



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



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TACS Legislative Update

The Capitol came back to life on Tuesday after a year and a half of virtual hibernation. Our friends with Pastors for Texas Children started the day on an uplifting note with a prayer event for the legislature. Throughout the day, there were parties in legislative offices thanking constituents for electing and reelecting legislators. Camera crews lined the halls, interviewing new and returning elected officials, and there was palpable excitement in the air. Joe Straus was unanimously elected to a 5th term as Speaker of the Texas House, and he stressed compromise and articulated legislative priorities including “investing in the state’s mental health system, fixing the broken school finance system and reforming the embattled child welfare system.” Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick kicked off the session in the Texas Senate and stated that “maintaining our conservative principles and protecting Texas values will be our top priority.” Among his top priorities are the “bathroom bill” and school choice. The Senate also elected Senator Kel Seliger as the president pro tem, which puts him second in line for the governorship.

In spite of the energy and enthusiasm, Texas’s financial outlook cast dark clouds that will dampen what can be done during the session. Earlier this week, Texas Comptroller Glenn Hegar, released estimates that lawmakers will have \$104.9 billion to spend for 2018-19, which is 2.6% less than the current two-year budget’s revenue estimate of \$107.7 billion. The state’s ability to address key issues including funding public education will be extremely challenging given the tight budget legislators will be working with this session. In fact, later in the week, Dan Patrick suggested the way to cut spending would be from education and health care, the two largest state expenditures.

The Texas Tribune’s Evan Smith interviewed Dan Patrick on Wednesday morning and asked if he intended to hold school finance hostage to school choice. Lt. Gov. Patrick replied that “hostage” isn’t a very nice word. He explained that he and the Governor were elected because the people want choice, and that he intends to move forward with school choice right away. While they are still in the process of writing school choice legislation, he suggested it would include education savings accounts (ESAs), business tax credits, and special education vouchers. When pressed to find out if Senator Larry Taylor would be Chair of the Senate Education Committee, Lt. Gov. Patrick spoke highly of him and said that he would announce committee chairs with lightening speed.

Lieutenant Governor Patrick avoided directly answering questions on many issues, but he was eager to give his opinion on A-F. “The A-F system is not going away.” In Lieutenant Governor Patrick’s eyes, A-F is a done deal and while they are open to suggestions of how to make it better, it is here to stay. The following is a telling exchange between Dan Patrick and Evan Smith on this issue, which shines a light on the real (unstated) reform goal of A-F.

Dan Patrick: Our A-F system is not going away.

Evan Smith: Does anybody outside the Capitol like it?

Dan Patrick: Schools that got A’s and B’s like it.

Evan Smith: That isn’t a very long list, is it?

Dan Patrick: Maybe that's why we should have school choice.

It is going to be a long hard session for public education. It will take a fight to fix school funding, reduce testing, oppose vouchers, and address the A-F fiasco. We are ready to work hard to stand up for a free and fair public education for all Texas children. We look forward to working with you and for you in the coming months.

Regards,

Laura Yeager
TACS Governmental Relations