Fixing a Badly Flawed System

In February, TSTA released a detailed report on the state’s school accountability system with our recommendations for change. Misuse of high-stakes standardized testing has prevented us from collecting the meaningful and accurate data on student and school performance that both the state and school districts need to ensure great public schools for every child, the report concluded. We hoped to accomplish two things:

• Convince the Select Committee on Public School Accountability that change is overdue and lay out the benchmarks for evaluating the effectiveness of any suggestions for reform.
• Stimulate broader public discussion on accountability and what such a system can reasonably be expected to accomplish.

The select committee’s leadership seems to have gotten the message that change is overdue, judging from the comments its leaders, Rep. Rob Eissler and Sen. Florence Shapiro, have made. At the committee’s first meeting, Eissler said the state needs an accountability system “with more carrot and less stick.” He clearly recognizes that using standardized testing to punish school districts, campuses, students, and teachers just doesn’t work. Other organizations have joined the discussion. Raise Your Hand Texas and the Texas Institute for Education Reform (TIER) recently issued their own reports, both calling for an end to overreliance on high-stakes testing.

Raise Your Hand Texas, led by former Lt. Gov. Bill Raffie1, recommends that accountability “focus on improvement rather than labeling,” which can be done by using more than one tool for measuring performance; setting “high expectations for achievement for all students”; and making the system “complex enough to differentiate among schools and districts” and “fair in addressing the diversity of educational settings and challenges.”

TIER calls for “administering several different types of assessments (which) will provide Texans with a comprehensive, comparative and fully nuanced understanding of student performance.” Unfortunately, it also calls for private school vouchers and merit pay for teachers, neither of which belongs in a report on accountability reform.

As lawmakers review these proposals and others that are likely to be released before January, we urge them to remember that, for meaningful and accurate measurements, an accountability system has to:

• Be diagnostic, not punitive.
• Be compatible with the federal accountability system.
• Measure growth.
• Evaluate necessary skills rather than irrelevant content.
• Have local control rather than remote control.

Accountability is about measurement only, not achievement. Changing the Texas accountability model must begin with this premise. Otherwise, change is likely to repeat the mistakes and shortcomings of the seriously flawed system it will replace. That would be bad for the students, teachers, and, most important, future of Texas.

—TSTA President Rita Haecker
Who Will Be Our Strongest Supporters?

TAKS. NCLB. AYP. IDEA. ARD. EOC. RTI. ESL. TEEG. Sometimes we have to step back and remember that teaching is about more than acronyms and tests. It’s about our children and our country’s standing among nations.

On November 4, key races in America will decide everything from who will be the next president to who will sit on the local school board. Every decision that impacts the students and employees in our public schools will be made by the people who are elected this fall.

The stakes are high. Increasingly we are trapped in a system that views students as products and teachers as assembly line workers. High stakes testing is driving the system to the point there isn’t anything that hasn’t been or won’t be sacrificed on the altar of TAKS.

School districts’ finances are mired down in a system designed to perpetually underfund education. Those who believe that public dollars should be used to fund private schools and employees in our public schools will be made by the people who are elected this fall.

The TSTA Political Action Committee met August 20 to allocate over $400,000 that you contributed, voluntarily, to help our recommended candidates get elected. While contributions are important, what is more important is that we get involved in campaigns at every level. Our strength as an organization is in our ability to engage in grassroots organizing across the state. Two or three hours of block walking or making phone calls for a candidate could be an invaluable investment in the future of public education.

Clockwise from top left, a few of TSTA-PAC’s recommended candidates: Barack Obama (photo by Joe Bean), Rick Noriega, Sherrie Matula, Laura Ewing.
Michael Geisen of Oregon, a foresteturned-middle-school-science-teacher and NEA member, is the 2008 National Teacher of the Year. Here are a few of his thoughts on education, as reported by the Learning First Alliance (www.learningfirst.org) and Council of Chief State School Officers (www.ccsso.org):

• We are in a system where I think we’ve really enshrined certain aspects of intelligence and really focused on those to the exclusion of developing the whole child. So I really want to try and help not only teachers at the classroom level but all the way up through policymakers to find a better balance in education. Because we need to start really viewing intelligence as multi-faceted and unique to each child, and help them develop their own unique way of how they’re going to thrive in the world.

• My general approach is to really take a multitude of approaches to learn a particular concept. We may act it out. We do a lot of computer simulations. We do discussions. Some students are very musical, and so I write songs and music about science concepts.

• I post one or two critical things that we’re trying to learn for that unit in a prominent place in the classroom, in front of the class. I share with students, “Here’s what we’re trying to learn,” and I post it up there for a couple of weeks. Not only does it help the students focus on what they’re trying to learn, but it also helps me. I need to look up there and say, “Hey, is what I’m doing right now related to that content standard?” I call them the “SAPSBATDOs.” It’s just a silly acronym that stands for “stuff all people should be able to do.” But it’s kind of evolved into this strange martial arts theme and people become SAPSBATDO masters...

• I quickly realized that, okay, I’m not just teaching science. I’m dealing with human beings. I think I’ve focused more on developing our classroom into community, and not been so concerned with getting through what we’re supposed to get through. Because a student is not going to be learning that day if dad has left them, or—I’ve got kids who have parents who are in jail and they’re concerned because he’s about to get out. These are real issues. And you can’t learn when that’s pressing on you. So sometimes I just need to back off and realize, okay, probably it’s not the most important thing for this student right now to focus on what’s the difference between a plant and an animal cell.

• I think what we really need in education is to stop enshrining this very narrow view of intelligence, and we need to start to formally value other forms of intelligence that are going to be essential in the 21st century.

Quotes: National Teacher of the Year

Let us all in America sincerely focus on the whole child, not just test scores or future adult success. The further from children one is, the easier it becomes to forget that we are dealing with real live human beings with legitimate needs, desires, and feelings. These young people are our equals. They are not simply the numbers, conglomerations of hormones, or future products. All the latest programs, fads, and statistics are meaningless to a child who isn’t cared for on a deeper level. Whether you are a teacher or parent, businessperson or retired, young or old: reach deep down into each child with humor, love, and compassion and they will learn from you. They will learn much more than just how to read and write; they will learn they are wonderfully human.

Michael Geisen speaks at the 2008 NEA Representative Assembly
SENATE BILL 9: Lessons Learned Since Fingerprinting Became Mandatory

BY JOEY MOORE, TSTA GENERAL COUNSEL AND DIRECTOR OF LEGAL SERVICES

In the last legislative session, the Texas Legislature made sweeping changes to the Texas Education Code related to employee criminal background checks. While the State Board for Educator Certification has fingerprinted all applicants for teaching certificates since 2003, Senate Bill 9 mandated that virtually anyone who comes into contact with students submit to some form of criminal background check to gain admittance to campus. Since Senate Bill 9 was enacted, several large school districts have completed the background check requirements. Let’s reflect on what we’ve learned in the past year.

Senate Bill 9 requires that all certified educators, classroom substitutes, noncertified employees hired after January 1, 2008, and charter school employees (whether certified or not) who are working in a teaching or professional capacity must submit to a national criminal history background check. Employees (whether certified or not) who are working in a teaching or professional capacity must submit to a name-based background check. A “volunteer” is defined as a person who has indicated in writing an intention to serve as a volunteer, unless that person (1) is a parent, guardian, or grandparent of a child enrolled in the district; (2) will be accompanied by a district employee while on the school campus, or (3) is volunteering for a single event on the campus.

Information obtained about the individuals who complete the fingerprinting process is compiled in the Texas Department of Public Safety (TDPS) criminal history clearinghouse. The clearinghouse is a database containing the national criminal history of Texas school employees. TDPS is required to create and update a subscription service for eligible persons to review criminal history information. School districts subscribe to the clearinghouse for $1 per employee.

RAMIFICATIONS OF THE FINGERPRINTING PROCESS

One of the most common questions the TSTA Help Center has received regarding the fingerprinting process is, “Will I get fired for . . . ?” Under the statute, school districts must terminate or refuse to hire anyone who has been convicted of a Title Five felony, which includes serious offenses against other people, such as murder, kidnapping, sexual assault, and assault. It is up to the individual school district how they respond to other criminal offenses.

Employees are more likely to encounter employment problems as a result of the fingerprinting process in two situations: (1) if the employee did not disclose his/her criminal history in accordance with the employment application, or (2) if the employee did not report a criminal arrest in accordance with district policy after becoming employed. Keep in mind, though, local policy governs which criminal incidents are required to be reported and which are not. Some incidents, such as certain misdemeanors, may be so minor that employees don’t have to report them. You should always check your local policy to be sure.

ONE DISTRICT LEARNS FROM THE PROCESS

Austin ISD was the first school district to complete the fingerprinting process. To manage the data it obtained from the clearinghouse, AISD created a spreadsheet that contained several categories of information, including data that was part of the background check report, such as the employee’s name, criminal history, and other identifying information. The district also included the campus at which the employee worked, the position the employee held, and the employee’s hiring date.

Several media sources requested a copy of the spreadsheet through the Texas Public Information Act. The Attorney General ruled that while most of the information was confidential — because it was information contained in the report obtained from the TDPS — some of the information was not. Specifically, the campus, position, and hiring date were not confidential because those details were not contained in the TDPS report. Interestingly, the district did not include those three additional areas of information that were not included in the TDPS report, no information would have been disclosed.

TSTA and other associations filed suit against the Attorney General and the district, arguing that even with such a limited amount of information being released, it would not be difficult to discover the identity of any particular individual on the list of employees with a criminal history. TSTA argued that public school employees have common law right to privacy just as other individuals do. The case is currently awaiting trial.

Points to Remember

As the first few districts went through the process, the TSTA Help Center received numerous inquiries about possible ramifications for employees. When your district goes through the process, remember these points:

➤ There are no exceptions. If you are an employee who falls into one of the categories to be fingerprinted, you must do so if you wish to remain employed by the district.

➤ Not every hit on the criminal background check will result in termination.

➤ The information contained in the TDPS report is confidential and may only be disclosed to appropriate district personnel.

➤ It is better to disclose criminal history information in accordance with your district’s specific policy than to wait until it shows up on the background check.

➤ If you have encountered a reportable offense or have missed your deadline to report, contact the TSTA Help Center.
When Rita Haecker and her husband James were expecting their son Jimmy, she knew her $19,000 teacher salary, even when combined with James’ salary, would not be enough to support their new family. She worked a second job throughout her pregnancy.

That frustration almost 20 years ago set Haecker on a path to the TSTA presidency, a position she assumed in July and takes very seriously.

“When you are state president, the members put their livelihoods on your shoulders. I don’t take that lightly. Thousands of people are counting on me, and I’m committed to my members getting the representation they deserve.”

As a child, Haecker witnessed the power of collective action at home. Her father worked in a print shop in San Antonio for $1.03 an hour, putting in many hours of overtime to support his three children. When he took a job in Austin working for the local newspaper, everything changed. “His benefits went up, his wages went up, and it was a better environment to work in because they had a union,” Haecker recalled.

Both found a teaching position they loved and stayed with it, she as a first grade bilingual teacher in Austin for 16 years, he as a middle school teacher in Klein for 14 years. Both knew from the beginning that TSTA was the only organization that could make a difference. President Rita Haecker and Vice President Jason Hillman share a little about themselves and why they want to lead TSTA.

‘WE CARE ABOUT KIDS’

Listen to TSTA’s new leaders talk and it’s obvious they loved teaching. Now they’re taking it to the next level, working to make all schools better.

“He believed the reason was she was not educated,” Haecker said. “He came home and told us that story, and he said he expected every one of us to do well in school and go to the University of Texas. His expectation was we would not fail; he worked long hours at a hard job, and he expected us to work just as hard at school.”

Haecker did graduate from the University of Texas and, influenced by her music teachers at Travis High School in Austin, she became a teacher.

“What I saw was their unconditional commitment to their students,” Haecker said. “The power of education is dramatic. It makes a difference in every part of your life. My choir director, Josemaria Gonzales, helped me grow, not just musically but as a leader. My mariachi director, Zeke Castro, gave us opportunities to explore different experiences outside of our home and our neighborhood. From that time on, I knew what I wanted to do was give students the experiences I was given.”

She became a first grade bilingual teacher at Kocurek Elementary in Austin, a job she truly loved for 16 years.

“It’s exciting to see children open a book and start to read, and by the end of the year they’re reading everything. It’s a real evolution and a great reward,” she said.

“When you are state president, the members put their livelihoods on your shoulders. I don’t take that lightly. Thousands of people are counting on me. I’m committed to my members getting the representation they deserve.”
“It was a huge gift to the community that showed how much the association cares about kids and parents,” Haecker said.

“As TSTA president, I want to emphasize that we care about kids,” she continued, “kids who can’t speak English, kids who can’t pass the test, kids who drop out. How are we going to work on that? We need to talk about it, not just as one community or one school district but across the whole state.

“Texas is seeing big challenges,” she continued. “We’re shutting schools down because our minority kids are not doing well on standardized tests. We have millions of kids that are not being educated. We should be working together on the big issues we face.”

When she was an NEA director, she lobbied Congress and the U.S. Senate. “That was very enlightening because I saw the responsibility of some of them to the issues in our schools, and then I saw some of them that didn’t seem too concerned about social security or NCLB,” Haecker said. “It really opened up my mind to know that we can’t just make an impact at the state level but we must work very hard to elect the right people at the national level, too, because they are key to how federal laws are written and implemented at the state level.”

As a local leader, she worked with state legislators, as well. “We need to form those political relationships and keep meeting with them so they understand why we take the stands on issues that we do,” Haecker said. “I will continue to do that as state president—lobby and visit with legislators and do whatever I need to do to make sure they understand what kind of support we need for our schools and our employees.

“It’s imperative that we work as a team to come up with strategies and solutions to address those issues that our members are dealing with — the No Child Left Behind law, cuts in funding, the emphasis on testing,” she said. “Our education support professionals unfortunately are still at will employees. They need a living wage that will allow them to support their families; they need health care benefits for themselves and their families; and they need respect, because they aren’t always treated in a professional way. We have to ensure that our school board policies and state laws guarantee that our ESPs have due process in their jobs.”

Her goal for TSTA itself is to increase the strength of local associations by boosting leadership development at every level. Her leadership style is collaborative.

“I believe when you get a group of leaders together you should take advantage of their different perspectives. Meetings should be engaging people, not lecturing them,” Haecker said. “That’s the kind of teacher I was. I never stood in front of my class. You had to look for me. I was there monitoring, but it wasn’t like I had to be the only person talking in front of the class.”

She plans to visit as many local leaders as she can this fall to find out how TSTA can help them, and her goal is to sign up twice as many members as last year, or more. “It’s about building our power in the state,” she said. “It’s exciting, very exciting.”

Haecker said of her new role as president. “It’s going to be a lot of work but that’s okay.”

On a personal note

• I was born in San Antonio but we moved to Austin when I was two, and I’ve been here ever since.
• I have a brother and a sister who both live in Austin. My sister works for Whole Foods as a CPA, and my brother is still in school at the University of Texas and works for a children’s shelter.
• My son Jimmy is a senior in high school. He wants to be a lawyer. He’s a National Hispanic Scholar finalist, so he’ll have a lot of choices of where he can go to school. Of course I’m a little prejudiced; I want him to go to school here at Texas. I’m sure he’s going to be great whatever he does. I look forward to seeing the next part of his life. He’s already a great kid.
• My husband James has worked for the Austin Public Library for 20 years. He loves books and loves to read. He’s very thoughtful and has a peaceful personality. I met him my senior year in high school.
• I read nonfiction—how to build teams and be an effective leader. I’ve read Barbara Jordan’s speeches. I like biographies about strong women leaders. It’s important to see how other leaders dealt with obstacles and challenges. I just read Good to Great by Jim Collins and I’m about to read Death by Meeting by Patrick Lencioni.
• If I had free time, I would be sitting somewhere like the beach, reading a book, maybe listening to music, having some quiet time, walking, doing a lot of reflecting, being with my son, playing with my little nieces. These are things that take my mind off of work and keep me more centered.

“I still have all those first-grade books out in my garage, because sometimes I just like to go back and remember how it is.”

At the beginning of Haecker’s first year as a teacher, a parent approached her about joining TSTA/NEA and the Austin Association of Teachers, now Education Austin.

“Don Bos, the librarian at Metz Elementary, came for his parent conference and asked me if I had joined a professional organization yet. He in- vited me to a building leaders meeting, and that’s where I became inspired to get involved in TSTA,” Haecker said.

She moved through the ranks from an association representative for her school, to a member of the local execu- tive board, to NEA director for Texas and full-time vice president of Education Austin.

A merged local association whose members belong to both the National Education Association and American Federation of Teachers, Education Austin holds an exclusive consultation agreement with Austin ISD.

“One thing I was really proud of was our two-year agreement over salaries,” Haecker said. “Our employees received an 11½ percent pay raise over two years, and we were able to focus on issues other than pay during consultation, such as quality professional development for teachers and restoring library books.”

Another great memory: restoring reason- able class sizes for art, music, and physical education classes at the elementary level. “It was a two-year fight to educate the public and parents on the importance of a manageable and teachable class size for their kids,” she said. “We were able to keep the momentum high enough to get the school board to reverse its decision and go back to one class for one teacher.”

And then there was the local’s outreach to bilingual parents through two literacy events cosponsored by NEA and AFT. Some 600 parents and teachers spent a Saturday learning more effective ways to teach children through workshops, books, and handouts in Spanish and English. Breakfast and lunch were included.

On a personal note

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For some adults, being around middle school kids is a nightmare. For new TSTA Vice President Jason Hillman, it was a choice.

When he graduated from college, he spent a semester as a substitute teacher, just to find out which grade level he liked best. He worked at the elementary level and with homebound students, but he found he had an aptitude for working with middle school students.

“Eighth graders will roll with you. They’re malleable. They’re not jaded,” he said. “It’s easy to get them to question what you’re saying, and that’s when the real dialogue opens.

“Education happens through mentoring, and you can’t do that unless you can talk with kids, not just at them,” Hillman continued. “If you can joke with them and get them to realize you’re human, and if you can bear with them as they go through all the changes they go through as teenagers, you’ll earn their respect. They’re a lot broader as a group than people give them credit for.”

Born in Colorado in 1969, Hillman spent a couple of years on a ranch outside of Brownwood, Texas as an elementary student before moving to Georgia and back to Colorado. When he was 13, the family moved back to Texas for good.

His mom taught special education for 34 years, the last 20 in Cypress-Fairbanks ISD; his dad taught government and American history for 29 years, ending with 18 years in Conroe. Now retired, they summer in Maine and return to Magnolia when the leaves start to fall.

With both parents as role models, Hillman was pretty sure he wanted to teach, but he tried a few other fields. “I started in engineering at Tarleton State, but it was too cold,” he said. “I’m a people person, and the computer labs didn’t agree with me. Then I turned 180 degrees at Sam Houston State University and got a degree in psychology” with additional classes in teaching and geology.

Hillman taught in Klein ISD for 14 years at the same middle school he attended as a student, and he joined TSTA. “It was evident to me that TSTA was the leader. When I started paying attention to the professional organizations, I knew I needed to be part of TSTA.”

He started attending building meetings, was elected as a delegate to the TSTA and NEA conventions, then became vice president and president of the Klein Education Association.

Hillman moved up to the state level in 2005, serving for two years as the vice chair and one year as the chair of the TSTA Legislative and Political Action Committee. It was an exciting time. “We were very successful in the 2006 TSTA Political Action Committee campaign. We elected 104 of 113 of our endorsed candidates,” he said.

In addition to TSTA’s legislative work, “I’ve always been interested in the legal end of what we do,” he said. “In school law class at Sam Houston, I came to have a real appreciation of the legal end of policy interpretation and how important it is to have the right players to protect our rights. The legislature makes the rules, the Commissioner interprets the rules, and the legal department tweaks the rules. There’s a real civic component to what we do. I’m proud to be a part of it.”

His wife Cindy is a counselor at Jack Hays High School in Hays CISD; previously she was a counselor in Humble. They have two boys: Reid, who is 11 and starting middle school, and Ryan Mize, who is 22 and just graduated from Texas State University in San Marcos with a degree in geographic information systems.

At the end of August, Hillman’s thoughts were with his middle school students back in Klein. “I miss them. I’m sitting here in Austin on what would be the fourth day of school,” he said on the day he spoke with the Advocate. “I’m missing that.”

His office was a testament to his words: the walls were lined with the posters of NASA and space exploration he always had in his classroom at the beginning of the year.

But he has no regrets. “I’m extremely happy to be here working for such a great organization on behalf of all teachers and other education employees,” he said. “I want to make a difference for them.”

President Rita Haecker and Vice President Jason Hillman talk with State Rep. Rick Noriega of Houston, TSTA’s recommended candidate for U.S. Senate, at the association’s Leadership Academy in June.
Do the Math.
No, Really. Do the Math.

BY DR. PAUL HENLEY, TSTA TEACHING AND LEARNING SPECIALIST

THE PROBLEM

Every year in grades 3-11, Texas children are subjected to a high-stakes mathematics test, the TAKS Math. The test determines whether children are promoted. The test gives a numeric worth to a student, a teacher, a campus, and a district.

While few agree on the best way or ways to fix the problem, nearly all educators agree that the United States, and Texas, has a problem. The U.S. Department of Education (DOE) reported to Congress on state results in reading and mathematics. Only one state, unnamed in the report, hit the mark on making Adequate Yearly Progress. Texas was not that state. Nearly 40% of Texas students failed to reach the “proficient” or “advanced” levels on mathematics tests.

The situation is even more disturbing for minority students. Students in minority sub-groups, especially English Language Learners, are falling further and further behind in their math achievement levels. Even more, the report notes that achievement in both math and reading drops as the grade level of students increases. “With each grade level,” the report says, “fewer states met their targets.”

HOW DID THIS HAPPEN?

There are a number of reasons that experts give for low scores on mathematics tests. One reason may be that TAKS math tests rely on reading ability. Undiagnosed dyslexia can be a real obstacle, and while some students have testing modified, others are left to read as best they can and accept their results.

Other reasons come from mathematics specialists: math anxiety, lack of direction, and what amounts to a generation gap in math teaching.

Math Anxiety: Mathematics is one of the least popular subjects in schools. Some students hate math. Let’s be honest, some teachers hate math. Some even see mathematics as elitist and geeky.

That stands in direct opposition to the beliefs of Brian Foley, the webmaster of MathMojo.com. He puts it differently:

“Math is the great equalizer. You don’t have to be rich or privileged to excel at it. Some of the greatest mathematicians started out as sons or daughters of poor, rural families. Curiosity and a local library are all you need to get you on your way.”

Perhaps, but right now local libraries and current curiosity levels are not producing the success students and teachers both need. It is difficult to be curious when you are anxious, and the stigmas associated with the subject may be part of the issue.

Math anxieties could be broken into two categories. Type I (math aspect) and Type II (psychological aspect). Type I math anxiety is caused by certain math symbols, concepts, or terms which make mental blocks in the learning process. Type II math anxiety is triggered by socio-cultural factors. Fighting math anxieties while also teaching the subject matter may be a reason for lower student achievement. Take heart. Students in other countries don’t seem to like math, either.

Lack of Direction: The DOE sponsors the What Works Clearinghouse, but it does not offer meaningful research on any mathematics teaching strategy.

The Texas Education Agency operates a Best Practices Clearinghouse, but it only has two entries for mathematics. Both spoke to data-driven decision-making, early intervention, and a small student to...
In other words, the SBOE specifically series from approval. Board of Education (SBOE) specifically mathematics. Unfortunately, the State student improvement. The most series failed to show any measurable DOE. All but one major textbook se-
classroom in and of itself. none will help a current, contained for all three of these approaches, Math anxiety may
Generation Gap: Math anxiety may have played a role in this ban, which came from a very conservative group of SBOE members who see Everyday Math as a threat to the basic princ-
MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS: Students learn using three basic means: visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. In other words, some students learn by see-
ing (visual); some students learn by hearing (auditory); still others learn by touching (kinesthetic). While ele-
mentary-school-age students use manipula-
tives, middle schools tend to phase them out. Giving students opportuni-
ties to see, hear, and feel gives all students a chance at learning.

WHAT TO DO?

Now, there are some sug-
gested approaches that can lead to meaningful gains in mathematics at each level. By keeping things as sen-
sory as possible—and shining a posi-
tive light on math—teachers might be able to improve student interest, and achievement, in mathematics.

Elementary School Students: At this age, students need to learn the facts of math. The facts come first, before larger concepts. Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, an 18th century Swiss edu-
cuator, theorized that learning is best when experience comes before the-
tory. He was right.

Using money, fact cards, races, games, and manipulatives can make learning fun. Variation is key to learning at younger ages, and mathematics offers teachers many different oppor-

High School Students: High school students have reached a point where they should have the knowledge, comprehension, and application skills. The whole point of high school mathematics may be using math facts to learn and use math con-
cepts. Like Pestalozzi said, experi-
ence should come before theory. High school is the time to learn those theories, as well as the critical think-
ing skills those theories offer.

There are still kinesthetic learners in high school. Students’ learning styles rarely change.

Algebra may be learned more quickly if students are allowed to use any-
thing physical to learn a concept. This may include magnets on a mag-
net board or anything tactile. For an example, see the “Figure with Sticks and String Half an Ellipse” at www.geometryexpressions.com (search for Ellipse).

One way to get upper-level students thinking on higher levels is by simply changing roles, turning algebra stu-
dents into problem solvers. Begin with a question and have students speculate about possible ap-
proaches. Such an approach gives students higher-order thinking skills like reversibility, flexibility, and gener-
alization. Discussing logic in algebra helps prepare students for the similar demands from geometric proofs they will experience the next year.

It’s not about beating another coun-
yry, and it’s not about a school’s label. Perhaps math is the great equalizer, but we won’t know until everybody is able to do it.
One Elected Official at a Time

With “Improving Education One Elected Official at a Time” as their motto, Socorro Education Association helped elect two new, pro-education school board members, Joe Sarabia and Tony Ayub.

SEA President Glenda Hawthorne said members worked tirelessly in the campaigns.

“Our members helped with the voter registration drive, gave up their Saturdays for two months to stand at intersections with signs, manned the early voting sites, and braved sun, wind, and sandstorms in the process,” she said. “They talked to their friends, families, and neighbors about our recommended candidates and came out to vote during the most stressful week of the whole school year, TAKS.

“It was a long and hard-fought road to victory for these two fine men, but with the help of families, friends, and SEA, we were able to prevail,” Hawthorne said.

The local association is looking forward to working with the new board. “Confidence, communication, and community involvement must and will be, I am sure, high priorities in Socorro ISD once again,” she said.

BLOGGING FROM JAPAN

In October, Kathryn Brothers will depart for Tokyo as a participant in the Japan Fulbright Memorial Fund Teacher Program. She was selected from over 1,700 applicants to spend three weeks in Japan to promote greater intercultural understanding.

Brothers is the chair of the TSTA Community and Instructional Advocacy Committee, vice president for teacher affairs for NEA-Dallas/TSTA/NEA, and a teacher at Lagow Elementary in Dallas ISD.

Follow her blog at www.trimmingthebonsai.blogspot.com or read more about the program at http://www.fulbrightmemorialfund.jp.

LAREDO LOCALS CLOSE TO 3,000 STRONG

As the Advocate went to press, TSTA’s Laredo local associations — Laredo TSTA/NEA, Laredo United TSTA/NEA, and Laredo United ESP — were only 33 members short of their 3,000-member goal.

Many new members signed up at this fall’s new teacher orientations and job orientations for support professionals, but the locals also got a big boost from the spring campaign, when 443 new members were recruited in two weeks.

Local leaders are Rene De la Vina, president; Blanca Balboa, president of United TSTA/NEA; Juanita Gomez, Laredo United ESP president; and Hilario Cavazos, Region 1C president.

PASSADEA EDUCATORS APPRECIATE STAPLES

Patrick Hernandez, president of Pasadena Educators Association and treasurer of Region 3C, contacted his local Staples office supply store after reading about its August 16 “Teacher Appreciation Day” in TSTA’s electronic newsletter for local presidents.

“I spoke with the manager about setting up a table with our TSTA promotional literature and brochures,” he said. “We were given permission with no problem.”

Hernandez’s local association emailed all its members to remind them of Teacher Appreciation Day and to ask them to bring a teacher who might not yet be a member.

“Periodically throughout the year, we will be able to remind our members of...
Meet Tawna Pitts

“I love everything that TSTA has to offer: the networking, the pre-professional development workshops, and the introduction to the legislative and political side of education,” Tawna Pitts, the new president of TSTA Student Program, says. “It all appeals to me, not only as an individual, but as a TSTA member, and a future educator. The decisions and actions of people today affect the outcome of tomorrow and the future of my classroom.”

The Advocate asked Pitts, a student at San Jacinto College, about her background and goals for TSTA Student Program, TSTA’s affiliate for college and university students who plan to teach.

I got involved in TSTA Student Program because: I went to a meeting at San Jac TSEA where they were finalizing plans for the trip to the Student Program State Convention in Austin. They said that you had to be a paid member to be able to attend the convention, so I wrote a check that day. At the next meeting they were holding officer elections for the following year, so I jumped right in, ran for local president at San Jac, and was elected.

I went to the convention and got hooked! I loved the workshops, the networking opportunities, and getting to meet up with people from other colleges around Texas that had made the same career choice I had.

I remember the keynote speaker that year was former NEA President Reg Weaver, and he told a story about one of his students that just touched me to the core. When I left that convention, I was fired up for education and wanting more of what the association had to offer.

I ran for state president of the student program because: I wanted to continue the work that was already being done, and I knew I had something to contribute. I had shadowed President Leigh Anne Meeks for the last year and observed firsthand what issues we really face as students, association members, and future educators. While following her footsteps, I was also serving as District III president and I was appointed to a position on the NEA-Student Program Advisory Committee. I knew that with these experiences I was more than capable of fulfilling the role of president.

This year, TSTA Student Program will: be focused on revitalizing the chapters that have decreased in activity and getting those locals that are just starting out established and comfortable to make headway on their own. We will be more politically active and aware, as this is a huge election year, and we have a really big campaign going on nationally called “Got Tuition?” This is a campaign really pushing the issue of college affordability.

The Student Program’s theme this year is: “Inspiring the Stars of Tomorrow.” There is such a truth to this statement. Teachers don’t just educate, they mold, create, and inspire children’s lives. I read on a shirt somewhere “without teachers, other careers are not possible.” I absolutely love this statement.

I was inspired to teach by: one of my teachers. I had the chance to honor that teacher, Mrs. Sandra Borrego, at the Fall Connections Conference in Louisville, KY, this past November. She was my 6th-8th grade music teacher at Deepwater Junior High in Pasadena. I just absorbed her passion for teaching and her love for music. Unfortunately, my major is no longer music education. I’m going to school to receive my teaching degree in social sciences grades 8-12.

I love spending time: with my husband and my dog. We both love music and travel. Our dog has been with us since the day we adopted him. I love spending time with my friends and family, as well. I love getting to know people and hearing their stories.

In my free time I: love to teach. I love spending time with my husband and my dog. We both love music and travel. Our dog has been with us since the day we adopted him. I love spending time with my friends and family, as well. I love getting to know people and hearing their stories.

TSTA STUDENT PROGRAM

Isabella Cavazos, Region 1C president, and Rene De la Vina, president of Laredo TSTA/NEA, promote membership in Laredo.
Honoring Excellence

The start of the new school year inevitably includes lots of planning. As you put together your annual calendar, don’t forget to plan on recognizing your peers and other friends of education in your community. TSTA offers several opportunities to recognize outstanding educators, education support professionals, regional and local associations, media representatives, businesses, and other individuals or organizations that support public education.

**RONNIE RAY ESP ADVOCATE OF THE YEAR AWARD**
Nomination Deadline: September 30
Submit to: TSTA Organizing Center for Executive and Governance
Recognizes a TSTA ESP member whose activities reflect the contributions of educational support professionals to public education, particularly in one or more of the following areas: (1) innovations to support the day-to-day educational process; (2) professional achievements in his/her classification; (3) involvement in promoting public education in the community; (4) involvement in TSTA at the local, state, or national level; and (5) enhancement of the ESP image in their association, work site, or community. Nominees must have been an ESP member of TSTA for three years as of January 15.

**INSTRUCTIONAL AWARDS**
Plan Deadline: November 1 / Documentation Deadline: March 15
Submit to: TSTA Organizing Center for Public Affairs
Recognizes local associations for planned activities and accomplishments that incorporate certain strands of the NEA Priority Schools Initiative into local planning. Detailed information about the criteria can be found at: www.tsta.org/teaching/current/instructional_awards.shtml.

**FRIEND OF EDUCATION AWARD**
Nomination Deadline: December 1
Submit to: TSTA Organizing Center for Executive and Governance
Recognizes either (1) an individual, who is not a professional educator, who has made a significant contribution to the cause of public education or (2) an organization/company outside the field of education that has made an outstanding contribution in the field of education.

**FRANK J. TEJEDA AWARD FOR PUBLIC SERVICE**
Nomination Deadline: December 1
Submit to: TSTA Organizing Center for Executive and Governance
Recognizes an individual for service at the state or national political/legislative level on behalf of Texas public school children or educational employees. Nominees must be elected or appointed officials who are not currently employed full time by a school district. Any TSTA member or group of members or the award committee may submit a letter of nomination and supporting evidence of accomplishments related to the award.

**SCHOOL BELL AWARDS**
Nomination Deadline: January 31
Submit to: TSTA Organizing Center for Public Affairs
Recognizes outstanding media coverage of education issues and events. There are several categories of awards for different forms of media and various populations. The instruction book and nomination form are available on TSTA's website.

**PROFESSIONAL, HUMAN, AND CIVIL RIGHTS AWARDS**
Nomination Deadline: February 1
Submit to: TSTA Organizing Center for Executive and Governance
Individual Award—recognizes an educator who has made outstanding contributions to professional and human rights (nominee must be a TSTA member and be nominated by the local PHCR and executive committees);

Special Award—recognizes an individual or organization inside or outside the area of education for outstanding contributions to professional and human rights (recipient does not have to be a member of TSTA unless eligible but must be nominated by a TSTA affiliated association);

Mickey Leland Memorial Award—recognizes individuals or organizations that have initiated/participated in activities establishing an ongoing program or institution having a widespread social, educational, economic, or political impact, especially those projects that help the needy;

Willie Velasquez Memorial Award—recognizes individuals or organizations that have initiated/participated in activities to eradicate inequities based on race, gender, or ethnicity and to improve inter-group relations and understanding, especially those projects that help the politically disenfranchised become more involved in the political process.

**NEA Awards**—TSTA also encourages regional and local affiliates or individuals to nominate an individual, organization and/or a region or local affiliate for an NEA Human and Civil Rights Award. For NEA forms and information visit: www.nea.org/annualmeeting/neaawards NEA Award nominations must be postmarked by December 10, 2008.

**Ermalee Boice Instructional Advocacy Award**
Nomination Deadline: February 1
Submit to: TSTA Organizing Center for Executive and Governance
Open to all TSTA members, this award recognizes and promotes teaching excellence based on the following criteria: professional practice, advocacy for the profession, community engagement, leadership in professional development, and attention to diversity. The recipient of this award will be submitted as TSTA's nominee for the NEA Foundation Award for Teaching Excellence, so nominees for the Boice award should comply with the guidelines provided for the NEA Foundation Award for Teaching Excellence (www.neafoundation.org).

**PRIDE IN COMMUNICATIONS AWARDS**
Nomination Deadline: March 1
Submit to: TSTA Organizing Center for Public Affairs
Recognizes regional association newsletters and web sites. Entries are judged on the extent to which the local and/or regional association programs are identified and explained. Detailed information, instructions, and nomination forms are available on TSTA's website at: www.tsta.org/news/current/awards.shtml. You may also call the Center for Executive and Governance or the Center for Public Affairs at 877-ASK-TSTA for more information.
Great Discount Programs!

Because NEA is 3.2 million members strong, we are able to get great rates on insurance and investment plans for our members. We also now offer a variety of discount health care programs including dental care, vision care, and pet care. See below for more details.

**FREE Discount Prescription Drug Card**

TSTA has a new Discount Prescription Drug Card Program for members and it’s absolutely free. Go to our members only area and login with your TSTA member ID#, then click on the free Discount Prescription Drug card link and print out your free card and use it today at a participating pharmacy.

**Dental Program**

- Save 15% to 50%* on everything from general dentistry and cleanings to root canals, crowns and orthodontia.
- Over 71,000** available dental practice locations nationwide.
- Save on routine dental services such as X-rays and fillings.
- Save on specialty care such as orthodontics and periodontics where available.
- Dentists are credentialed and recredentialed on an ongoing basis.

*Actual costs and savings vary by provider and geographical area.

**According to the Aetna Enterprise Provider Database as of November 1, 2006.

**Vision Care**

Coast to Coast (CTC) Vision has contracted with over 12,000 eye care locations nationwide. Members save 20% to 60% on prescription eyeglasses, including frames, lenses and specialty items at participating retail locations nationwide.

**Prescription Eye Glasses**

- Save 20% to 60% on eyewear at over 12,000 optical locations nationwide.
- Most frames, lenses and specialty items are available.

**Ophthalmology Services**

- Save 10% to 30% on medical eye exams and surgical procedures, including LASIK at select locations.

**Contact Lenses**

- Save 10% to 40% on most brands of replacement soft and gas permeable contact lenses including disposables, torics and bifocals through the mail order service.

**Pet Care**

- Save 25% off veterinary medical services from a growing network of participating veterinarians nationwide.
- Save 10% to 30% on pet-related products and services such as pet food, pet grooming, boarding, and pet supplies from thousands of local and national merchants.

Visit [www.tsta.org](http://www.tsta.org) for more information and to sign up!

**Disclosures:** This plan is NOT INSURANCE. This discount card program contains a 30-Day cancellation period. Member shall receive a full refund of membership fees, excluding registration fee, if membership is cancelled within the first 30 days after receipt of membership materials. Discount Medical Plan Organization, New Benefits, Ltd. 14240 Proton Rd. Dallas, TX 75244. Available only in Texas.
TSTA GOVERNANCE

National Delegate Elections

STATE DELEGATES

The Advocate-containing ballots for the election of state delegates should be received by members by late March 2009. Deadline for receipt of ballots at TSTA is April 24, 2009, by 5 p.m. NEA requires that all elections for state and local locals must be conducted by open nominations and secret ballots. At the end of this article you will find a nomination form to seek election as a state delegate to the TSTA. NEA RA. If you would like to run for a delegate position, please complete the form (or a copy of it) and return it to TSTA.

The form must be received by the Center for Executive and Governance at TSTA no later than January 9, 2009, in order for your name to appear on the printed ballot. Each candidate for state delegate is entitled to have his or her name published in the Advocate, along with a biographical sketch of 25 words or less, which may include ethnic status.

NEA also requires proportional representation for supervisory and non-supervisory members. In order to ensure this is not violated, supervisory members are not eligible to run for state delegate as outlined above. Instead, all supervisory members are eligible to run in a separate election for Category 3 State At-Large Delegate (which also includes NEA Active Life Retired members).

In addition, supervisory members who also are members of a local may run in the statewide supervisory cluster election unless their local is not a part of that cluster. Locals are removed from this cluster only if their inclusion would cost the local a non-supervisory delegate. Locals will be notified in February if they have been removed from the cluster.

Supervisory members desiring to seek election as a delegate should complete and return the nomination form (stamped envelope). These supervisors may then file if his or her inclusion would cost the local a non-supervisory delegate. Those who are running in the same state district, (which also includes NEA Active Life Retired members) are eligible to run in a separate election for Category 3 State At-Large Delegate (which also includes NEA Active Life Retired members).

Ethnic Group: (Check all that apply)

American Indian/Alaska Native Asian Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander Multi-ethnic

Hispanic Caucasian (not of Spanish Origin)

Check here if you will be a first-time delegate

Email _______________________________ Social Security No. ________________________

Signature of Nominee ____________________________________________________________________________________________________________

The deadline for submitting a nomination form (with an optional biographical sketch of 25 words or less) is January 15, 2009. For this election, one delegate is allocated for the first 50 TSTA-R/NEA-R members and an additional delegate for each additional 1,000 TSTA-R/NEA-R members. (2) A retired member who was an NEA Active Life member while teaching may seek election as a Category 2 State At-Large delegate by completing and returning the state delegate Nomination Form and checking the Category 2 box. Those who are eligible to run in both elections must choose; they may file in only one election.

RETIRED DELEGATES

TSTA-Retired/NEA-Retired delegates may run as either retired delegates or state delegates. The two elections have different eligibility requirements. (1) The Retired Delegate Nomination Form is for a TSTA-R/NEA-R member who seeks election as a TSTA-R/NEA-R delegate. 

Ethnic Group: (Check all that apply)

American Indian/Alaska Native Asian Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander Multi-ethnic

Hispanic Caucasian (not of Spanish Origin)

Check here if you will be a first-time delegate

Email _______________________________ Social Security No. ________________________

Signature of Nominee ____________________________________________________________________________________________________________

The two elections have different eligibility requirements. (1) The Retired Delegate Nomination Form is for a TSTA-R/NEA-R member who seeks election as a TSTA-R/NEA-R delegate.

RETIRED DELEGATE NOMINATION FORM

NEA REPRESENTATIVE ASSEMBLY TSTA/NEA-RETIRED DELEGATE POSITIONS—JULY 1-6, 2009

Deadline for receipt at TSTA Headquarters is January 15, 2009, 5:00 p.m. This form is also available online at www.tsta.org

LOCAL DELEGATES

Since local associations are allocated one delegate for each 150 NEA members or major fraction thereof, a local must have at least 76 members (Active and Life) to qualify for a delegate. Locals with fewer than 76 members may cluster together for the purpose of electing local delegates. If you are a member in one of these smaller locals and would like to be a delegate, please contact Sandra Solimine as described above.

NEA will notify locals in mid-February of the number of delegates allocated for each local. Locals will be provided official NEA forms for reporting data about local delegates and alternates (“successor delegates”).

Those completed forms must be received by TSTA no later than April 10, 2009, in order to ensure proper credentials at the NEA RA. Locals must conduct an election that provides for open nominations and secret ballots. That can be done either by delivering a nomination form to each member (using a local newsletter is permissible), then insuring each member gets a ballot with the names of those returning the form, or by holding an all-member meeting, with proper notice to each member, and accepting nominations at the meeting, then voting by secret ballot.

STATE DELEGATE NOMINATION FORM

2009 NEA REPRESENTATIVE ASSEMBLY STATE DELEGATES

Deadline for receipt at TSTA Headquarters is January 9, 2009. (This form is also available online at www.tsta.org)

NOMINEE FOR: (Check one)

State At-Large Delegate: Category 1—Teacher, ESP or other Non-Supervisory

State At-Large Delegate: Category 2—Administrator or NEA Active Life Retired

Statewide Supervisory Cluster—Supervisors who are members of a local association*

NEA Active Life Retired—NEA Active Life member while teaching and now retired

Note: If your statement exceeds 25 words, it will be cut to 25 words.

Send by U.S. Mail or FAX (512-486-7043) to: TSTA-Retired, 316 W. 12th Street, Austin, TX 78701

Send by U.S. Mail or FAX (512-486-7053) to: Sandra Solimine, TSTA, Organizing Center for Executive and Governance, 316 W. 12th Street, Austin, TX 78701

Signature of Nominee ____________________________________________________________________________________________________________

Let’s go to San Diego, CA for the 2009 NEA Representative Assembly (RA) July 3-6. Pre-RA meetings and workshops begin on June 25. The first Texas Caucus meeting will be on July 1.

The exact number of delegates from Texas will be determined by our first Texas Caucus meeting will be on July 1. NEA has established a policy of encouraging ethnic-minority representation reflective of the ethnic make-up of the state’s population. The goal for TSTA is to elect at least 48% of our total delegation from among our ethnic-minority members. We cannot accomplish this goal unless all of our leaders and caucuses help recruit ethnic-minority candidates to run for delegate positions at both the state and local levels, and it is most important that the elected delegates attend the RA.

TSTA does not fund state delegates to the NEA-RA, though they may receive a small stipend budget permitting. Some regions and a few locals provide some funding for state delegates.

Below you will find some of the specific requirements and timelines for election of state and local association delegates. Anyone with questions about the elections, or needing other information about the process, should contact Sandra Solimine at TSTA, 877-ASK-TSTA, ext. 1514 or email sandras@tsta.org.

Please note that we cannot determine until after January 15 exactly how many state delegates we will elect or exactly how we will elect them. At least one state delegate will be elected on a statewide basis. The remaining state delegates will be allocated to individual regions or to clusters of regions or, possibly statewide. They will be allocated in a manner to comply with NEA rules on one-person, one-vote, and in accordance with TSTA policy.

RETIRED DELEGATE NOMINATION FORM

NEA REPRESENTATIVE ASSEMBLY TSTA/NEA-RETIRED DELEGATE POSITIONS—JULY 1-6, 2009

Deadline for receipt at TSTA Headquarters is January 15, 2009, 5:00 p.m. This item is also available online at www.tsta.org

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State Convention Delegate Elections

State delegation allocations for local associations (including Texas Faculty Association) to the April 17-18, 2009, TSTA House of Delegates will be sent to local presidents on January 23. Delegates are allocated to locals in a ratio of one delegate for every 50 members or major fraction based on the local’s Active Professional, Active ESP and Active Life membership on January 15, 2009. The policy regarding election of delegates, forms and timelines will accompany the allocation.

If a local wishes to conduct its election for delegates prior to January 15, it may do so and keep a list of delegates in the order of votes received. When the local delegation allocation is received by the local, the top vote getters who are delegates are listed as delegates and the remaining vote getters are listed as alternates.

Contact Sandra Solimine in the Center for Executive and Governance at 877-ASK-TSTA, ext. 1514, or sandras@tsta.org with questions regarding the elections.

ATTENTION, RETIRED MEMBERS:

According to the TSTA Bylaws, retired-at-large delegates for a retired delegate position.

These at-large retired delegates are allocated in the ratio of one delegate for every 75 members or major fraction thereof. Nomination forms must be received by January 15, 2009. Ballots for the election will be sent to members in early February 2009. The deadline for returning ballots to TSTA Headquarters is March 20, 2009.

Any retired member who is a TSTA/RNEA-R member may nominate himself/herself or another qualified member for a retired delegate position.

NOMINATION FORM

RETIR ED-AT-LARGE DELEGATE POSITIONS—TSTA HOUSE OF DELEGATES—APRIL 17-18, 2009

The deadline for receipt of this nomination form at TSTA Headquarters is January 15, 2009. (This form is also available online at www.tsta.org.)

(Circle One: Mr. Ms. Name)

Address _____________________________________________________________

City ___________________ State __________ Zip ____________________________

Day Phone ___________________ Home Phone __________________________

Email __________________________ Social Security No. __________________

ETHNIC GROUP: (Check all that apply)

☐ American Indian/Alaska Native ☐ Asian ☐ Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander ☐ Multi-ethnic

☐ Black ☐ Hispanic ☐ Caucasian (not of Spanish Origin) ☐ Other

☐ Check here if you do not want your ethnicity printed

☐ Enclose a biographical sketch of 25 words or less which will be sent with the ballot. (Note: If your statement exceeds 25 words, it will be cut at 25 words.)

☐ Check here if you will be a first-time delegate

Send by U.S. Mail or FAX (512-486-7043) to: TSTA-Retired, 316 W. 12th Street, Austin, TX 78701

Signature of Nominee ____________________________________________________

TSTA GOVERNANCE
Vote for the change our schools need
TSTA’s recommended candidates, page 5.

For the latest news, go to www.tsta.org.

Texas State Teachers Association
316 West 12th Street
Austin, Texas 78701