

# Association of Texas Professional Educators

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**Supporting Your Freedom to Teach<sup>SM</sup>**

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## **Let teachers, not school districts, determine grades**

*By Sam Spurlock*  
*ATPE State President*

Millions of Texas schoolchildren returned to school this week, and many of them will continue to receive grades that they might not have earned from their teachers despite the passage of a bill during the 81st legislative session aimed at curbing the practice of giving out minimum grades.

Senate Bill 2033, by Sen. Jane Nelson of Lewisville, prohibits school districts from requiring teachers to give minimum grades for a student's assignment. Rather, a student's assignment must be judged solely on its merit and the quality each student injects into his or her work. The bill also clarifies that districts may allow students reasonable opportunities to retest and make up assignments.

Many school districts have used a loophole in the bill to continue the practice of assigning minimum grades. While the wording of the bill covers the individual classroom assignments of each student, it makes no mention of the report cards and progress reports students receive throughout the year. Some school districts believe this loophole allows them to give students grades on their report cards that they may not have earned, essentially creating a minimum floor in the grading process.

Both Sen. Nelson and the Texas Education Agency have stated that this practice was never the intent of the bill, yet we see more and more news reports of districts using this loophole as a means of boosting students' grades.

It's admirable that districts wish to give students every opportunity to improve their grades, but by giving students grades that they did not earn, districts aren't helping students prepare for college or the workplace. Setting an arbitrary minimum for grading periods, especially if failing students have been allowed opportunities to retest, is akin to the social promotion phenomenon that lawmakers have long tried to eradicate. The analysis of actual grades earned by the student is a necessary component of meaningful interventions to help struggling students and prevent dropouts. By simply giving them a grade and hoping for the best, school districts fail to provide students with the real assistance they need in order to succeed—not just in the classroom, but in life itself.

The law set forth in SB 2033 is meant to give teachers the ability to effectively manage the teacher-student relationship within their classrooms through the determination of a student's grade based on his or her mastery of the subject matter. By allowing policy to forcibly alter that connection, school districts are usurping the role a teacher plays in this relationship. This creates the question of who is best qualified to assess the accomplishment and individual needs of a student—the state, the district or the teacher?

Students deserve every reasonable means to achieve success in the classroom, but simply giving them a grade that doesn't reflect the quality of their work does them a great disservice. The students of Texas deserve much better.

*Sam Spurlock is the state president of the 112,000-member Association of Texas Professional Educators and a teacher with the Olney school district.*

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*The 112,000-member Association of Texas Professional Educators is the largest educators' group in Texas and the largest nonunion educators' group nationwide. Its membership consists of classroom teachers, para-educators, administrators, college students and retired educators. ATPE is committed to advocating for better benefits for all educators, promoting a collaborative work environment and the right of educators to choose the association they feel represents their interests, and providing the best education possible for all Texas school children.*