TNDOE will not use invalid test data for school report cards or to place school on the priority lists. An 80% participation level is arbitrary and not based on literature or research. The 80% threshold can be waived by the commissioner as she sees fit.

Not meeting the 80% threshold to move schools onto the priority list or to assign them into the Achievement School District is arbitrary and ridiculous on the merits. The ASD is the state's worst performing school district, adding schools to the failed program makes no sense and complicates the necessary work of unwinding this failure of education "reform."

It is a question whether TNDOE has requested and received a waiver for the lower test participation threshold from the USDE.

TVAAS is invalid in most circumstances but especially now

TVAAS is not a valid means for high stakes decisions for individual teachers. As a statistical estimate, it is far too imprecise and broadly prone to anomalies to be fairly used in teacher evaluations.

TVAAS is a statistical estimate with standard error. The statistical model uses three years of test data to generate a "growth score" for individual teachers, schools and LEAs. The three years of data are critical to the statistical model to generate an estimate of teacher effect on student academic knowledge demonstrated in performance in standardized tests. Continuous input of data into the statistical model is, by the founder of the model, necessary for the reliability of estimates generated.

Tennessee has not generated three years of continuous data in seven years. Testing failures in 2016, problems in 2017, failure in 2018 and suspension of testing due to COVID in 2020 means the last time the state had the requisite three-year data window for the TVAAS statistical model was 2015.

The corporation Tennessee hires to generate the TVAAS statistical estimate nonetheless generated a TVAAS score for teachers in 2019, though no data—and therefore no knowledge—of student progress in

the prior year was known because of the 2018 testing failures. No TVAAS score generated for teachers in the past six years have been valid under the statistical model.

The ability of the teacher to use TVASS scores if they are beneficial to them is no substitute for the validity problems of TVAAS. Those teachers who have arbitrarily low TVAAS scores due to the flaws in the model suffer harm.

The bill should suspend TVAAS until at minimum the state has three years of valid data as the statistical model requires.

Portfolio and non-tested subjects

K/pre-K portfolio system is a flawed and time-consuming enterprise. Providing alternatives to the portfolio is essential and allowed by the bill.

Granting Tenure

The state should release all state requirements for local directors on who they recommend tenure to their local school boards. Eliminating state requirements does not impact director tenure recommendations, the director always maintains the power of tenure recommendation. The possible use of TVAAS in the most recent two years of evaluation scores, after all the testing failures, should be prohibited in the legislation.