



## Texas Association of Community Schools

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### Legislative Update

With the end of session in sight, House and Senate floor sessions are growing longer and committee meetings are getting shorter and shorter. Accordingly, education committee meetings this week were BRIEF. For bills that have not yet had a hearing, they may have taken their last breath until next session, unless they get rolled into some other bill that is cruising down the legislative highway. Legislative traffic jams are just as bad in the capitol as they are on Austin streets, so many bills will not make it to their final destination.

Tuesday morning, the Senate Education Committee met for perhaps the shortest hearing in history. Two bills were heard; one (HB 505) would prohibit limitations on the number of dual credit courses a student can take. The other (HB 181) would eliminate requirements that districts indicate endorsements, achievement levels, and performance acknowledgements on high school diplomas. The bills were introduced; Austin ISD testified in favor of HB181; and the meeting was adjourned in less than 15 minutes!

On Thursday, the Senate Education Committee met again, this time for a total of 23 minutes. Three bills were heard and only two education committee members were present. One bill (HB 440) would ensure that students with mental disabilities are given necessary accommodations during physical education classes. Another bill (HB 1430) would add mental health as a strand in the public services endorsement. Lastly, HB 1993 would authorize school districts to notify parents of their students' academic performance electronically and to allow districts to gather parents' signatures electronically.

The House Public Education Committee met on Tuesday evening. Eight bills were heard including Chairman Aycock's HB 1341 which would review and modify the TEKS. Randy Willis, Superintendent of Granger ISD (who has become a regular at the Capitol) testified in favor of the bill. Toting color-coded binders of TEKS and analyses, he presented a clear argument for why the TEKS need to be reduced, why students should only be tested on readiness standards, and why students are being set up for failure if we teach curriculum that is an inch deep and a mile wide, and then test them as if they had learned material in depth. The bill was left pending in committee, but the companion bill, Senate bill 313 passed unanimously out of the Senate earlier in the day. Since the Senate bill was amended to include testing each 10th grader with the TSI and eliminated the provision to test only readiness standards, a conference committee will likely be needed to iron out differences between the versions. Kudos to Randy for shepherding these bills through the legislature and for his closing line advocating for "a move from a culture of testing to a culture of learning." Representative Alma Allen agreed and said, "It is time to stop killing our kids, our teachers, and our schools."

Also heard in House Public Education Committee on Tuesday, were two bills by Senator Kolkhorst related to a pilot program for establishing reading excellence teams, and creating reading comprehension training academies for public school teachers who teach grades 4 and 5. Later that day, Senator Kolkhorst's SB 925 to create literacy academies for teachers of K-3 was passed out of committee. These bills are priorities for the Governor, so they will likely keep moving forward.

While committee hearings have been lighter, the full Senate and House are getting the bills that have made it out of committee.

Representative Huberty's HB 743 passed on the House floor with only Representatives Stickland and Simpson voting against it. This bill would do several things:

1. Require an audit by an entity independent of TEA and the testing vendor to assure that assessments are "valid and reliable."
2. Require assessments be based on readiness standards.
3. Reduce the amount of material tested so that 85% of students taking the exam in grades 3-5 could complete the test in 120 minutes; and 85% of students taking tests in 6-8 could complete them in 180 minutes.
4. Lastly, there would be a study of the number and scope of the TEKS.

This bill will hopefully get a hearing in the Senate soon so it can live another day.

Senator Royce West's Opportunity School District bill (SB 669) previously called the Achievement School District, was heard and passed on the Senate Floor Thursday morning. This bill would allow the commissioner of education to put campuses that have been rated low performing for two consecutive years in the Texas Opportunity School District that would be managed by a commissioner-appointed superintendent, who could contract with private companies to run the school. TACS opposed this bill last session, and opposed it again this session. Yesterday, 20 senators voted for the bill and 11 voted against. Keep in mind that if the Senate hadn't changed the rules at the start of session to enable a bill to pass with fewer votes, this bill would have died.

The Governor's number one education priority, Pre-K, has now passed both chambers in the form of House Bill 4. There were various amendments, so the bill now goes back to the House to see if it concurs with the changes or if it needs a conference committee to resolve differences. Touted as a bill that doesn't increase spending for pre-K, but rather improves the "quality" of pre-K, it passed the Senate with all voting for the bill except for 5 Tea Party members.

At this point, we are doing what we can to help good bills move forward and keep bad ones from becoming law. The last day of this legislative session is June 1, 2015. There is light at the end of the tunnel!

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