

House education chief agrees with delay in grade mandate

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Texas Education Commissioner Robert Scott soon should have enough political backing to delay a **controversial requirement** that students' scores on new standardized tests count toward their course grades.

Robert Eissler, the chairman of the House Education Committee, confirmed to the Houston Chronicle Tuesday that he told Scott he agrees with **a letter from his counterparts** in the Senate that the grade mandate may legally be postponed.

On Tuesday, the chairwoman of the Senate Education Committee and three other senators wrote Scott to recommend that he delay for a year the requirement that the end-of-course exam scores count for 15 percent of students' grades. The measure had drawn criticism from school superintendents and parents who were worried students' grade-point averages would suffer with the more rigorous exams, known as the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (or STAAR).

Eissler, R-The Woodlands, led an effort last year to loosen the grade requirement, but after his measure passed in the House, it stalled in the Senate Education Committee.

A spokeswoman for Scott said Tuesday that he he was waiting for a letter from the House to confirm he had the legal authority to delay the grade requirement. Eissler said the commissioner should be clear on his authority given the House action last year but he would talk to his colleagues about sending written confirmation.

"I talked to Robert (Scott) yesterday," Eissler said. "I said, 'You remember what we passed in the House. We should be fine with this.'"

State Sen. Dan Patrick, R-Houston, was among the senators urging the one-year delay. Patrick said in an interview that lawmakers' intent was always to give students a year break from the grade requirement, just as school districts will not be given an accountability rating for a year.

"This isn't a change in policy," said Patrick, vice chairman of the Senate Education Committee. "It's a clarification of what was always intended going back to 2007."

While the law was passed several years ago, school district officials and parents recently stepped up their complaints and concerns as students are set to take the new end-of-course exams this spring.