



Individual Graduation Committees Should be a Permanent Option for High School Students

IDRA comments for House Bill 1603: Relating to the use of individual graduation committees without expiration. Submitted by Chloe Latham Sikes, Ph.D., to House Public Education Committee, March 16, 2021

Dear Chairman Dutton and Honorable Members of the Committee:

IDRA (Intercultural Development Research Association) is an independent, non-partisan, education non-profit committed to achieving equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college. We support HB 1603, which would remove the expiration date of 2023 for individual graduation committees (IGCs).

Individual graduation committees should be a permanent option for high school students to graduate. Individual graduation committees allow students who have completed all high school coursework but not met passing rates on two STAAR end-of-course exams to still be able to graduate with the approval of their committee. Committees are comprised of educators familiar with the student's academic work and success, as well as a parent/guardian.

Individual graduation committees provide equitable opportunities to graduate high school. Black and Latino students, and students from households with low incomes, overwhelmingly benefit from this option for graduation. In the 2016-17 school year, 17% of individual graduation committee graduates were Black, 68% were Latino, and 76% were economically disadvantaged.

Over 11,400 Texas students benefited from the option to use Individual graduation committees in the spring of 2019, and likely more last spring when all STAAR tests were cancelled due to the pandemic. Now, with students in different learning environments and facing potential disruptions to learning and regular assessments, individual graduation committees offer the opportunity for qualified students to still graduate high school and move on to postsecondary success. Overall, 3% of Texas high school graduates used Individual graduation committees.

Recommendations

- Remove the expiration date for individual graduation committees by supporting HB 1603;
- Expand individual graduation committee eligibility criteria for students who have faced instructional and assessment disruptions throughout pandemic (per HB 999);
- Consider removing the passage of STAAR end-of-course exams from high school graduation requirements.

Texas students who have worked hard to complete their high school graduation requirements should not be blocked by a test. Individual graduation committees should be a permanent option without expiration for equitable graduation opportunities.

IDRA is available for any questions or further resources that we can provide. Thank you for your consideration. For more information, please contact Chloe Latham Sikes, Ph.D., IDRA Deputy Director of Policy, at chloe.sikes@idra.org.

IDRA. (2019). [Don't Block Graduation Because of a Test -- Set Policies to Allow School Officials to Consider Other Factors Like Class Grades and Attendance](#).

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