

HB 1704 -- RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

SPONSOR: Christensen

This bill establishes the "Education Freedom Act" and creates and modifies provisions relating to the statewide assessment system, school accountability report cards, and the powers and duties of the State Board of Education (State Board).

The bill repeals provisions of current law authorizing the State Board to develop a statewide assessment system and a standardized assessment instrument based on academic performance standards. Instead, the State Board will develop a statewide summative assessment system that satisfies the requirements of Federal law, and the State Board must use the results of the assessments only for the purpose of compliance with Federal law and the determination of performance districts in the calculation of State aid. The State Board must not use assessment results to classify school districts and charter schools.

The bill repeals a provision of current law that the statewide assessment system will permit the academic performance of students in each school to be tracked only against prior academic performance in the same school.

Under the bill, school districts and charter schools must create, purchase, or adopt a local assessment system that meets certain criteria outlined in the bill, including but not limited to, being related to curriculum taught in the school and being evaluated and graded in a manner that provides students and teachers with meaningful feedback.

The bill repeals provisions relating to the State Board's authority to suggest criteria for a school to demonstrate that its students learn the knowledge, skills, and competencies measured by the statewide assessment system at exemplary levels. The bill further repeals provisions relating to "Outstanding Schools Waivers" that exempt certain schools from requirements relating to the authority of the State Board to classify school districts (Section 160.518).

The bill repeals provisions requiring the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to produce a school accountability report card for each public school district, public school building, and charter school. Instead, school districts and charter schools must report certain information

annually on a data dashboard on their website, and will separately share such information with DESE.

The bill also repeals provisions relating to the identification of priority schools that fail to meet acceptable standards of student achievement, as well as repealing provisions relating to the identification of attendance centers that are categorized as requiring school improvement strategies.

The bill repeals the requirement for school districts and charter schools to provide their school accountability report cards to legislators by December first annually, as well as the requirement for the State Board to approve the inclusion of charter school data in a school district's school accountability report card (Section 160.522).

The bill modifies provisions of current law authorizing the State Board to classify public schools by specifying that these provisions will apply before the 2027-28 school year and again in the 2032-33 school year and subsequently.

Beginning in the 2027-28 school year through the 2031-32 school year, the bill requires the State Board to identify a minimum of two national school accreditation agencies from which any school district can seek to obtain accreditation. Although the State Board can adopt a system of accreditation that school districts can choose to utilize, the State Board must accept any accreditation status a school district obtains from an approved national school accreditation agency, provided that the accreditation status is in accordance with the documented guidelines of such agency. However, the State Board will still determine whether a school district accredited by such an agency must be considered accredited, provisionally accredited, or unaccredited solely for the purposes of determining whether a charter school can be operated in the school district (Section 161.092).

This bill is similar to SS#2 SB 360 (2025).