



Texas Association of Community Schools

1011 San Jacinto Blvd., Ste 204, Austin, Texas 78701-2431
512/440-8227 • Fax: 512/442-6705 • WEB: www.tacsnet.org

Barry Haenisch, Executive Director



January 6, 2017

TACS LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

We hope your semester is off to a great start. We at TACS have rested, rejuvenated, and reinvigorated for what promises to be a doozy of a session. The 85th session of the Texas legislature will convene next week on January 10th, 2017, and the members have been busily pre-filing bills that they hope will become law. As you know, the “reformers” have been emboldened of late and the push for vouchers will come stronger than ever. Meanwhile, we will need to fight to fix school finance, delay or destroy the A-F rating system, and further reduce reliance on high stakes standardized testing. In preparation, we are tracking proposed education bills, waiting for committee chair and member appointments, and attending meetings and conferences with other education organizations to plan our strategies for addressing each of these and other important issues.

Just before the holidays, I attended a “stakeholder” meeting at TEA. We met some of the new Deputy Commissioners and discussed TEA’s plan (or lack thereof) to engage stakeholders to develop and implement the Texas ESSA plan. What we learned at the meeting, was that while the state is legally responsible for holding stakeholder meetings to gather input on alternative assessment and accountability systems that take advantage of the new flexibility in the law, TEA was not intending to do that. TEA’s interpretation of the law is that it no longer requires two separate accountability systems, and that the new law enables them to keep the existing state system (which is punitive to students, teachers, schools and districts and relies heavily on high stakes standardized testing). TEA did not intend to seek input beyond its existing ATAC and APAC committees. The meeting participants included representatives of parents, teachers, principals, superintendents, and others and we all pushed back and told TEA that they were behind on carrying out their responsibilities under the law and that they better get moving and outline the flexibilities allowed and have real meetings seeking real input from real stakeholders. It was tense, but we are hopeful that the message was received. There will be a follow-up meeting of the group later this month and I’ll report back then. If you want to take a peek at what other states have done and are doing, check out this website: <http://understandingessa.org/>

Meanwhile, TEA is focusing on implementation of A-F, principal supervisorship, working with legislators on bills that address inappropriate teacher student relationships and specifically educator misconduct, including some that would hold superintendents responsible and have legal consequences for not reporting suspected abuses. We have been providing input and following these and other bills very closely. We are also following legislation related to voting. So far a wide variety have been proposed, ranging from laws that would restrict access to voting, to those that would make it easier for teachers and other citizens to exercise their right to vote. We will support the latter, of course.

Lastly, at a recent meeting on various approaches to solving the school finance problems, we were shown a video created by some parents who created a grassroots organization called Taxparency. If you click on the link below, you will see a video at the bottom featuring interviews with taxpayers who think all of the property taxes they are paying go directly to public schools. It

is quite powerful. The more voices singing the chorus saying that the state isn't paying their share, the more likely it will be held accountable to do so. Please share this video with your PTAs and other groups you think will be interested. <http://www.taxparencytexas.org/>

The fight continues!

Many thanks for your hard work and support.

Regards,

Laura Yeager
TACS Governmental Relations