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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE	Contact: Bill Hammond
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TAB Letter to Lawmakers Supports New Accountability System
Letter responds to North Texas Superintendents' effort to delay the new system.

AUSTIN, TX— Texas Association of Business President and CEO Bill Hammond has delivered a letter to every State lawmaker, asking that the accountability system all of them supported in 2009 be allowed to move forward.

The letter reads as follows:

February 12, 2012

Dear Members of the Texas Legislature:

There's more than a war of words under way right now on the topic of accountability and public education. The rhetoric and the recent actions espoused by opponents of a quality public education system in Texas are poised to set our state on a tragic course.

These opponents are doing everything they can do to scare fellow Texans as if this system just recently hurtled from outer space to destroy the earth. What both the commissioner and these superintendents don't say is that this system was approved three years ago virtually unanimously by the Legislature, **AND WITH THEIR SUPPORT.**

It's time for the people with the most at stake in our education system – our students and their families, our state's employers and Texas taxpayers – to stand up and make their voices heard.

Recently, some superintendents wrote to business and chamber leaders about "standardized, high stakes testing" that "is strangling our public schools." If these local administrators would cut out all their own time-consuming "benchmark" testing and practice and drill testing that drive parents and teachers crazy, we'd be left with very little, but highly valuable, testing at the end of the year.

Former Governor George W. Bush said we shouldn't teach to the test, but teach the material instead. In many ways, the reforms (House Bill 3) passed unanimously across party lines five years ago are positioning Texas schools and teachers to do just that:

Ensure our children are well educated and well prepared for the rigors of globally competitive careers and challenging post-secondary studies while providing a fair and meaningful measuring stick for school, educator and student performance.

House Bill 3 refined our state's testing and accountability system to ensure that our educators could teach, our students could learn and everyone could benefit from fair-minded, meaningful accountability, measured not with additional tests but enhanced testing through STAAR (grades 3-8) and end-of-course exams (grades 9-12).

Texas lawmakers funded and approved the necessary authority for the Texas Education Agency and local school districts to implement the bipartisan reforms passed by the Texas Legislature. Suggestions by Commissioner Scott and others to the contrary are nothing more than a stall tactic.

These reforms are not adding more testing requirements but ensuring that when we do test our students they are fair and meaningful assessments of the curriculum and studies they've completed.

Clearly, the status quo education and accountability system is not acceptable. Texas is on a road to ruin if we do not raise our standards in public education. Today, only 16 percent of 9th graders in Texas public schools are career and college-ready as they graduate from high school.

Opponents of the bipartisan education reforms passed five years ago and enacted three years ago are fond of saying that they do not oppose accountability, but their actions to date speak a loud and clear message to the contrary.

Finally, I find these charges of more and mindless testing both sad and false. I supported House Bill 3 because these very same people came to Austin several years ago, wanting to get rid of the TAKS tests. That legislation passed. So, after a transition, if local districts truly want it, we can have fewer and better tests that show whether our youngsters are on path to college or career and improve instruction to that end.

It's time – as employers, as job creators, as taxpayers and as parents – to stand up and press for our local schools and our leadership at the Texas Education Agency to show in word and deed that they are sincerely committed to their core mission and to following both the letter and the spirit of the law as laid out in House Bill 3.

Sincerely,

Bill Hammond

President and CEO

Texas Association of Business

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Founded in 1922, the Texas Association of Business is a broad-based, bipartisan organization representing more than 3,000 small and large Texas employers and