

Advocate

KEYS PROJECT • ESP OF THE YEAR • INSTRUCTIONAL ADVOCACY LEADER

Texas State Teachers Association/National Education Association

SUMMER 2009

Legislature Falls Short

SCHOOL FINANCE, ACCOUNTABILITY
STILL NEED WORK

How to Prevent Bullying

A School Psychologist Shares Tips

FIVE RIGHTS

You May Not Even Know You Have

Which Meetings Really Matter?

Which Will Improve Your
Life and Career?

New to Teaching?
Wondering What
Makes Us Different?

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Our Mission Mandates Our Response



“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

Margaret Meade

Do you know the mission of TSTA? Here it is: “The Texas State Teachers Association will unite, organize and empower public education advocates to shape public education in Texas thus providing a quality public school for every child.”

Ambitious? Perhaps. Lofty? Certainly. Achievable? Most definitely; yet it carries with it the responsibility of each of us in TSTA acting as citizens of this organization, working in concert as we carry out our responsibilities to provide a quality public school for every child.

The opportunity for lasting and effective change only happens when we exercise our rights, privileges and responsibilities as citizens of our local, TSTA and NEA. As citizens, we move beyond being empowered to advancing not just the organization but its mission. Our responsibility extends to our fellow members and potential members, yet it doesn't end there. It reaches out to the larger education community – that community where decisions are made that impact your life and your career; that community that includes decision-makers who make the decisions that impact your students' learning environment. Citizenship is about keeping our eyes on the prize, which begins with fully functioning locals and ends with quality public schools for all Texas children. This, then, requires diligence and vigilance – dili-

gence in the work we do as an association and vigilance to preserve and protect that which has already been accomplished.

This passion, this belief, this concept of citizenship sets us apart and above all others. Citizenship is not about just being present any more than it is about showing up. Rather, it is about the hard work of learning, thinking and doing. It is about accepting responsibilities and meeting obligations; it is about contributing your part to the synergy of TSTA so that we will not fail in our mission.

As you think about your role as a citizen of TSTA, imagine what your career and work life would be like without TSTA. Duty-free lunch, hardly! Duty-free planning period, say what? Retirement pension? Who said anything about retirement? There is much work still to be done but we are where we are because of the giants who came before us – the giants who, since 1880, have demonstrated their citizenship in TSTA. We stand on their shoulders but our work is not yet done and will not be so long as there are those who stand in the way of quality public schools across Texas. We are the giants on whose shoulders future citizens of TSTA will stand.

Are you a citizen of TSTA? If you believe in your own capacity to do good in your work and association, then you are on the road to being a citizen of TSTA. If you act responsibly as an educator to elevate the knowledge and character of your students, then citizenship in TSTA is within your grasp. If you want and desire to be one of the giants on whose shoulders future generations will stand and become one of the many who stand up and speak out for quality public schools for all Texas children, then you are a citizen of TSTA.

In 1880, a small band of committed and thoughtful citizens came together in Mexia to form TSTA. Through their efforts, they did change the world. We owe it to them to do no less; we owe it to the future to do much more. Become a citizen today first by joining TSTA, recruiting others as members and then by rolling up your sleeves and becoming an advocate for quality public schools.

—TSTA President Rita Haecker



TSTA HOUSE OF DELEGATES: For 130 years, delegates have come together to make the decisions that guide the association. This year's convention was in Houston.

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The Road Not Taken

Legislators had a chance to fix two major problems, school finance and accountability, in the 81st session. It didn't happen.

Two major bills highlighted the education agenda this session; the school finance bill, House Bill 3646, and the school accountability bill, House Bill 3. This legislation presented an opportunity to address the two key issues currently faced by the public schools. In both cases, policymakers faced clear alternatives in how to approach important issues that affect educators, students and their families.

School Finance: Almost everyone agrees the current system is severely broken. Schools don't have the resources they need, and under the current school finance plan, they no longer have the capacity to generate additional resources at the local level. The franchise tax created in 2006 isn't producing enough state revenue to offset local school property tax cuts the state mandated the same year. That funding imbalance drains an ever-increasing

amount of state money needed to sustain the poorly funded system in place today, and that doesn't begin to account for what is needed to provide excellence in public education.

Faced with making difficult decisions about how to fix the problem, the legislative leadership used federal stimulus funds from President Obama's American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to provide some modest improvements, but they elected to punt the larger funding problem to the 2011 session. By then, a more urgent school funding crisis is likely. More districts will be at the maximum tax rate, will have spent their reserve funds and will be looking at major cuts in programs and staff to balance their budgets. The two percent increase in the budget for the next biennium that is paid for with stimulus money will have to be replaced with state dollars just to keep up with current funding levels.

Instead of providing the necessary funding for a comprehensive fix for the school finance problem this year, legislative leaders decided to change the failed 2006 funding system. Unfortunately, they weren't willing to pay for it, opting to put \$9.5 billion in the state rainy day fund. They very likely are heading toward another lawsuit over school finance in 2011. In that context, we had to fight hard to overcome those who tried to deny a minimum \$800 pass-through, across-the-board pay raise for each classroom teacher, full-time speech pathologist, full-time librarian, full-time counselor and full-time school nurse. Fortunately, we succeeded.

Accountability: Given the wide range of problems associated with the current school accountability system, everyone in the education community hoped that when a task force was formed to suggest changes in the system, we would finally begin to turn away from a high-stakes "test and punish" system. Many stakeholders, including TSTA, urged legislators to adopt

accountability system reforms that would use multiple measures to assess students, focus on the diverse needs of our 4.7 million students and provide assistance for schools that had high concentrations of at-risk kids.

Instead, the leadership largely elected for more of the same – a lot more of the same. When it was all said and done, the Legislature passed an incredibly complex 187-page bill that almost no one completely understands. After months of changes that alternated between better and worse, the final accountability bill includes a few good elements, but for the most part it offers more, not less, testing. Punishment is still very much the focus of the bill.

The final version of HB 3 eliminates one third-grade test and replaces the high school TAKS exams with 12 standardized end-of-course exams. Students will be required to pass the English III and algebra II exams to graduate. Given the opportunity to forge a new path in student accountability, the leadership, at the urging of Gov. Rick Perry, decided to stay the course. The only good news is the bill is so complicated that it will probably take several years to implement it, and the Legislature will be back in session in 2011.

Looking ahead to the 2010 March primary and November general elections, we must work to elect candidates who will support the kind of change that swept through the rest of the country in November of 2008. Obviously, we have many friends in the Legislature, but we won't break new ground on public education policy in Texas unless we elect more people who share our vision and our dedication to creating a first-rate public education system. This is particularly true at the highest levels of leadership in state government. We must replace the leaders who spend as little as possible and put the squeeze on public schools and public school employees.

We have many friends in the Legislature, but we won't break new ground on public education policy in Texas unless we elect more people who share our vision and our dedication to creating a first-rate public education system.



EDUCATION BILLS FROM THE 81ST TEXAS LEGISLATURE

This report is abridged due to space limitations; for a comprehensive report, go to www.tsta.org.

FINANCE

HB 3646, by Hochberg, D-Houston, is the school finance bill for the biennium. It started late and was one of the last bills to be considered by the Legislature, and that led to a number of bills becoming embedded in it. The bill spends \$1.9 billion in federal stimulus money from President Obama’s American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) over the next two years.

It requires a minimum salary increase of the greater of \$800 or \$60 per weighted average daily attendance (WADA) in 2009-10 for each classroom teacher, full-time speech pathologist, full-time librarian, full-time counselor and full-time school nurse. In Texas, students with additional education needs are weighted for funding purposes because it costs more to educate them. Because WADA is used in the calculation, there will be different pay raises in different districts.

This salary increase is in addition to step increases under a school district’s current salary schedule, local supplements and career ladder supplements.

The pay raise depends on the U.S. Education Department’s approval of using ARRA funding for it.

The district can use funds from the salary allocation to pay for Social Security and Teacher Retirement System payments on the salary increase.

The bill makes significant changes to the incentive pay program. It eliminates the Texas Educators Excellence Grant and rolls that money into the District Awards for Teaching Excellence program. A local awards program will specify the criteria and any formulas on which the awards will be based.

To graduate, a high school student must have a cumulative score for end-of-course exams — for each subject in the foundation school curriculum — that meets or exceeds the scale score that indicates satisfactory performance, as determined by the commissioner of education.

ACCOUNTABILITY/CURRICULUM

HB 3, by Eissler, R-The Woodlands, and Shapiro, R-Plano, revises the state’s accountability system. Some of the features:

Student Promotion and Testing

A district is required to consider in grades other than five and eight:

- The recommendation of the student’s teacher;
- The student’s grade;
- The student’s score on an assessment instrument; and
- Any other necessary academic information as determined by the district.

No later than the first day of the school year, the district must post its rules for promoting students who fail the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). The Texas Education Agency (TEA) will provide schools with guidelines on what to post based on best practices.

The measure eliminates the provision that a student must pass third-grade reading to be promoted to the fourth grade but keeps the provisions that fifth and eighth graders must pass math and reading for promotion. It keeps the current appeal and grade placement committees in place.

If a student fails an assessment instrument in grades 3-8, the district must provide accelerated instruction which the student must complete to be promoted. A student who fails an assessment and is promoted must be assigned to a teacher who meets all state and federal qualifications to teach that subject and grade.

To graduate, a high school student must have a cumulative score for end-of-course exams for each subject in the foundation school curriculum that is equal to the product of the number of end-of-course assessments and a scale score that indicates satisfactory performance (as yet to be determined by the commissioner of education). A student also must achieve a minimum score as determined by the commissioner

within a reasonable range of the scale score. The end-of-course exam also counts for 15 percent of the final grade for the course. A student must meet or exceed the score set by the commissioner on the algebra II and English III end-of-course exams to graduate under the recommended and advanced programs.

The tests will include questions regarding college readiness. They will count toward a student’s final score, and a certain number of correct answers will be required for a student to be deemed college ready. College readiness questions will be integrated into all TAKS tests, including those given to students in grades 3-8.

Graduation Plans and Requirements

Minimum Graduation Program Requirements: The student, the student’s parent or guardian and a school counselor or administrator must agree to the minimum plan in writing. The student must be at least 16, have completed two credits required for graduation in each subject of the foundation curriculum and have failed to be promoted to the 10th grade one or more times.

Requirements for the Recommended and Advanced Programs: Four credits in each subject of the foundation curriculum; one-half credit in economics and government as part of the social studies requirements; and two credits in the same foreign language for the recommended program (three credits for the advanced program).

Electives: The SBOE will develop a variety of math and science courses to be used for the fourth course in each of those subjects. Six elective credits are required for the recommended program and five electives for the advanced program. One credit must be in fine arts and one in physical education. The physical education requirement can be met through athletic programs sponsored by nonprofit or for-profit entities (such as aquatics or karate). The commissioner must approve the district’s decision. Onsite, school-sponsored athletics do not count toward this credit.

Other Provisions

The campus-level site-based decision-making committee can limit the administration of locally required assessment instruments to a maximum of 10 percent of instructional days.

TEA will establish an information portal to track student data over time. Data will be made available to the student, the parent, school district personnel and any higher education institution to which the student applies.

HB 1322, by Hochberg, D-Houston, provides internet resources for teachers of students with special health needs.

SB 891, by Nelson, R-Lewisville, mandates a state physical education curriculum that enables students to develop the skills, knowledge, attitudes and confidence to participate in physical activity throughout life. Students in full-day pre-kindergarten and grades K-5 will participate in moderate or vigorous physical activity for at least 30 minutes per day either in physical education or structured activity during recess.

SB 451, by Van de Putte, D-San Antonio, requires a school district to provide training to an educator who works primarily outside the area of special education only if the educator does not possess the knowledge and skills necessary to implement the individualized education program.

SB 1219, by Averitt, R-Waco, provides for a parenting and paternity awareness program for use in the high school health curriculum.

SB 1344, by Watson, D-Austin, requires TEKS standards on binge drinking and alcohol poisoning.

HB 3076, by Deshotel, D-Beaumont, expands the curriculum for parenting and paternity awareness programs to middle and junior high schools, as well as high schools.

STUDENTS

HB 130, by Patrick, R-Arlington, establishes a full day pre-kindergarten grant program that is voluntary for both parents and school districts.

HB 1020, by Deshotel, D-Beaumont, provides an exception to the rule that students be expelled for having weapons if the

firearm is at an approved target range facility that is not located on a school campus and while participating in or preparing for a school-sponsored shooting sports competition or educational activity.

HB 1332, by Maldonado, D-Round Rock, makes each student and student’s parent(s) responsible for not only unreturned textbooks, but also electronic textbooks and

LEADING THE CHARGE FOR A TEACHER PAY RAISE

While it took a lot of friends to get a pay raise passed in this session of the legislature, two lawmakers stood out for their roles in making it happen.

Representative Scott Hochberg is recognized as THE legislative expert on school finance. He worked to make sure that his version of the school finance bill had a pass-through teacher pay raise in it. And he passed it unanimously in the House.

In the Senate we had a problem. Their version of the school finance bill didn't have a teacher pay raise in it. Senator John Whitmire, the dean of the Texas Senate and a three-decade-long friend of schools, teachers and TSTA, took on the assignment to put a pay raise in the bill. When the dust settled, he won a 19-12 vote in the Senate, and both versions of the bill had a pass-through pay raise for classroom teachers and full-time school speech pathologists, librarians, counselors and nurses in them.

Of course, the third person to thank is you. The barrage of phone calls and emails from TSTA members truly made the difference.

technological equipment that are not returned in acceptable condition.

HB 3643, by Aycock, R-Killeen, defines “child” to include a stepchild and “parent” to include a stepparent, for purposes of enrolling a child in a pre-kindergarten program.

HB 2703, by Olivo, D-Missouri City, excludes from dropout risk a student who did not advance from pre-kindergarten or

kindergarten to the next grade level as a result of parental request.

STATE AGENCIES

Rider 95 to SB 1 (budget bill), by Heflin, D-Crosbyton, prohibits TEA from using funds on any education voucher program/pilot program that would use federal funds or state tax dollars to pay tuition for children in grades 1-12 to attend a private school.

HB 635, by Guillen, D-Rio Grande City, provides that the TEA may seek, accept and distribute grants awarded by the federal government subject to the limitations imposed by law. The bill also allows the commissioner of education to determine that a Head Start program operated by a district or a community-based organization serves the function of a public elementary school under the laws of this state by providing elementary education at one or more program facilities.

The bill creates professional development grants for educating students with disabilities and a competitive grant program to promote early literacy.

HB 772, by Howard, D-Austin, requires that the SBOE webcast its meetings live via video and audio and that it subsequently archive them on the TEA website.

HB 1574, by Thompson, D-Houston, creates the Autism Spectrum Disorders Resource Center to coordinate resources for individuals with autism and other pervasive developmental disorders and their families.

HB 2263, by Eissler, R-The Woodlands, expands the Innovation Grant Initiative to middle and junior high schools.

HB 1801, by Bohac, R-Houston, adds school supplies to the sales and use tax exemption that had previously been applied to the purchase of school backpacks before the start of school.

HB 2480, by Hochberg, D-Houston, provides for agreements between a public junior college and a high school to offer a course at the junior college, whether the high school is located within the service area of the junior college district or not.

HB 2488, by Hochberg, D-Houston, adds

open-source textbooks that can be downloaded from the internet to the list of textbook options the SBOE can consider. The state could develop its own open-source materials, as well as allowing certain entities to participate in the program.

HB 2893, by Hochberg, D-Houston, allows the TEA to implement a Technology Demonstrations Sites Project to demonstrate the use of technology for improving teaching and learning, use digital tools and resources to extend learning opportunities from school to home and exemplify instructional practices and lessons that support academic learning in the classroom and at home.

HB 4152, by Rose, D-Dripping Springs, says the State Board for Educator Certification may issue a one-year certificate to a teacher who holds a certificate in another state or country in mathematics, science, special education, bilingual education or another subject area the commissioner of education determines to be a shortage area. The teacher must perform satisfactorily on the applicable exam within one year.

HB 4294, by Branch, R-Dallas, requires school districts and charters to certify that they provide each student with instructional materials that cover all elements of the TEKS. Districts can decide whether printed or electronic textbooks better serve the student body. Electronic textbooks or instructional materials on the permitted list must be recommended by a panel of experts in the subject area, be aligned with current research, cover each part of the TEKS and indicate the percentage of each essential knowledge and skill covered, and include appropriate training for teachers. A panel of experts will have to make a recommendation before an approved electronic textbook or instructional material can be removed from the approved list.

HB 4435, by Allen, D-Houston, requires the principal of an academically unacceptable campus to attend the School Leadership Pilot Program for Principals.

SB 90, by Van de Putte, D-San Antonio, removes barriers for military children caused by frequent moves and deployment of their parents.

SB 939, by Watson, D-Austin, requires the TEA and the Department of Family and Protective Services to exchange information as appropriate to facilitate the department's evaluation of educational outcomes of students in foster care.

SB 1027, by Watson, D-Austin, creates an interagency farm-to-school coordination task force that must design education resources on nutrition and food education to be used by schools and school districts and implement a plan to facilitate the availability of locally grown food products in public schools.

SB 300, by Patrick, R-Houston, allows the commissioner of education to grant class size waivers on a yearly basis instead of a per semester basis. Bus evacuation training will be permissive rather than mandatory, and school boards must establish long-range energy plans.

SB 2178, by Shapleigh, D-El Paso, requires the commissioner of education to establish a computer lending pilot program to make computers available for use by students and their parents.

SB 2248, by Zaffirini, D-Laredo, requires the TEA to assist the transition of foster care students from one school to another.

SB 2258, by Zaffirini, D-Laredo, requires the commissioner of education to award grants to participating campuses to provide intensive academic instruction during summer recess promoting college and work force readiness to students at risk of dropping out.

SB 2262, by Zaffirini, D-Laredo, requires the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to establish academies at institutions of higher education to improve the instructional skills of certified teachers and train students enrolled in a teacher preparation program to perform at the highest levels in mathematics, science and technology.

EMPLOYEES

HB 709, by Rose, D-Dripping Springs, provides for a stipend under the District Awards for Teacher Excellence program for a teacher who holds advanced certification from an organization that certifies at least 2,500 teachers in the United States each

year based on the teachers' demonstrated achievement of high and rigorous standards for accomplished teaching.

HB 829, by Hochberg, D-Houston, requires the commissioner of education to rule on a grievance within 180 days from the date the appeal is filed with that office. A person is not required to appeal to the commissioner before pursuing a remedy under a law outside of Title I or any state law that references Title I.

HB 1364, by Eissler, R-The Woodlands, requires coverage of pre-existing conditions for active school employees under the state group health plan so that employees will continue to receive coverage for those conditions. This provision will allow employees to safely move from a district providing coverage under a local plan to a district that participates in the Teacher Retirement System of Texas' ActiveCare.

HB 1365, by Eissler, R-The Woodlands, mandates that a school district provide a former classroom teacher, librarian, counselor or nurse's service record to a school district employing the individual not later than 30 days after the date of the request. If a district fails to do so, the TEA must provide information it has to the employing district to enable it to determine proper placement of the individual on the district's salary schedule.

HB 1470, by Thibaut, D-Houston, requires a school district to notify employees of their right to assault leave by including it in the appropriate section of an employee handbook or on the district's website and to also include assault leave as an option on any leave form an employee is required to submit.

HB 2512, by Aycock, R-Killeen, provides that a school district grievance policy must permit an audio recording to be made at any meeting or proceeding at which the substance of the grievance is investigated or discussed. The implementation of this policy may not result in a delay of any timeline provided by the grievance policy and does not require the district to provide the equipment for the employee to make a recording.

HB 2730, by Kolkhorst, R-Brenham, in-

cludes a provision that will close the loop-hole in state law regarding information gathered through educators' criminal background checks conducted under the Texas fingerprinting law. Information gathered through these checks can be used only by school districts and the state, remaining confidential in nature, and can no longer be discovered through a request under the Texas Public Information Act.

SB 522, by Averitt, R-Waco, allows an employee of a public school district to choose the order in which the employee will use different categories of leave. The bill also allows a public school employee to use certain previously accumulated sick leave in the order desired as long as the leave used is appropriate to the purpose of the leave.

SB 1798, by Zaffirini, D-Laredo, allows certain educational aides to receive an exemption from tuition and fees charged by public institutions of higher education.

RETIREMENT

HB 1191, by Flores, D-Mission, provides a 90-day window after the date of retirement for a retiree eligible for coverage to select any coverage provided by the Teacher Retirement System of Texas, or during any other open enrollment periods established by rule.

HB 1259, by Kolkhorst, R-Brenham, limits the Teacher Retirement System of Texas board's authority to employ outside legal counsel to provide services, including ethics and fiduciary responsibilities, to the board except as provided by current law, regardless of the source of funding to pay for those services.

HB 2656, by Miller, R-New Braunfels, reconstitutes the Teacher Retirement System of Texas board to include eight members or trustees; two will be members of the retirement system who have retired, and one will have demonstrated financial expertise.

HB 3347, by Truitt, R-Southlake, authorizes the Teacher Retirement System of Texas to make a one time payment to qualified retired public school employees in an amount not to exceed \$500. Funding is dependent on a ruling by the Attorney General.

HB 3480, by Truitt, R-Southlake, amends

current law to expand the types of companies eligible to offer 403(b) retirement accounts that the Teacher Retirement System of Texas certifies.

SCHOOL BOARDS AND DISTRICTS

HB 171, by Olivo, D-Missouri City, mandates that school board policy state certain factors to be considered when making decisions about suspension, removal to a disciplinary alternative education program (DAEP), expulsion or placement in a juvenile justice alternative education program, regardless of whether the decision concerns mandatory or discretionary action, in cases of self-defense. Those factors are: intent or lack of intent at the time the student engaged in the conduct, a student's disciplinary history or a disability that substantially impairs the student's capacity to appreciate the wrongfulness of the conduct.

DAEP must include structured courses in English language arts, mathematics, science, history and self-discipline that are equivalent in content and rigor to courses provided in the regular classroom setting. There must be an established curriculum for each grade level that gives students an opportunity to achieve promotion to the next grade level or to graduate from high school on the same schedule as students in regular classroom settings.

HB 1041, by Parker, R-Flower Mound, mandates that a school district adopt and implement a policy addressing sexual abuse of children that must include methods for increasing awareness and prevention.

HB 192, by Alonzo, D-Dallas, requires a student to be excused to appear at a government office to complete paperwork for application for U.S. citizenship or take part in a U.S. naturalization oath ceremony. Also included are absences for persons with autism spectrum disorder to receive a generally recognized service with a health care practitioner.

HB 281, by Anchia, D-Dallas, allows federal or state funds to be used for a grant program for school-based health centers.

HB 1297, by Hochberg, D-Houston, allows for a flexible school day program for students who as a result of attendance require-

ments will be denied credit for one or more classes in which they are enrolled.

HB 1423, by Guillen, D-Rio Grande City, allows a public junior college to operate an open-enrollment charter school on its campus or in the same county in which the campus is located.

HB 1425, by Lewis, R-Odessa, provides that the population of a county is to be determined according to the 2000 federal census for purposes of determining whether a juvenile justice alternative education program should be developed.

SB 283, by Nelson, R-Lewisville, requires districts to appoint members to serve on the district's local school health advisory council, including a chair or co-chair. The council will meet four times a year and submit an annual report to the school board; school districts will notify parents in writing of the board's decision on whether human sexuality instruction will be provided.

SB 1290, by Van de Putte, D-San Antonio, allows a school district to assign a mentor teacher to each classroom teacher who has less than two years of teaching experience in the subject or grade level to which the teacher is assigned.

SB 2033, by Nelson, R-Lewisville, states that a school district must adopt a grading policy, including provisions for the assignment of grades on class assignments and examinations, before each school year. A district grading policy must require a classroom teacher to assign a grade that reflects the student's relative mastery of an assignment, may not require a classroom teacher to assign a minimum grade for an assignment without regard to the student's quality of work and may allow a student a reasonable opportunity to make up or redo a class assignment or examination for which the student received a failing grade.

HB 2542, by Eissler, R-The Woodlands, authorizes a school district to excuse a student from attending school for not more than two days during the student's junior or senior year to visit an institution of higher education to determine whether the student is interested in attending the college or university.



CELEBRATING BLACK HISTORY MONTH: NEA Secretary-Treasurer Becky Pringle visits North Lamar ISD.

LEGISLATIVE CONCERNS TOP TSTA CONVENTION AGENDA

Delegates called their members of Congress about Social Security concerns, were updated on the Texas legislature and heard from Congressman Al Green and Houston Mayor Bill White at the April TSTA state convention in Houston.

Judge Scott McDowell received the Frank J. Tejeda Award for Public Service for his work on behalf of children, public schools and the North Lamar Education Foundation, which provides scholarships for graduating seniors. Elsewhere in this issue of the Advocate are articles about Lee Terrazas, who was named TSTA Ronnie Ray ESP Advocate of the Year, and Claire Anderson, who received the Ermalee Boice Instructional Advocacy Award. TSTA also recognized outstanding communication efforts with School Bells for the media and Pride in Communication Awards for local and regional associations.

Delegates elected NEA directors Frances A. Smith, Place 1, and Evelina Loya, Place 2; TSTA Board of Directors supervisor at large member Jose Luis

Martinez; and TSTA Board of Directors ESP at large members Linda L. Estrada, Raymond Flood and Lee Terrazas. View the photo album on our website, www.tsta.org.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH BRINGS NEA OFFICER TO TEXAS

"While we're not where we used to be, where we need to be, we've come a long way," NEA Secretary-Treasurer Becky Pringle told North Lamar High School students at two February assemblies celebrating African-American achievement. Standing below an oversized portrait of the nation's first African-American president, painted by North Lamar students, underscored Pringle's message of encouragement.

Alluding to racial issues that sometimes still arise locally in the North Texas town of Paris, Pringle told students and staff that "challenges present an infinite number of opportunities." Diversity's challenges offer opportunities to better our own lives and the lives of others, she explained.

Pringle's appearance at the North Lamar

High School celebration of Black History Month brought an enthusiastic response from the student body.

NOTICE OF FILING DEADLINE FOR NEA DIRECTOR

Nominations are open for NEA Director for Texas, Place 1. The election for this position will be held at the April 2010 annual convention. The individual elected will serve a three-year term beginning September 1, 2010. For further information or to request a filing form, contact TSTA's Center for Executive and Governance, 316 West 12th Street, Suite 510, Austin, Texas 78701, or (877) ASK-TSTA, ext. 1514 or 1510. Nominations are due at TSTA by September 15, 2009.

NOMINATIONS DUE FOR ESP AWARD

TSTA is accepting nominations for the Ronnie Ray ESP Advocate of the Year award, which recognizes one educational support professional whose activities reflect the contributions of ESPs to public education. Nominees should demonstrate outstanding accomplishments in one or more of the following areas: (1) support of the day-to-day educational process; (2) professional achievements in his/her classification; (3) involvement in the promotion of public education in the community; (4) involvement in the local, state or national association; and (5) enhancement of the ESP image within the association, work site or community. Nominations must be submitted by a TSTA regional or local affiliate. The nominee must be a TSTA educational support professional member for three years as of January 15, 2009. Nomination forms are available online at www.tsta.org or may be requested from the TSTA Center for Executive and Governance by email (carolm@tsta.org) or by phone (800) 324-5355, ext. 1510. Submissions should be sent to the ESP Award Committee, c/o TSTA President, 316 West 12th Street, Austin, Texas 78701. The deadline for submitting nominations is 4:45 p.m. on September 30.



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Five Rights You Should Know

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

Be aware of the rights and protections school employees are entitled to under the law.

I frequently present employee rights workshops to TSTA members. I am constantly surprised to hear that many school employees are unaware of the rights and protections afforded to them under the law.

All education professionals should at least be aware they have the following five rights:

ASSAULT LEAVE

Any employee of a school district who is physically assaulted while performing his or her regular duties is entitled to up to two years paid leave to recuperate from all physical injuries sustained as a result of the assault.

Days of leave taken for assault leave may not be deducted from the employee's accrued personal leave. However, the employee has the responsibility to request assault leave. If the request is not made by the employee, it is unlikely that the district will voluntarily place the employee on assault leave. The district has the right to investigate the assault to determine if assault leave is appropriate.

A person is "physically assaulted" if the person causing the injury could be prosecuted for assault, meaning the conduct of the person was done intentionally, knowingly or recklessly. It is still considered an assault even if the person causing the injury could not be prosecuted because of age or mental incapacity.

DUTY-FREE LUNCH

Classroom teachers and full-time librarians are entitled to at least a 30-minute lunch period free from all duties and responsibilities connected with the instruction and supervision of students. In fact, the school district cannot even require the teacher to remain on campus or school property during this time.

There are a few exceptions to this rule, though. If necessary due to a personnel shortage, extreme economic conditions or an unavoidable or unforeseen circumstance, a district may require a classroom teacher or librarian to supervise students during lunch, but not more than one day per week. (Notice statewide testing is not one of these exceptions!)

PLANNING PERIOD

Each classroom teacher is entitled to at least 450 minutes within each two-week period for instructional preparation, including parent-teacher conferences, evaluating students' work and planning. The planning period may not be less than 45 minutes, and it must be held within the instructional day. During the planning period, a teacher may not be required to participate in any other activity.

In *Strater v. Houston ISD*, the court said, "The statute clearly relieves the teacher of any duty during this period of time and prohibits the district and its administration from requiring the teacher to engage in any other activity the administration determines to be useful and important." TSTA believes that this means teachers cannot be required to participate in team meetings or ARD meetings during their planning periods.

FINALITY OF GRADES

A teacher cannot be required to change a students' examination or course grade unless the district's board of trustees determines the grade is arbitrary, erroneous or in conflict with the district's grading policy. A determination by the board is final and cannot be appealed. Further, the Educators' Code of Ethics states, "Educators may not falsify records, or direct or coerce others to do so."

PROTECTED TYPES OF LEAVE

There are several statutory forms of leave employees should be aware of. Here are just a few:

State minimum personal leave: All district employees shall receive at least five personal leave days per year. These days may be accrued without limit and are transferable among districts. The board of trustees may adopt a policy governing an employee's use of leave but may not restrict the purposes for which the leave may be used.

Temporary disability leave: "Full-time educators" are entitled to a leave of absence

for temporary disability any time the educator's condition interferes with performance of regular duties. The educator may not be terminated while on TDL. Pregnancy is a condition which may qualify an employee for temporary disability leave. A board of trustees may establish a maximum length of TDL, but the maximum may not be less than 180 days.

Professional leave: The board of trustees may grant a developmental leave of absence for study, research, travel or other appropriate purpose to an employee who is employed in a position that requires a teaching certificate and has served in the same school district for at least five years. The leave may be granted for one school year at half pay, or for a half a school year at full pay. If employees are interested in and eligible for professional leave, they should check the district's local policy to see if it grants such leave.

Religious observance: While not a form of leave, school districts are prohibited from denying an educator a salary bonus or similar compensation based on attendance because the educator was absent for observation of a holy day. The religious observance must be for a religion whose place of worship is exempted from property taxation.

Jury duty leave: The district may not discharge, discipline, reduce the salary of or otherwise penalize or discriminate against an employee because of the employee's compliance with a summons to appear as a juror. For each regularly scheduled workday on which a non-salaried employee serves in any phase of jury service, the district shall pay the employee the employee's normal daily compensation. An employee's accumulated personal leave may not be reduced because of the employee's service in compliance with a summons to appear as a juror.

While there are many other rights and protections for public school employees in state and federal statutes, these are common issues that arise on campuses throughout the state.

Knowing your legal rights is half the battle. With this knowledge, you have the power to make positive changes for yourself and your colleagues. For more information, call the TSTA Help Center at (877) ASK-TSTA.

Bullying Prevention

BY DR. KENNETH SHORE, SCHOOL AND FAMILY PSYCHOLOGIST



Children surveyed rated bullying the worst experience of childhood other than the death of a loved one.

Being taunted or attacked physically can be one of the most painful experiences of childhood and can leave lasting psychological scars. Victims of bullying may experience anxiety, low self-esteem, depression and in some cases even suicidal thoughts. They may come to view school, where most incidents of bullying take place, as an unsafe, anxiety-provoking environment and may be afraid of attending. Some may even refuse to go to school rather than face the ordeal of bullying. In fact, a study by the National Association of School Psychologists estimates that 160,000 children miss school every day for fear of being bullied.

Bullying also affects the students who witness the incidents. It can give rise to a climate of fear and anxiety in school, distracting students from their schoolwork and impeding their ability to learn. According to a recent study, about 10 percent of students are afraid during much of the school day. Students who witness their classmates being victimized wonder, "Am I going to be next?" The possibility of being bullied may cause these bystanders to live in a state of fear and focus on little else. This is hardly surprising when you consider that children surveyed rated bullying the worst experience of childhood other than the death of a loved one.

BULLY-PROOFING YOUR CLASSROOM

The most effective way to deal with bullying is to prevent it from happening in the first place. The following are some specific teaching strategies to bully-proof your classroom.

Foster a climate of cooperation and caring. You can help to prevent bullying by the tone you set in your classroom. More specifically, you can send an anti-bullying message by reinforcing acts of kindness and communicating values of tolerance, respect and responsibility.

The most effective way to foster a caring attitude in your classroom is to model this behavior yourself by relating in a warm, sympathetic way with your students without talking down to them. As the saying goes, example is the best teacher.

Here are some specific strategies for promoting a cooperative and caring climate in your classroom:

- Avoid sarcasm or put-downs of any kind. If you are taking a child to task for misbehaving, you can talk to him in a firm manner and get your point across without being rude or impolite.
- Incorporate into your classroom lessons activities that promote understanding of students who are different.

- Consider using cooperative learning projects in which students must work together to attain success.

- Give out courtesy awards to younger students for such actions as helping a classmate with an assignment, comforting someone who is upset, inviting a new student to join in a game or coming to the defense of a child who is being bullied.

- Establish a box that students can place notes in complimenting their classmates for something they said or did. At the end of the week read these notes to the class.

- Name a "student of the week" and then develop a poster about him that includes positive comments from classmates.

- Have a class meeting periodically in which students gather in a circle and compliment or express appreciation to a classmate. Only allow positive comments and make sure that all students are acknowledged at least every other meeting. You may need to get the ball rolling by being the first to talk about an act of kindness by a student.

- Have a courtesy display on the bulletin board. When you observe an act of kindness by one of your students, describe the act with the student's name on a 3 x 5 card or a heart-shaped piece of paper and tack it to the display. Encourage students to tell you about actions of classmates for posting on the display, or have them write out the cards and submit them to you. This may give rise to a chain reaction of compliments that has a contagious effect on your class.

Catch the bullying student being kind.

Make a special effort to find something positive to say about students who are prone to unkind behavior, even if it is a small gesture. As an example, you might praise a student if you see him/her acting in a caring or helpful manner to a classmate. Describe the specific behavior that

BEHAVIORAL SIGNS

While teachers are the adults at school who spend the most time with their students, it is unrealistic to expect that they will notice every bullying incident that takes place with their students. Bullying incidents often occur outside the classroom.

In addition, victims of bullying often fail to report incidents to teachers because they are not confident teachers will take their concerns seriously or they fear retaliation. As a result, bullying is a problem that sometimes escapes detection by teachers.

This makes it all the more important that teachers be on the lookout for behavioral signs suggesting that a child is being bullied, such as:

- frequent school absences
- anxiety or fearfulness during class
- difficulty focusing
- unusual sadness
- withdrawal from peers
- a decline in academic performance
- not eating lunch
- avoidance of certain school areas
- clingy behavior
- frequent visits to the school nurse
- torn clothing or bruises

Of course, the more of these behaviors exhibited by a student, the more reason to suspect bullying.

you observed as you praise him/her. Do this publicly (unless you think it would be embarrassing) to encourage other children to engage in similar acts of kindness. As an example, you might say to a student: “Seth, it was so nice of you to sit with Julio after he hurt himself on the playground. That was a very caring thing to do.”

Hold a classroom meeting early in the year to discuss bullying. This is an activity that all teachers can do with their classes, even with students as young as five or six. It may be difficult to find time to hold these meetings, especially at the middle school level, but it is likely to be time well spent. Just discussing the problem of bullying with your class will raise their awareness of the issue and help to decrease bullying incidents. You may want to revisit the issue of bullying at periodic class meetings throughout the year.

You might begin the meeting by showing your class a video or having them read a story about bullying. Then follow this up with a class discussion. Consider seating your students in a circle so that everyone can see each other. While you want to encourage discussion, begin by making some key points, including the following:

- Describe what you mean by bullying, perhaps offering examples.
- Make it clear that bullying behavior of any kind is unacceptable and not permitted in school while stating an underlying value, namely, that all children are to be treated with respect.
- When you describe to your students your classroom rules, make sure that “No bullying” is among them. (You might post these rules next to the clock so your students see them often.)
- Inform your students what they

should do if they are bullied or they see a classmate being bullied.

- Tell your students that you will take reports of bullying seriously and there will be consequences for students who engage in this behavior.

After you have made these points, engage your students in an age-appropriate discussion to help them understand how bullying can be hurtful. Some possible topics:

- You might ask them to talk about times they have been bullied (without mentioning names) and to describe how it felt. In this way you are helping to promote empathy, an important element in preventing bullying.

Ask the class why they think students bully. The reasons they offer may deter some students from acting in this way.

- Consider volunteering your own school experiences when you or a classmate was bullied.
- Ask the class why they think students bully. The reasons they offer may deter some students from acting in this way.
- Discuss the importance of supporting classmates who are targets of bullying while stressing the importance of informing an adult.
- At the end of the discussion, tell your students that you are available to talk with them privately about any

specific concerns they have. Tell them the best time to do this.

If you are not comfortable holding a classroom meeting, you may want to invite a school counselor or school psychologist to conduct the meeting with you. You may also want to attend a staff development workshop on this topic.

Role-play social situations with your students. Consider having students assume the roles of bully, victim and bystander and give them common social situations where bullying might occur and have them act them out.

The following are some situations that you might have students role play:

- a student calls you a name
- a student cuts in front of you in line
- a student takes the ball away from you on the playground
- a classmate doesn't let you join in a game during recess

After the role play, have your students talk about how they felt and what they might have said or done differently. In this way, students can have a chance to try out their own responses and hear what their classmates might say and do. Give them feedback by having them consider whether their response is likely to get their point across without angering or provoking the other student. If you find that younger students are unable to role play these situations, you might act them out using puppets and then engage them in a discussion.

Closely monitor students who are at high risk for being bullied. Children are more prone to being bullied if they are withdrawn from their classmates, stand out in some way (for example, they are short, overweight or have an accent), attend special education programs,

speak English as a second language or are new to the school. Students who are isolated from their classmates are particularly vulnerable to being bullied. You can reduce their chances of being a victim by helping them become more connected to and involved with their peers. As examples, you might integrate them into activities (especially on the playground), pair them with students who are likely to be accepting and make sure they sit with other children during lunch.

Inform other school staff about potential bullying situations. If you become aware of a bullying incident in your classroom, make sure to inform other personnel who come into contact with the students, including special subject teachers and paraprofessionals, so they can monitor their behavior.

Present classroom lessons that have a bullying theme. You have a range of opportunities to integrate bullying into your academic lessons. Here are some examples:

- Read a book to your students about a child who is bullied (or if old enough have them read it aloud) and then lead your students in a discussion of how a victim of bullying might feel, why bullies might behave that way, how the victim might respond to the bully and how other children might help the victim. Books about bullying can be comforting to students who have been victims and can spark ideas about how they might handle a difficult social situation in the future.
- After talking with your class about what bullying is and is not, present some scenarios to your students and ask them whether or not they meet the definition of bullying.
- Have your upper elementary or middle school class design a survey about bullying and then have your students complete it anonymously.

Have them tally the results and present them in the form of bar graphs, using percentages. In addition to raising their awareness about bullying, this will help them practice and apply math skills in a meaningful way.

- Draw a large picture of a child on the blackboard, then ask your students to describe the characteristics of a bully as you write them on the picture. This exercise will help to communicate what is appropriate and inappropriate behavior and also convey what children think of bullies in the hope that it will discourage potential bullies.

Closely supervise areas where bullying is likely. Bullying often takes place

You can help prevent bullying by being especially vigilant and visible during less structured activities.

in areas of the school that have minimal supervision such as the playground, the lunchroom, the bathroom and even the back of the classroom. While some of these areas are outside of your control, you can help prevent bullying by being especially vigilant and visible during less structured activities. As an example, if you are a middle school teacher, you may be able to deter bullying in the hallway by standing in your classroom doorway as students are changing classes. Similarly you need to scan your classroom regularly during unstructured activities to detect possible peer problems.

Encourage bystanders to bullying to take action. While you may not always observe bullying incidents, the likelihood is that some of your students will. These witnesses can thus play a valuable role in reducing bullying behavior. They can do this by telling the bully to stop what he is doing, by distracting the bully by getting him to focus on something else, by reaching out to the victim in friendship or support, and most importantly by informing a school staff member. Tell them that doing nothing is saying to the bully that it is okay to hurt other students. Also make the point that if they laugh at the bully's behavior or go along with his actions, they are contributing to the bullying.

Because students may be reluctant to inform an adult for fear they will be seen as a tattletale, it is important to stress to them that telling an adult about bullying is vastly different from tattling on a student. You might make the point that telling is what you do to get someone out of trouble and tattling is what you do to get someone in trouble. Make sure they know that if they do come to you with a report of bullying that you will keep their name anonymous.

One way of doing this is to have a box in your classroom where students can deposit notes about any concerns they have. It is better if the box is not restricted to issues of bullying so that students submitting bullying concerns cannot be identified.

A New Jersey school and family psychologist with over 30 years of experience, Dr. Kenneth Shore has written six books, including “Elementary Teacher’s Discipline Problem Solver,” and appeared on various television and radio programs. He has also developed a bullying prevention program titled “The ABC’s of Bullying Prevention,” which is available as a book or DVD. Email him at ShoreK@aol.com or visit <http://drkennethshore.nprinc.com>.

Improving Schools

Pflugerville Stakeholders Make a Plan with NEA's Help



Watch for a trailer of NEA's new KEYS training video, shot in Pflugerville, at the NEA Representative Assembly this July.



In Green Bay, Wisconsin, it significantly increased indicator scores and student achievement. In Springfield, Massachusetts, it's enabled the local association and school district to finally work together.

KEYS, Keys to Excellence for Your Schools, is NEA's comprehensive, research-based, data-driven program for continuous school improvement, the result of a 15-year collaboration of educators, school district administrators, parents and business and community leaders—everyone with a stake in improving public schools.

"KEYS helps members create better working environments and do a better job," NEA's Jacques Nacson said. "It's a very good product. We've tested it against other products on the market, and it constantly comes out tops."

More than 600 school communities have used the program since 1996; Pflugerville began the process this spring.

"We had done the organizational health inventory and, while we felt we got some good results from that, there was so much secrecy involved in that instrument. You

couldn't really share the data," said Laurie Einfalt, Pflugerville ISD human resources director. "DeAnn Henley, president of Pflugerville Educators Association, spoke with me about the KEYS instrument, how it really had the power to reflect teacher voice and went so far beyond campus culture, looking at so many variables that contribute to high performing schools."

"We had a lot of members complaining they had no opportunity for input on decisions at their campus or district level," Henley said. "When the district began talking about doing some form of survey again, PEA asked to be part of the process of choosing a tool. It was a chance to give everyone a voice, as opposed to bringing 24 grievances from throughout the district."

The school board approved KEYS and in February, NEA sent Nacson to help stakeholders take the first step: find out what's working and what isn't.

They were impressed. "They asked questions that have never been asked of the school or of the community about the individual campus," Cindy Ward, district Teacher of the



Year, said. "To see it finally together—where are the concerns and where is everything going right?—it really lays the information out so we can go back and ask our staff, 'This is obviously an area we all feel needs some attention, so what can we do?' Our campus as a whole felt teacher mentoring was very low; if it's not being provided by the district, what can we do as a campus to meet the needs of those teachers?"

"I don't know how you find out what the climate on your campus is in any other way" than the KEYS survey, Kurt Wrinkle, principal of Pflugerville High School, said. "You can go out and ask a person how he feels about his campus, and he can give you his opinion, but with KEYS, you've got your entire campus and some of the community members and staff saying, 'This is how our campus is.' It gives you a better picture than just one person's opinion."

"KEYS is a wonderful opportunity for the district to hear the collective voice and for

us to analyze that and respond to it," Einfalt said.

As teacher Scott Galler put it, "You gave us the tools. We'll go build the house."

Nacson said NEA will be closely watching Pflugerville's progress. "We're very interested in tracking the changes that occur. We've seen success in many, many places," he said.

KEYS is already making a difference. "Staff have earned a place at the table to make real change on their campuses," Henley said. "The Campus Advisory Council plan is based on KEYS data, as is campus and professional development. Staff reference KEYS data at district meetings."

Going through the KEYS process has been good for the local association, as well, she said. "We have experienced a large growth in membership this spring. We have also gained active members.

"There were members who belonged to the organization but didn't participate in anything," Henley said. "They stepped up and took on the job of being a building representative for the KEYS teams. Many of these people have become 'key' members."

FIND OUT:

- About KEYS www.keysonline.org
- About the NEA Foundation www.neafoundation.org
- About other NEA programs www.nea.org

WHY TSTA/NEA?

"KEYS is the first time we have used any of TSTA/NEA instructional tools. People have commented that more real conversations about changes needed on their campuses have happened than with any other survey."

DeAnn Henley,
Pflugerville Educators
Association president



“My involvement with TSTA/NEA has made me a strong advocate for students, teachers and education support professionals.”



Taking the Initiative

Education Support Professional of the Year Gives 100%

While helping parents and children cross the street safely each morning, Lee Terrazas practices conversation skills with the ones she knows are trying to learn English. It's just the way she is.

“With her daily job and attending school by night, she still finds time to help everyone else, too,” Arlinda Valencia, former Ysleta Teachers Association president, said.

For 25 years—three generations—Terrazas has tried to make every child at Ascarate Elementary in Ysleta ISD feel important and successful.

Technically, Terrazas is a physical education assistant, responsible for helping coaches with daily classroom activities such as set-up, teaching assistance, student discipline and parent contacts. Her other duties include morning and afternoon crossing guard duty, lunch playground duty and after school detention. During her 25 years, she has substituted for all grade levels.

In the evening, she studies early childhood education at the University of Texas at El Paso. Her goal is to complete her education degree in early childhood through fourth grade and teach at Ascarate Elementary.

“Lee is a leader in the workplace because she routinely takes the initiative to start projects that might otherwise go undone, and then she gives 100% of herself to that effort,” TSTA President Rita Haecker said. “Her gift is the ability to turn ordinary circumstances into extraordinary opportunities.”

That's why she was named this year's TSTA Ronnie Ray Education Support Professional Advocate of the Year, and she is TSTA's nominee for NEA ESP of the Year.

“Lee strives to make parents and grandparents feel welcome, and she encourages them to become involved,” Haecker said. “She especially loves her students and goes out of her way to build their self esteem and make sure each and every child feels important and successful, because, as she says, ‘each child's personal best is different.’”

As a member of the YTA member rights cadre for three years, Terrazas has protected her colleagues as well.

“My involvement with TSTA/NEA has made me a strong advocate for students, teachers and education support professionals,” she said. “Helping members to feel comfortable and confident knowing that TSTA/NEA is there to support them is what makes me proud.”

A recent example of the cadre's work: “One day, I got a call from custodians who were working in a closed building without air conditioning, running water or toilet facilities,” Terrazas said. “I called an assistant superintendent, and the next day the district provided ice chests of water and Gatorade; the supervisors hooked up a portable with a new refrigerator and microwave; and the custodians were given longer breaks and an extended lunch.”

Terrazas finds the time to be involved at the state and national levels of TSTA/NEA as well. She is a member of the TSTA Board of Directors, has been a delegate to the TSTA and NEA conventions, went to two national NEA conferences for education support professionals and attended the NEA Minority Leadership and Western Region Leadership Conferences.

She also has attended TSTA's legislative and political action training, been a legislative cadre participant and worked hard for the TSTA-Political Action Committee with both her actions and her dollars, as a continuing contributor. Working polls and phone banks, she has helped elect pro-education local school board candidates.

“It doesn't matter where I am or who I am with, if I hear that someone is with the school system, I invite them to join the strongest association in the world. It is easy for me to advocate for public schools when I have the knowledge and the support of a great team!”

FIND OUT:

- How to nominate someone for the TSTA Ronnie Ray ESP Advocate of the Year Award <http://www.tsta.org/news/current/awards.shtml>
- About the March NEA ESP Conference in Las Vegas <http://www.nea.org/grants/31430.htm>
- How to be a TSTA-Political Action Committee continuing contributor <http://www.tsta.org/legislative/update/pac.shtml>

WHY TSTA/NEA?

“I work hard to educate those in my community about the value of the ESP, and I work hard to politically empower my ESP members. TSTA/NEA is the best vehicle to accomplish this work.”

Lee Terrazas, Ysleta Teachers Association





“When young mothers return to my classroom after being taught by Claire, I notice that there is strength and wisdom that hadn’t been there before.”

Stephen Smallwood,
North Lamar TSTA/NEA
president

An Advocate in Every Sense of the Word

Above the door to Claire Anderson’s office are the words “Against All Odds.”

“As the homebound teacher for our district, it says it all for me. Many of our students have beaten the odds just to be able to receive my services,” Anderson said. “I strive to find ways to reach them and rekindle their desire to learn and love school. Widening the lens through which my students peer and creating an atmosphere that lets them find their voice is my passion.”

Some of her students are battling life-threatening illnesses; some face the challenges of teen parenthood. But Anderson believes that every one of her North Lamar ISD students can succeed academically, no matter the odds.

“Claire is fiercely protective of her students while at the same time expecting them to rise above their individual problems and use academics as the catalyst to help them escape whatever has been dealt them,” teacher Stephen Smallwood said. “When young mothers return to my classroom after being taught by Claire, I notice that there is strength and wisdom that hadn’t been there before. She has instilled them with responsibility and convinced these youngsters that life is not a dress rehearsal.”

When she took the position of homebound instructor, Anderson rewrote the job description, Dr. Linda Winfrey said. “Claire has brought the program to a whole new level. She believes that students at home have even more of a need for a good teacher. After all, how will they otherwise be prepared to return to the classroom, and how will they be prepared for TAKS?”

“That’s why you will see Claire Anderson sitting in a chemistry class, brushing up on the content that one of her students needs. And that’s why you will also see her sitting in any number of math classes and attending conferences,” Winfrey said. “She is the epitome of a professional educator, one whose focus is always on what is best for students.”

Anderson believes listening to her students is almost as important as teaching them. “What will students remember? Will they remember the facts we taught them or the labs we conducted? Maybe. But they will definitely remember how we encouraged them with a glance, a moment listening, a bright smile and an open heart,” she said.

Anderson’s colleagues, who nominated her for the TSTA Ermalee Boice Instructional

Advocacy Award she received in April, said she also is an invaluable part of the North Lamar TSTA/NEA local association.

“Claire has been instrumental in promoting the organization at all levels,” Winfrey said. “As a graduate of TSTA’s Ambassador Academy, she has added her new expertise to everything from recruiting new members and planning districtwide inservice presentations, to organizing local political action committees. She is the go-to person for anything we need; if she doesn’t know how to do it, she will find someone who does.”

Anderson said she loves the leadership activities, political discussions and networking she’s experienced while attending NEA conferences.

“I am unable to contain my enthusiasm when I return from an association event. My professional membership in TSTA allows my knowledge base to increase at warp speed,” she said. “Opportunities abound for emerging leaders and passionate ‘politickers.’ These events make me proud of my profession and ready to work harder.

“While in college, I belonged to TSTA/NEA and didn’t get involved. My first year of teaching was no different — I was a ‘dues payer’ only,” Anderson said. “Not now, though. I’m going for the gusto, protecting one of the most precious rights granted by our government: a free public education for ALL children.”

FIND OUT:

- How to nominate someone for the TSTA Ermalee Boice Instructional Advocacy Award <http://www.tsta.org/news/current/awards.shtml>
- How to apply for the TSTA Ambassador Academy <http://www.tsta.org/inside/calendar/ambassador.shtml>

WHY TSTA/NEA?

“The political scene is the arena, and political action is the vehicle to success. My local, state and national associations allow me, a rural northeast Texas girl, a front-row seat in keeping our public school system viable.”

Claire Anderson, North
Lamar TSTA/NEA





Reading Across America

On or around March 2, many TSTA locals observed NEA's Read Across America, the annual celebration held on Dr. Seuss' birthday to promote reading. In the photos, clockwise from above:

- TSTA President Rita Haecker (above) and Vice President Jason Hillman (page 25) read to Metz Elementary students at the invitation of Education Austin.
- In Socorro, National Junior Honor Society, student council and speech members distributed bookmarks, pencils and stickers. Board president Karen Blaine read "Green Eggs and Ham" while wearing a "Cat in the Hat" hat, and board member Tanya Loya, wear-

ing a Thing One costume, read "The Best Nest." Slider Middle School's advanced mariachi group entertained.

- Spring Branch Education Association donated books to Houston Junior Achievement for use in their Biztown simulated city "book store." Thousands of Houston children participate in Biztown, which gives elementary students an opportunity to learn about economics, civics, finance and cooperation by participating in a mock city setting for a day. Pictured from left to right are: SBEA Board Member Stacey Thomas, Bryan Plocek of Junior Achievement and SBEA Board Member Janie Walton.

- NEA-Dallas President Dale Kaiser reads at Henderson Elementary.
- Hurst-Euless-Bedford ISD librarians put on their hats. Third from left on the bottom row is Marcia Zorn, TSTA building representative and librarian at Shady Oaks Elementary, who presented \$400 worth of TSTA local support materials to all district elementaries.

FIND OUT

- About NEA's Read Across America and get ideas for promoting reading year round www.nea.org/readacross
- How to download a free digital book each month from kidthing <http://www.kidthing.com/nea>





MARDI GRAS IN KINGWOOD

In the top photo, Be a Teacher Club President Karen Behrend drives a decorated golf cart in the Lone Star College-Kingwood Mardi Gras parade February 24. The Be a Teacher Club is TSTA-Student Program's chapter at the college. Ana Silva, wearing a hat, walks behind the golf cart.

Below, Vice President Lisa Armstrong signs up members during Club Rush in March. To accommodate student schedules, the Be a Teacher Club meets the first Monday of every month at 12:30 p.m. and the first Thursday at 4 p.m. Guest speakers are featured at each

meeting, and there are many opportunities to work with the community.

NEWS FROM TSTA-RETIRED

Attention, Pre-Retired Life TSTA-Retired/NEA-Retired Members: Did you retire this year? If you did, you will need to contact TSTA Membership (amyp@tsta.org) and activate your Retired membership. Congratulations!

TSTA-Retired officers for 2009-10 will be President Johnetta Williams, Vice President Jay-Ann Rucker, Secretary Bobbie Duncan, Treasurer JoAnn Peschel and Immediate Past President Letha Grace McCoy.

Mattie Ford, Betty Jo Brown, Fran Valenzuela, Frank Colbert Jr., Johnetta Williams and Letha Grace McCoy represented Texas at the NEA-Retired Western Regional Conference in Portland, Oregon. We got the latest information on issues relating to retired school employees, including the news that our Social Security concerns for the repeal of the Offset/Windfall Provisions are being heard.

The TSTA-Retired Annual Meeting and TSTA State Convention in Houston were well attended. Thanks to JoAnn Peschel for arranging two workshops relating to health care and to Liz Picone, NEA Member Benefits, for updating us on our benefits.

We also thank our Retired delegates, Nancy Calfee, Paul Haupt, Barbara Effenberger, Ann Price Ouzts, Johnetta Williams, Gladis G. Wallace, Jerry Watkins, Fran Valenzuela, Bobbie Duncan, JoAnn Peschel, Betty J. Brown, Connie DeLuna, Jay-Ann Rucker, Eddie Spence, Earl Dredge, Frank Colbert Jr. and Letha Grace McCoy for representing our members at the TSTA Convention.

Letha Grace McCoy, Fran Valenzuela and Johnetta Williams are our TSTA-R delegates to the NEA-Retired Annual Meeting and NEA Representative Assembly in San Diego this summer. Fran Valenzuela hopes to represent NEA-Retired on the NEA Resolutions Committee. The NEA-R Annual Meeting will present issues relating to the retired needs, and our delegates will be a part of the NEA RA representing the Retired in the business of the NEA.

Finally, I want to thank you. I have truly appreciated your support and votes to give me the opportunity to represent TSTA-Retired. Serving as a board member, secretary/treasurer, vice president and president have been such honors. Trying to meet your needs and moving TSTA-Retired forward to being a stronger association have been my goals.

—Letha Grace McCoy

Locals in Action

DEER PARK

Two flags are now permanently housed in the Deer Park ISD administration building, next to a plaque that says they were donated by TSTA Region 3C. The group donated the U.S. and Texas flags in appreciation for being allowed to use the building for meetings. TSTA Region 3C President Gordon Gauthier presents the plaque to Superintendent Arnold Adair.



LAREDO ESPS

TSTA members came to Austin during Spring Break to lobby the legislature on education issues. Shown in the photo are education support professionals from Laredo who met with TSTA President Rita Haecker at headquarters before heading across the street to the Capitol.



REGIONS 2C & 2D

"Enlightened Leadership," a book by Ed Oakley and Doug Krug, was the focus of a retreat for Regions 2C and 2D in Marble Falls this spring. TSTA staff members Jason Wylie, Chris Vargas, Gonzalo Becerra-Weir and Antonio Galindo also covered relational organizing, member benefits, organizational development and membership recruitment.



COLLEGE STATION

College Station Education Association participated in Bryan's march and rally to commemorate the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Shown are CSEA members Lucious Clemmons, Gwen Elder and Bobby Slovak (far right) with students from A&M Consolidated High School.



Meet Chris Padron

He's the New President of the TSTA-Student Program



"The power of the people is amazing: 3.2 million members is a huge number, and to be a part of that NEA voice is truly something special."

What's your background?

I was born in Houston but raised in Pasadena. After I got through with my basics at San Jacinto College-Central Campus in Pasadena, I transferred to the University of Houston-Clear Lake. I complete my first year there this summer.

Why do you want to teach?

I want to be a bilingual education teacher because I believe that bilingual education is key for English speakers and non-English speakers alike. Learning two languages and learning how to excel in each language academically makes people in our society more marketable in terms of job opportunities, and it helps break down language barriers that exist, especially in certain areas of Texas.

My inspiration to become a teacher came from my intermediate school teacher, Mrs. Kerber, who is also a TSTA member! She was the first teacher to show me that she cared for her students' success, and she helped all of us in our class reach our po-

tential. When I graduated from high school, I heard someone calling my name. I looked up and to my surprise, it was Mrs. Kerber. She was there to see me graduate.

Why did you join TSTA-Student Program?

I first joined TSTA-Student Program during my spring semester at San Jacinto College. My mathematics professor, Mrs. Eska, announced that she was an advisor for TSTA-SP, and she invited our class to a meeting. I went, not knowing what to expect. She talked about the TSTA-SP state convention and encouraged us to become members. So I did. The state convention made a huge impression on me, and I have been wanting to be involved with TSTA ever since.

What do you like about TSTA and NEA?

The power of the people is amazing: 3.2 million members is a huge number, and to be a part of that NEA voice is truly something special. Personally, I enjoy all the networking opportunities that I have through TSTA, and I enjoy meeting new people from all levels of NEA, TSTA and my own



college peers across the state of Texas. I also enjoy the district and state conventions that are offered through TSTA-SP with the help of TSTA, because the workshops that we attend are very informative tools for our future careers.

Why is it important to join a professional association?

No matter what career path people choose to follow, it is always important to find and belong to a professional association. As members of TSTA/NEA, we fight for the rights of teachers, the rights of our students and the improvement of public schools and instruction. I am very proud to say I belong to TSTA/NEA because even though some of the things we are fighting for may not affect

TSTA-Student Program's officers for 2009-10 are, left to right on the preceding page, Vice President Angela Hammonds of Sam Houston State University, President Chris Padron of University of Houston-Clear Lake and Secretary Nicole Smith of Texas A&M University. Shown presenting workshops at the group's March 27-29 state convention in Austin are Rose Champion of the University of Texas at Brownsville and Bryan Weatherford, TSTA Leadership Development UniServ Specialist.

me now as a student, I know that they will affect my profession as a whole and my future career as a teacher.

What do you want to accomplish as TSTA-Student Program president?

My goal as president is to help the Student Program strengthen in the way it functions (build better communication routes through state, district and local officers and members), strengthen the membership count and help the Student Program become the most crucial tool that college students need to have as they pursue their degree in education.

What's the SP theme for the next school year?

The theme for this year is "I teach! What is your super power?" It means teachers are super heroes just like doctors, lawyers, political leaders and many other professionals. Teachers possess super powers to help students succeed academically and in life.

WHY TSTA/NEA?

"As members of TSTA/NEA, we fight for the rights of teachers, the rights of our students and the improvement of public schools and instruction. I am very proud to say I belong to TSTA/NEA."

Chris Padron, University of Houston-Clear Lake





There are committees and boards that meet at the campus and district level that have a significant impact on your career.

Gaining a Voice

Use District and Campus Committees to Improve Your Life, Career

BY DR. PAUL HENLEY, TSTA TEACHING AND LEARNING SPECIALIST

Many teachers believe that too many others make all the decisions that are most crucial in accomplishing their jobs. Often they are correct. Daily classroom activities, in large part, are controlled through mandates from the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and the United States Department of Education. On top of that, teachers are bound by policies set at the district level and rules at the campus level.

Despite all the controls on your teaching, there are some key opportunities for you to become one of the decision-makers in your career. There are committees and boards that meet at the campus and district level that have a significant impact on your career and give you the opportunity to have input on your day-to-day situation. Joining these groups, or even giving members your input, can give you a voice in the control of your classroom.

CAMPUS LEVEL DECISIONS

The Campus Advisory Council: Texas Education Code mandates that schools practice site-based decision making. Each campus has its own steering committee, called the Campus Advisory Council (CAC). Among other things, this group is charged with:

- Assessing the school's current academic performance
- Setting campus performance objectives
- Creating a plan to meet these objectives, including timelines, staff needs and other resources

Perhaps most important, the CAC has sole authority over campus staff development. That

is, all professional development decisions come from the CAC. Though the range of this group's power is limited to the building, the CAC's power runs very deep. Join this committee if you can. If you do not have time, or if you are not allowed to join, make sure your voice is heard by talking to your colleagues that are on your school's CAC.

Your School's Parent Teacher Association:

Parents have a large input on how a school is run. The officers in your building's Parent Teacher Association (PTA) or Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) are among the most powerful outside forces on your school. Typically, their suggestions are taken seriously, and their meetings are regularly attended by the school's chief administrator.

Your presence at meetings shows important people that you care about parents' roles in their children's education. This can lead to positive connections with powerful people.

There is another very important fact about your PTA or PTO: they often have money to disburse. Bake sales, raffles, flower sales and other fundraisers are designed specifically to put funds into your school, but members are often unsure about the best place to disburse those funds. If you are at a meeting when funding decisions are made, you have a strong chance of gaining the supplies and materials that you want for your classroom. You can join the PTA or PTO for less than \$10. After all, you are the T in the PTA.

DISTRICT LEVEL DECISIONS

The District Academic Advisory Council: In general, school decisions (including your salary) are made by your local school board. However, the State of Texas requires every district to report their situation and progress to a group that represents teachers, administrators, specialists, parents and community members. That group is called the District Academic Advisory Council, or DAC. A DAC should meet monthly.

Each year, TEA produces reports on every public school district in Texas. It doesn't matter how academically strong a district may be; there is always room for improve-

ment. Because of this, TEA requires that every district design and implement an improvement plan. The plan includes many things, such as dropout prevention, classroom management policies and achievement gap issues. In other words, decisions may come from the school board, but the DAC ensures the board's decisions (and the administration's performance) are reported publicly.

Texas Education Code charges the DAC with, "establishing and reviewing the district's and campuses' educational plans, goals, performance objectives, and major classroom instructional programs." The DAC is a powerful committee, with authority over the entire district. There are a limited number of spots on this committee available to teachers, and you may have to wait a few years to secure a place on the committee. Just remember this: if you aren't on the DAC, you should let your ideas be known to someone who is.

School Board Meetings: You may not find yourself on any of the above committees, but it makes sense to attend at least one or two school board meetings per year. School board meetings take two forms. The first is the typical meeting, where board members take final votes on important issues. The second kind of meeting is less formal. That meeting is called a board workshop.

Each type of meeting takes place once per month. Prior to the meeting, the board will post its agenda on the district's website. That is the easiest way to determine which meetings you should attend. If there is something on the agenda that you feel should include your input, you are allowed to speak to the board at a regular meeting as a member of the public. Testimony is usually limited to three minutes, so keep any testimony to 450 words or so.

These meetings are also a time to meet board members and determine which members are "teacher-friendly." Attending board meetings allows you to get to know the board members...and have them get to know you. School board meetings matter. They have a very strong impact on your salary, benefits and working conditions.

Teachers are busy people, and these meetings and committees take more time from a busy schedule. Nevertheless, they are real opportunities to have a say in how your school and your district work. Life is run by the people who show up. Make sure you do that!

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

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