



Texas Association of Community Schools

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TACS Legislative Update

Legislative activity has picked up in recent weeks. The Senate Education Committee held another meeting to discuss interim charges, the school finance commission met again, and a three-day SBOE meeting is currently in progress. TEA just announced how it intends to implement HB 22 to rate districts (and schools in a year) under the new A-F system and primary runoff elections will be here sooner than you know. These are not isolated issues, but rather are intricately linked to one another. It is important to understand the decisions being made in Austin for several reasons. First, because you have to implement them, whether they are funded or unfunded mandates. Second, because you get to decide if you support the decisions being made when you VOTE. Your staff and community are likely to blame you for bad scores, bad ratings, and decisions about how to use your limited funds. It is up to you to do your best, but also to make sure your community understands who makes the rules, why they are doing what they are doing, and to stress the importance of every eligible citizen becoming an informed voter.

Senate Education Committee

The Senate Education Committee met last Wednesday, April 4th to discuss three interim charges:

- 1) Expand High-Quality Education Opportunities – Examine high-quality campuses and programs in Texas and other states and make recommendations on incentives to expand high performing campuses and programs.
- 2) Virtual Education in the 21st Century – Review the Texas Virtual School Network (TVSN) and recommend methods of updating and improving the system to boost online virtual education.
- 3) Monitor the implementation of legislation addressed by the Senate Education Committee during the 85th legislative session. Specifically focused on state matching of the federal E-rate program (SB 1).

In keeping with past Senate Education Committee hearings, many committee members expressed a preference for privatization schemes, and were wary of valid research suggesting some of these approaches have not been effective. Patty Quinzi, Legislative Counsel at Texas AFT, provided strong evidence of failures from the largest virtual school programs in Texas, but Chairman Taylor, Senator Bettencourt, and others pushed back. Several superintendents were invited to speak about their experience bringing charters into their districts and some charter operators testified as well. Senator Bettencourt, who co-authored SB 1882 last session, which authorized incentives for having charters take over district schools, was very excited about the inclusion of private charters in San Antonio, but was concerned that a public entity might apply to run a school under SB 1882. There were no big surprises in the all-day meeting. All of the actors in the soap opera acted as expected and people who always stand up for public education continued to do so, and those who are ready to replace it with private options stayed on their steady course as well.

Texas Commission on Public School Finance

The Texas Commission of Public School Finance met on Thursday, April 5th to discuss property taxes. Before launching into the tax discussion, Chairman Brister apologized for his comments about disabled children from the previous week's expenditures working group. If you missed that, here is a brief recap. Chairman Brister had opined on the philosophical question of whether money would be better spent on gifted children or "slow" children. Needless to say, the comment created quite a stir and he "apologized" but blamed the media for taking his comment out of context.

Chairman Brister also gave some guidance on what he is looking for from the commission's working groups. He expects recommendations focused on how to use existing funds more efficiently. He is also seeking responses to education advocates who believe more funding is needed. His comments affirm suspicions that the commission (promoted and created by those who do not support public education) is not likely to recommend increasing spending on public education.

Several invited panels testified on various issues related to property taxes. TEA presented an outline of state sources of school revenue. Senator Paul Bettencourt and House Public Education Committee Chairman Dan Huberty disagreed about how recapture funds should be counted. Bettencourt argued that they should be counted as state aid, while Huberty explained that these funds are raised directly by taxpayers and the comptroller has consistently counted those funds as local funding. One panel discussed the business franchise tax, which was created to fund public schools. Since it has been cut in recent years, it contributes less and less to public education. House Public Education Committee Vice Chair Diego Bernal asked the comptroller's office to prepare a report on education funding streams that have been cut by the legislature over the last 10 years. The last panel had several business owners and a representative from Habitat for Humanity. They all agreed that high and rising property taxes are a serious burden to homeowners and businesses.

The commission's working group on outcomes met on Wednesday, April 4th in advance of the meeting of the full commission. The meeting was not live streamed, as each working group can decide whether to hold open meetings.

[Commissioner Morath's Final Decisions for 2018 Accountability \(HB 22\)](#)

On Tuesday afternoon, Commissioner Morath announced his final decisions for implementation of HB 22 for 2018 accountability. Please view the PowerPoint [here](#). As a member of the Accountability Policy Advisory Committee (APAC), I am disappointed, but not surprised, that many APAC recommendations were not adopted by the commissioner.

Here are some of the recommendations I argued for the hardest.

1. APAC recommended that in the Student Achievement Domain, dual credit should be counted the same as AP and IB courses. TEA slightly altered its original plan to require 9 credit hours for dual credit, by allowing 3 hours of dual credit in ELA or mathematics, but kept it at 9 hours for all other dual credit courses.

2. APAC urged TEA to include CTE coherent sequences in career readiness, and while the list of certifications remains ridiculously narrow, TEA did include CTE coherent sequence graduates to be counted as career ready if they have completed a CTE course aligned with the commissioner's list of 73 industry-based certifications. This is only for a couple of years, and CTE can only earn students a half a point.

3. In the weighting of the Student Achievement Domain comprised of STAAR, College, Career, and Military Readiness (CCMR), and graduation rates, the Commissioner originally wanted to count them 45%, 45%, and 10%. In response to ongoing urging by APAC and APAC to count graduation rates at least equal to the other two measures, TEA landed on 40% STAAR, 40% CCMR, and 20% graduation. I continue to be frustrated that graduation is devalued as a measure precisely because so many schools and districts are doing a great job on this.

4. One other area of GREAT frustration to me is the TEA's decision to only count substitute assessments at the "meets" level, not for the "masters" level. In a recent meeting at TEA, the assessment division representative explained that students are scoring much higher on substitute assessments (SAT, ACT, PSAT, TSI) than they are on STAAR. Only 30% of students scored at the "masters" level on STAAR, while 70% met "masters" for alternative assessments. He explained that since it isn't the same

as STAAR, they weren't sure these alternative assessments could be used. I pointed out that these alternative assessments are actually used to determine college readiness at COLLEGES, and that the system is supposed to be measuring "student achievement," not STAAR alignment. The TEA representative replied that 70% was just too high, so they are going to only use alternative assessments for the "meets grade level" measure until they do further research to set standards for the higher level. Do you need to do the deep breathing exercises I needed to do at that moment to maintain your composure?

Is our accountability system supposed to make sure not too many students look college or career ready? Or is it supposed to actually measure what is happening in Texas public schools? Our elected leaders say that the purpose is the latter, but based on TEA decisions devaluing graduation, CTE, dual credit, and alternative assessments, my suspicion is confirmed that the focus on state standardized tests and the A-F system is designed to discredit the work being done in Texas public schools in order to build an argument for the gradual privatization of education.

Sorry, that wasn't a cheerful end to my update. Here is how you can make it better.

VOTE and tell everyone you know to vote. One day I hope to have a cheerier update for you. That is contingent on all of us working to wake up educators, students, parents, and community members, and encouraging them to research and vote for candidates who support public education and the 5.4 million kids counting on us to provide it for them. The progressive starvation of Texas public schools through reduced state funding and the shaming of public schools via state-designed assessment and accountability are part of a long-term plan by reformers in Texas and around the country. Those reformers are driving the bus right now, and it is our own fault. Our only recourse is at the ballot box. The deadline to [register](#) for the May 22nd primary runoff election is April 23rd. Several important runoffs need educators to turn out. More on voting next week.

Respectfully,

Laura Yeager
TACS Governmental Relations