Billions Cut from Schools

CONCERNED TEXANS PROTEST THROUGHOUT THE STATE
Elections have consequences

We all knew that. Or, we thought we did until the recent legislative session slapped us with a very unpleasant reminder. Texas educators and school kids will be suffering the consequences of the last election cycle for months — maybe years — to come.

By Rita Haecker, TSTA President

Many teachers who were looking forward to well-deserved vacations will be spending much of their summers looking for new jobs after becoming the victims of $4 billion in budget cuts to the public schools. And students will find more crowded classrooms, fewer electives and a diminished learning environment when they return to school in August.

Cuts of this magnitude are unconscionable, particularly since, at Gov. Perry’s insistence, the Legislature left $6 billion of the taxpayers’ money untouched in the emergency Rainy Day Fund.

These are the results of the 2010 elections, which returned an ideologically driven governor to office and swept into the Legislature a host of ideologues — private school supporters, voucher advocates and home-schoolers — intent on shrinking state government and undermining the backbone of our society, our public school system.

Displaying an arrogance reflected in anti-teacher, anti-union crusades across the country, they scoffed as thousands of Texas school employees began losing their jobs. Now, it is time for educators and other friends of the public schools to fight back — and fight back hard.

The next elections for legislative offices in Texas — the March party primaries — are only nine months away, and TSTA soon will be gearing up for a campaign whose outcome will either dig Texas public education — and the state’s future — deeper into a hole or begin to restore some political sanity to the lawmaking and budget-setting process in Austin.

TSTA will be supporting — and, in some cases, recruiting — education-friendly candidates, men and women of both political parties who value the public schools and are ready to put the needs of school children above ideology and partisanship. We will also be involved in local school board races in which members of our locals can make a difference.

Our potential for success begins with our members, people like you. It requires your commitment to get involved and stay involved in the political process and, when school resumes, to recruit teachers and ESPs in your buildings to join our membership and our cause.

Are you angry about what the Legislature has done to our public schools? Are you angry about dedicated educators, your colleagues, who lost their jobs? You have every right to be angry, but you also need to channel your anger into political action. Only in that way can we, as educators, produce change.

Thousands of TSTA members participated in our Day of Action events around the state this spring and rallied for the public schools in marches on the Capitol. Those efforts helped raise the public consciousness of the ideological and political campaign against our public schools, but they were just the beginning.

Soon, you can help your locals organize candidate recruitment and screening committees. And, please donate to TSTA-PAC, or, if you already contribute, please consider increasing your donation. You can do that today.

Money is a fact of life in politics. Successful campaigns for state and even local offices are expensive. Remember, our pro-school candidates will be competing with heavy campaign contributions from voucher advocates, virtual school operators and other would-be educational entrepreneurs whose primary interest in the public schools is to squeeze profit from them.

Later, I will encourage you to volunteer in the campaigns of pro-education candidates and, of course, to vote — and urge your friends, neighbors and the parents in your schools to vote. Parents, when they fully realize the impact of the deep cuts that some of their local legislators have inflicted upon their local schools, will be no less eager for change in Austin.

Elections have consequences, and we must start preparing now for 2012. Our profession, our students’ opportunities and our state’s economic future depend on our ability — and determination — to change the legislative mire.

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WHY SHOULD EDUCATION EMPLOYEES CARE ABOUT POLITICS?
The regular session of the 82nd Legislature was not unlike a championship volleyball game (just ask Karin Keeney, page 27). Bad bill after bad bill popped up, only to be taken down by kill shots from your ace TSTA government relations team, backed by hundreds of calls and emails from members. Then the regular session ended, and the rules changed. At press time, it wasn’t pretty, as you’ll see on pages 6-14. Visit our website, www.tsta.org, for an update.

TSTA Elected New Officers

Delegates to the April TSTA House of Delegates in El Paso elected the following to TSTA and NEA positions. You’ll read more about them in the fall issue of the Advocate.

- TSTA President: Incumbent President Rita Haecker, elected to a second term
- TSTA Vice President: Noel Candelaria, Ysleta Teachers Association
- NEA Director: Rae Nwosu, Education Austin
- Second Alternate NEA Director: Noel Candelaria, Ysleta Teachers Association
- Third Alternate NEA Director: Tony Uzzell, Waco TSTA/NEA

National Teacher of the Year

Maryland teacher and National Education Association member Michelle Shearer was named the 2011 National Teacher of the Year by President Barack Obama at a White House ceremony on National Teacher Day. Shearer, a chemistry teacher at Urbana High School in Ijamsville, Maryland, is committed to helping children who have traditionally been underrepresented in science. http://bit.ly/IdfDS8

Our Executive Director is Retiring

With E.C. Walker at the helm, TSTA has seen a membership increase of almost 30 percent over the past nine years, in spite of the downward economy. He leaves us with his thoughts on keeping the upward trend going on pages 20-23. If you won’t see him at the NEA Representative Assembly, you can still send an email to ecwalker@tsta.org by the end of summer.

Tell the World About Our Great People

Nominate one of your colleagues to be a classroom superhero and encourage other colleagues, parents and students to post comments of support on Facebook. www.ClassroomSuperheroes.com

Legal Advice on Social Media

“Allowing students to post directly to your wall is like allowing them to write in Sharpie on your whiteboard when you aren’t in the classroom — only worse,” warns Brenda Satton-Wills, staff attorney for California Teachers Association, an NEA affiliate. “Students can and do post to social media sites from their cell phones. By the time you get to your page, truly permanent damage will be done. You can disable this feature through privacy settings on Facebook.”

And How Scary Is This: “You cannot erase your social media record. It’s possible to subpoena an archive of all your posts and all posts made by you.” Read more of Satton-Wills’ advice at http://bit.ly/kyAJo.

Black Friday Deals Every Day

Take advantage of hundreds of exclusive offers through NEA Click & Save. Register at www.neamb.com to start saving. New offers are added every day — from cell phones to Disney Cruises — and you can set reminders for your favorite merchants so you’ll be notified in advance of upcoming sales and discounts.

Follow Us on Facebook and Twitter

Did you know TSTA is on Facebook and Twitter? Follow us at www.facebook.com/texasstateteachersassociation and http://twitter.com/txstateteachers. And check out our website at www.tsta.org.

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Tough session for schools

As TSTA had feared following last November’s election, budget cuts to public education during the regular legislative session were deep. Thousands of school district employees will be losing their jobs. Many already have. By Clay Robison

For the first time in at least 27 years, according to the Legislative Budget Board, the Legislature failed to fully fund the school finance formulas and keep up with anticipated enrollment growth. Another 170,000 children are expected to enter Texas public schools over the next two years.

And, despite leaving $6 billion of the taxpayers’ money untouched in the state’s emergency Rainy Day Fund, lawmakers did nothing to address the $10 billion biennial deficit in the school finance budget. This shortfall accounted for more than one-third of the state’s budgetary hole. It was the result of the Legislature not fully paying for the school property tax cuts ordered in 2006, and it will continue to plague school districts and their employees.

Working on our own and banding together with Texas Forward, a coalition of advocates for education, health care and other critical public services, TSTA urged the Legislature to soften budget cuts by spending all $9.4 billion in the Rainy Day Fund, closing some tax exemptions and finding new tax revenue.

Thousands of TSTA members, their friends and parents from their schools participated in TSTA Day of Action rallies and other events around the state on April 2 to focus media attention on the public schools, and many TSTA members traveled to Austin to join thousands of other concerned Texans rallying at the Capitol for school kids and against budget cuts. The TSTA House of Delegates, meeting in El Paso this spring, also passed a resolution urging the Legislature to spend all the Rainy Day Fund and find new tax revenue.

But the governor, influenced by ideological Tea Party allies intent on shrinking the size of state government, insisted on deep spending reductions. He refused to consider new tax revenue and demanded that most of the Rainy Day Fund remain unspent. And, the legislative majority, many of whom were elected with Tea Party support, readily complied.

TSTA President Rita Haecker, in a statement to the media, said it was “ unconscionable” for the governor and legislators to cut education and other important services while leaving $6 billion of the taxpayers’ money in the bank.

“This budget fails to meet the Legislature’s constitutional responsibility to adequately fund the public schools,” Haecker said. “It is a shameful disservice to the school children and taxpayers of Texas. It will cost thousands of school employees their jobs, cram kids into overcrowded classrooms and undermine preparations for our state’s future.”

Had it not been for the outcry raised by TSTA and other concerned Texans, the budget probably would have been even worse. The House passed a budget early in the session that would have cut $8 billion from the public schools. But the Senate found additional non-tax revenue and employed accounting tools — including moving state school finance payments from one fiscal year to another — to reduce the cuts to $4 billion. In the end, House and Senate budget conferees went with the Senate.

Weeks before the final budget was written, many school districts started laying off teachers and other employees in anticipation. According to some estimates, more than 12,000 school employees — teachers, support staff and administrators — had lost their jobs by the end of the spring semester. And, there were predictions of thousands more.

Although school districts were underfunded by the state, TSTA believes districts can take some steps to minimize the loss of educator jobs. Many are already doing so. But the Senate found additional non-tax revenue and employed accounting tools — including moving state school finance payments from one fiscal year to another — to reduce the cuts to $4 billion.

As the Advocate was going to press, TSTA and other public school supporters were fighting hard to keep the assault on public education from becoming worse. Several proposals attacking an important class size limit, teacher pay and teacher employment rights — all of which TSTA had been instrumental in killing during the regular session — were back on the agenda for a follow-up special session.

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The Legislature, driven by Gov. Rick Perry and an overwhelming majority of conservative Republican lawmakers, cut $4 billion from school finance formulas to help close a state revenue shortfall of $27 billion. This was in addition to $1.4 billion in cuts to education discretionary grants for such programs as full-day pre-kindergarten, dropout prevention and teacher bonuses.

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Although school districts were underfunded by the state, TSTA believes districts can take some steps to minimize the loss of educator jobs. Many districts are below the $1.17 per $100 valuation cap on maintenance and
operations taxes and should consider asking local voters to approve tax ratification elections. TSTA believes most parents would rather pay slightly higher taxes than see their children jammed into overcrowded classrooms, electives cancelled or, in some cases, neighborhood schools closed.

Some districts can afford to dip into their reserve funds, and others may have administrative costs they still can trim.

In the near future, some districts are expected to file another school finance lawsuit against the state. Several have been filed over the past 30 years, culminating in court orders that have resulted in a series of school finance changes.

TSTA has spent most of the year so far fighting not only legislators over budget cuts but also school board members and superintendents trying to use the budget crisis to raise class sizes in the primary grades, cut teacher pay and repeal teacher employment rights — all in the name of budgetary “flexibility.” What teachers and parents value as important educational quality standards, the administrators attacked as burdensome “unfunded mandates.”

The superintendents were supported by key legislative leaders, but TSTA was successful in defeating them in the regular session, thanks to the strong support of teachers, parents and other concerned taxpayers. The fight over some of the provisions was renewed, unfortunately, in the special session that the governor called immediately following the regular session.

The special session was necessary to pass a fiscal matters bill needed to balance the new state budget. The bill had died at the end of the regular session, thanks to a mini-filibuster in the Senate on May 29, during the Memorial Day weekend.

In the special session, which began May 31, much of the fight centered on Senate Bill 8 by Senate Education Chairwoman Florence Shapiro, R-Plano, to allow districts to cut teacher pay and repeal important teacher employment rights. As filed, the bill allowed districts to reduce teacher pay in two ways. One provision allowed districts to order teacher furloughs for as many as six non-instructional days a year and adjust their pay accordingly. The second provision repealed the salary floor enacted in 2009.

Senate Bill 8 also changed the notification date for non-renewal of a teacher’s contract from 45 days before the last day of instruction to 10 days before the last day of instruction. It also eliminated seniority as a factor in determining layoffs during reductions in force.

Senate Bill 8 was approved by the Senate early in the session but was amended to apply furloughs to administrators as well as teachers. It also required public hearings on furlough policies. The bill had not yet been acted on by the House before the Advocate went to press. Please check the TSTA webpage for updates on this bill and other special session developments.

In the House, Public Education Chairman Bob Eissler sponsored legislation to raise the 22-1 class size limit in kindergarten through fourth grade. But, in the face of apparent opposition, he amended his bill early in the session to essentially maintain the current waiver law.

The 22-1 class size limit in K-4 has been law since 1984 and is credited with improving the learning environment for the youngest students and raising overall student performance.

Some superintendents had been not-so-subtly trying to repeal this cap for several years, although existing law allows districts, in cases of financial hardship, to seek waivers from the state. Those waivers are almost always granted.

During the regular session, TSTA also waged a strong fight against Senate Bill 4, which would have created a new teacher evaluation system heavily dependent on student test scores. This bill won Senate approval but died in the House.

A proposal to divert tax dollars for a private school voucher scheme popped up late in the regular session, but TSTA and other opponents were able to keep it bottled up.

Also late in the regular session, Sen. Dan Patrick of Houston won the Senate’s approval of an amendment to House Bill 6, the instructional allotment bill, allowing the State Board of Education to approve as many as 10 new charters a year. But opposition in the House forced the amendment to be stripped in a conference committee.

TSTA was instrumental in killing another proposal that would have allowed parents to petition the state education commissioner to transform public schools that have been failing for as little as two years into charters.

The proposal was offered by Rep. Mike Villarreal, a Democrat from San Antonio, as an amendment to a non-charter Senate bill, Senate Bill 738, on a Saturday late in the regular session. Villarreal won preliminary House approval of the proposal the first day.

But, alerted by TSTA, other Democratic legislators raised such strong opposition to the amendment a few days later that Villarreal took the unusual step of stripping off his amendment and passing the bill in its original form, without charters.

**BILLS THAT PASSED IN THE REGULAR SESSION**

The following bills passed during the regular legislative session, but had not been signed by the Governor at press time.

**HB 34** requires economics courses to include instruction in methods of paying for college and other postsecondary education, beginning with the 2013-14 school year.

**HB 275** spends $3,198,661, 120 from the Rainy Day Fund to help balance the budget for the remainder of the current fiscal year. More than $6 billion in the Rainy Day Fund is left unspent.

**HB 350** allows a judge to sentence someone younger than 17 to community service or tutoring for committing a Class C misdemeanor at a public school.

**HB 359** allows parents to sign annual statements prohibiting school districts from administering corporal punishment on their children.

**HB 398** prohibits any school district contractor or subcontractor from permitting an employee to work at a school if the worker has been convicted of a felony or misdemeanor that would prevent the person from being employed by the district.

**HB 392** increases the county population requirement for establishing a juvenile justice alternative education program from 125,000 to 180,000. Such programs will be permissible for smaller counties.

**HB 675** establishes new standards for high school football helmet safety.

**HB 692** directs the State Board of Education to allow a student who is unable to participate in physical activity due to disability or illness to substitute one credit in English Language Arts, math, science or social studies or one academic elective credit for PE.

**HB 734** allows a truancy case to be filed in a constitutional county court of the county in which a parent resides or in which the school is located if the county has a population of 1.75 million or more. Prior law directed the county must have a population of two million or more.

**HB 826** requires a school district to appoint at least one employee to act as a liaison officer to facilitate the enrollment of students with disabilities or cost bonds.

**HB 861** requires that at least one member of the Continuing Advisory Committee for special education services be a director of special education programs for a district or for a shared services arrangement of multiple school districts.

**HB 942** exempts a school district from security for court costs and appeal bonds when instituting and prosecuting suits. It also allows districts to appeal judgments without giving sureties or cost bonds. 
HB 906 requires removal of a student from a district to a disciplinary alternative education program (DAEP) for a felony offense of aggravated robbery. It also provides that a student may be expelled from a DAEP for engaging in documented serious misbehavior while on the program campus.

HB 1061 extends the investment authority of the Teacher Retirement System and limits investments in hedge funds to 10 percent of the value of TRS' total investment portfolio.

HB 1130 concerns reporting of students receiving special education services in various settings.

HB 1124 allows a student to be expelled for breaching a school district's computer security.

HB 1334 states that a certificate or permit is not considered to have expired if: (1) the employee has completed the requirements for renewal of the certificate or permit, (2) the employee submitted the request for renewal prior to the expiration date, and (3) the date the certificate or permit would have expired is before the date the State Board for Educator Certification takes action on renewal.

HB 1550 includes charter school employees and officers under the contract for travel services procured by the state.

HB 2678 requires the governor to appoint a committee to address the curricula for health classes.

HB 27 provides that a student in grades 5 or 8 who is enrolled in a course above grade level, or for high school credit for which the student will be assessed, is not required to pass the state tests for the grade 5 or 8 state assessment on the same subject.

HB 2366 requires that an open enrollment charter school of a municipality may admit children of the municipality's employees before conducting its lottery, provided that those children are only a small percentage of the school's total enrollment.

HB 2561 redesigns the meaning of school year as a 12-month period beginning Sept. 1 and ending Aug. 31 of the next calendar year.

HB 2678 provides for schools to be able to print and issue agency-approved driver education certificates with the certificate numbers to be used for certifying completions of an approved driver education course.

HB 2971 makes confidential teacher evaluations and administrator records in open enrollment charter schools. It also provides that an open enrollment charter school may provide documents evaluating the performance of a teacher or administrator to a requesting school district or open enrollment charter.

HB 3278 amends a number of statutory provisions relating to memberships of the state commissioner of education and the Texas Education Agency on advisory committees, commissions, task forces and other similar groups.

HB 3306 allows a district to use transportation allotment funds to provide a bus pass or card for another transportation system to students for whom the district's regular transportation system is not feasible.

HB 1907 requires immediate notification of teachers and other school employees of a student with whom they have regular contact has been accused of a serious criminal offense.

HB 1942 requires school districts to adopt policies against bullying and for responding to incidents of bullying. It further provides that a district may transfer a student who has been a victim of bullying, or transfer the student who engages in bullying, to another class or another campus. It also requires the State Board of Education to include awareness and prevention of bullying in the curricula for health classes.

HB 2030 requires school boards to implement and administer a policy for the care of students at risk for anaphylaxis.

HB 2139 provides that a student in a district's regular transportation system is not required to have regular contact has been accused of a felony offense.

HB 2162 prohibits school board members or school district employees from coercing another employee to make or refrain from making a charitable contribution or to attend a meeting called for the purpose of soliciting charitable contributions.

HB 2679 requires a school board to implement and administer a policy for the care of students at risk for anaphylaxis.

SB 49 requires a school district to provide the parents of a student removed to a disciplinary alternative education program with written notice of the district's obligation to provide the student with an opportunity to complete coursework required for graduation.

SB 27 requires a school board to implement and administer a policy for the care of students at risk for anaphylaxis.

SB 28 provides that a student in a district's regular transportation system is not required to have regular contact has been accused of a serious criminal offense.

HB 2107 provides that a student in grades 5 or 8 who is enrolled in a course above grade level, or for high school credit for which the student will be assessed, is not required to pass the state tests for the grade 5 or 8 state assessment on the same subject.

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SB 54 sets certification requirements for teachers of students with visual impairments.

SB 149 allows the state education commissioner and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to adopt rules covering reporting for the school district college credit program.

SB 199 allows the Department of Agriculture to award a grant to a nonprofit organization that partners with a school district in agricultural projects.

SB 226 requires a school district to provide to the Texas Education Agency the results of individual student performance on the physical fitness assessment instrument. The results may not include a student’s name, Social Security number or date of birth.

SB 290 requires instruction in personal financial literacy in each mathematics course from kindergarten through eighth grade.

SB 391 states that the notice of the textbook review and adoption cycle must require a publisher of an adopted textbook for a grade level other than pre-kindergarten to submit an electronic sample copy of the textbook.

SB 419 prohibits state funding to public junior colleges for physical education courses offered for joint high school and junior college credit.

SB 471 requires that each school district’s improvement plan include a policy addressing sexual abuse and other maltreatment of children. It requires training for educators in preventing and increasing awareness of these problems.

SB 501 establishes the Interagency Council for Addressing Disproportionality to make recommendations for reducing the involvement of minority children in the juvenile justice, child welfare and mental health systems.

SB 727 allows for the election of trustees of an independent school district to be held on the same day as an election for members of the governing board of a public junior college district in which the school district is located.

SB 736 allows a school board to appoint a member from a local domestic violence program to the local school health advisory council.

SB 738 allows parents of students at a failing campus, under certain circumstances, to ask the state education commissioner to re purpose the campus, order alternative management of the campus or close the campus.

SB 764 prohibits a school board from using taxes or other public resources for the design, construction, renovation or operation of a hotel.

SB 778 provides that a campus-level planning and decision-making committee should include, if practicable, at least one representative with the primary responsibility of educating students with disabilities.

SB 866 requires certain educators to receive training on dyslexia, requires testing of students for dyslexia, and contains provisions on reassigning dyslexic students in college.

SB 966 allows school districts to issue high school diplomas to war veterans who left school before graduating.

SB 975 allows junior colleges to partner with school districts in dropout recovery programs on the junior college campuses.

SB 1042 prohibits any school district contractor or subcontractor from permitting an employee to work at a school if the worker has been convicted of a felony or misdemeanor that would prevent the person from being employed by the district.

SB 1094 requires the State Board of Education to establish a process for certifying educators who examine or screen students for learning disabilities.

SB 1104 requires a school district to disclose information in a student’s educational records to a juvenile service provider, as necessary under certain circumstances.

SB 1383 requires the state education commissioner to establish and administer a comprehensive appraisal and professional development system for principals.

SB 1410 requires the Texas Education Agency to identify and report to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board the number of students enrolled in a tech-prep program.

SB 1484 authorizes certain open-enrollment charter schools to be awarded academic distinction designations.

SB 1494 allows junior colleges to partner with school districts in dropout recovery programs on the junior college campuses.

SB 1524 requires the state education commissioner to establish the Interagency Committee on Dyslexia.

SB 1545 grants immunity from civil liability for unpaid health care practitioners who examine or screen students for participation in athletics or other school-sponsored extracurricular activities.

SB 1557 requires the State Board of Education to establish a process for certifying educators who examine or screen students for learning disabilities.

SB 1577 creates the Texas High Performance Schools Consortium to find ways to improve student learning through the development of innovative, next-generation learning standards and assessment and accountability systems.

SB 1610 requires school districts to put seatbelts on buses only to the extent that the legislature has appropriated money for reimbursement.

SB 1619 provides that a school district is not required to pay a student’s tuition or other costs for taking a college credit course.

SB 1620 requires the State Board of Education to establish a process for substituting an applied STEM course for a specific mathematics or science course required under the high school curriculum.

SB 1667 makes changes in the administration of the Teacher Retirement System. Among other things, it prohibits anyone who is convicted of causing the death of a member from receiving the benefits of that member, and it allows for earlier retirement with a reduced benefit.

SB 1668 deals with the purchase of Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act credits.

SB 1669 revises the retire/retire program. The bill allows for an annuity payment if the retiree has been separated from service with all Texas public educational institutions for at least 12 full, consecutive months.

BILLS THAT DIED IN THE REGULAR SESSION

The following bills died during the regular legislative session. However, sponsors tried to resurrect several of them during the special session. At press time, their fate was undetermined. Please check our website at www.tsta.org for updates.
HB 400 would have permanently raised the 22-1 cap in K-4 to 25-1; permanently eliminated the requirement that districts cannot pay teachers less next year than they earned this year; eliminated the state minimum salary schedule and let districts set their own compensation systems with their own rules; permanently allowed school boards to furlough teachers and reduce their salaries accordingly; permanently allowed a district to declare a financial emergency at any time for purposes of doing a reduction in force; permanently deleted seniority as one of the factors used in determining who is terminated if a RIF is implemented; permanently changed the deadline for teachers under probationary, continuing and term contracts to leave a district without penalty from 45 days before the first day of instruction to not later than 60 days.

HB 936 would have abolished the cap on open-enrollment charter schools.

HB 1076 would have removed the 10-1 ratio on accelerated instruction groups for students who fail to perform satisfactorily on an assessment instrument.

HB 1311 would have allowed that, under certain circumstances, new open-enrollment charter schools for students at risk of dropping out could avoid applying for authorization.

HB 1587 would have mandated that a significant portion of teacher evaluation be based on the teacher's student learning objectives and outcomes, including student performance on assessment instruments.

HB 1589 would have established the Center for Financial Accountability and Productivity in Public Education, an independent policy center to represent business, finance, public policy, education and other interests. The center's purpose would have been to increase productivity and cost effectiveness at the school district and campus levels, rank each district, campus and charter school, and provide annual progress reports and recommendations.

HB 1603 would have allowed 100 additional new charters to be granted every state fiscal year by the State Board of Education.

HB 1632 would have changed the deadline for teachers under probationary, continuing and term contracts to leave a district without penalty from 45 days before the first day of instruction to not later than 60 days.

HB 2506 would have required district employees hired after Sept. 1, 2012, to participate in a defined contribution plan instead of a defined benefits plan. TRS would have changed from a defined contribution plan to a costly defined benefits plan.

HB 2539 would have allowed a school district to suspend a teacher without pay for good cause in lieu of discharge or pending discharge.

HB 2540 would have eliminated a teacher's right to a hearing before an independent hearing examiner until after the teacher was suspended without pay for more than 20 days within a period of one year.

SB 1612 would have required TRS to make an annual contribution to the Pension Review Board in the amount of $0.50 per member, at a cost of over $650,000.

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It starts with an index card

Getting to know every one of her students is a priority for Texas Secondary Teacher of the Year Beth Huckabee

Beth Huckabee’s first few weeks of teaching were a crash course on the importance of class size limits.

“It was a disaster!” Huckabee, this year’s Texas Secondary Teacher of the Year and TSTA Ermalee Boice Instructional Advocacy Award winner, said.

“I walked into a situation with 40 percent repeating students. I had six classes, five preps and a seventh period health class of 42 students,” she said. “I went home crying the first six weeks.”

As a high school and college student, she had the opportunity to help teach her peers, and she enjoyed it so much that it shaped her career path, but this was very different. “Failure to help teach her peers, and she enjoyed it so much that it

She shares knowledge, techniques and experiences with new teachers, student teachers and pre-service teachers, then she covers new teachers’ classes so they can collaborate and set up their labs.

“My goal became to visit with each student every two weeks herself an assignment: to learn something about every student. With her classes finally at a manageable level, Huckabee gave

“I love watching the girls gain confidence as their skills develop. I love watching the pitchers slow the ball down for the special needs players, regardless of the score, and I love watching the girls learn how to be good sports, win or lose,” she said. “As a high school teacher who has seen first hand the trouble that seems to find unsupervised teenagers, I love the fact that I know where 75 teenagers are and what they are doing three nights a week.”

Given her rough first semester in the classroom, it’s not surprising that she volunteers to mentor new teachers. “I love teaching. There is nothing else I would rather be doing, and because of this, I feel that I need to do all I can to help new teachers experience that joy,” she said.

She shares knowledge, techniques and experiences with new teachers, student teachers and pre-service teachers, then

“Many of our new teachers feel threatened not only by the hard-to-discipline student, but also by the very bright student. I assure them that they do not have to have all the answers, that they can turn the unanswered question into a teaching moment.”

“I love watching the ‘lights go on’ when a student understands a difficult physics concept or makes a connection with previous material in biology or anatomy or physiology. I love learning new ‘stuff’ each year. I love that every day and each student is different. I love the challenge of trying to reach each student and help them reach his or her full potential, “she said. “All too often we define success and failure based on grades or test scores alone. I believe that success for some students is elusive and harder to define. For some students, thinking and not memorizing is success, and for others, developing a curiosity about learning is success.”

For Huckabee, one of the greatest rewards of teaching is hearing from former students.

“My students, decathletes and science team members are scattered across the country studying dark matter in California, growing cartilage from stem cells at Rice, researching and using DNA compatibility to design new drugs for a pharmaceutical company in Massachusetts, teaching residents and interns in Arkansas, and working on cutting edge DNA research in Washington. They are veterinarians, computer programmers, district attorneys, physical therapists, nurses and doctors. Many have exceeded beyond even my expectations and work in fields that didn’t exist when I taught them,” Huckabee said. “Teaching is a way I can touch the future through my students. They are my greatest contributions and accomplishments.”

TIP: The Ermale Boice Instructional Advocacy Award rewards and promotes teaching excellence in Texas public schools. All TSTA members who are members of NEA and their local association are eligible. www.tsta.org/news/current/awards.shtml
‘Never allow anybody to dictate our future’

Yolanda Molina, TSTA’s educational support professional of the year, has changed the lives of migrant students as well as her colleagues.

“My favorite memory of Yolanda Molina goes back to 2008, when she and I were waiting for an airplane at the Austin airport,” John Hand, a TSTA member from San Benito, said. “We had spent two days at a TSTA Board of Directors meeting, and Yolanda had recently returned from Washington, D.C., where she had attended an NEA Board of Directors meeting and lobbied various congresspersons on several important national issues. At the airport, the speaker system was playing a popular song from the 1960s. ‘I bet you remember listening to that song on the radio when you were a teenage girl,’ I said. ‘When I was a teenager,’ Yolanda said, ‘we could not afford a radio.

“There is so much about Yolanda Molina in that anecdote,” Hand said. “She was born into poverty and struggled to find a job in education. She was able to balance her life as a wife and mother, and became an important advocate for migrant children in the Mercedes school district. She joined TSTA, became a leader in her local and made herself into a statewide and national leader.

Instead of an advocate for Mercedes migrant children, she has become an advocate for all children in Texas. Her work on behalf of education at the state and national levels has been recognized by congressmen such as Ruben Hinojosa, as well as two NEA presidents, Reg Weaver and Dennis Van Roekel,” he said.

As a data entry specialist and migrant recruiter for 34 years in Mercedes ISD, Molina handles identification and recruitment, and the New Generation System, a web-based interstate information network that communicates demographic, educational and health data on migrant students to educators throughout the nation.

Mercedes ISD Director of Federal Programs Walter Watson describes her as “constantly on the go and working for her constituents.” She has presented at state and national migrant conferences and brought the needs of migrants to the attention of national government leaders, he said.

“Mrs. Molina has many gifts, among which is the rare gift of being able to work on issues in an amiable fashion. This gift has opened many doors and many hearts, which in turn has resulted in good things happening for the people she represents,” Watson said. “In Mercedes ISD and the community at large, she is highly respected and known for her ability to make things happen.”

“Yolanda is a visible leader in her local and in her community,” TSTA President Rita Haackler said in presenting Molina with the TSTA Ronnie Ray Educational Support Professional of the Year Award at the April TSTA Convention. “She is involved in the Children of the Fields Project, a coalition that provides emergency educational financial relief to migrant workers and their families, and ensures that farmworker children are protected and given an opportunity to succeed in life. She also works with various community groups to facilitate connections between low income families and support agencies, such as Goodwill, the Salvation Army and the Housing Authority.”

As the child of migrant parents, Molina understands the difficulties these students face. “Her work to help bring these students and families into the education system is more than a job, it is her passion,” Haackler said.

Molina said she often visits the homes of migrant families to help them take advantage of educational and other benefits they may not know are available.

“I always advise parents that we should never allow anything or anyone to discourage us from moving forward in life and never allow anybody to dictate our future,” Molina said. “Working with the parents of the children that attend our schools has prepared me to be an advocate for them, too. These parents, in most cases, are the ones in great need of support from school employees.”

Molina encourages them to participate in parenting sessions, workshops and other school functions. That involvement has encouraged some parents to enroll in school themselves, taking classes that prepare them for teaching, nursing and other professional positions.

She works hard for the Mercedes Educators Association/TSTA/NEA, and has served in positions ranging from association representative, to local president, to NEA Board of Directors member. She currently is the Region 1E president on the TSTA Board of Directors.

“I am a strong advocate for our association because it prepares educational employees to be the best they can be. We, in turn, become better prepared to serve the children that attend our schools,” she said.

“My experience as an ESP at large at the state and the national level has been one that changed my life forever,” she said. “My participation in the 2007 Education International World Congress in Berlin, Germany, was most memorable. TSTA/NEA members, counselors and people in the community expressed their pride in my attendance. They realize we can accomplish our goals when we work together.”

Recognizing the impact that local politics has on day-to-day life in the schools, Molina is very involved. “I make myself visible while attending school board meetings. Our school board knows my position as a leader of the organization and as an advocate for our students and parents. Our relationship is strong and the respect for each other is mutual,” she said.

She works school board and city elections, and helps the chamber of commerce generate questions and concerns for the school board candidate forum.

Yolanda Molina is retiring this year, marking the end of an impressive career that truly has changed lives. She offers these words of advice to those who follow her: “Do what you can to the best of your ability and when the opportunity arises, do not be afraid to step out of your comfort zone. Always strive for improvement and reach for the brass ring. You will see you can achieve your goal when you set your mind to it.”

WHY I CHOOSE TSTA/NEA

Leadership Training

“Working closely with our school administrators and school board members is something that comes naturally to me because of the training provided by TSTA/NEA. Our relationship is strong and the respect for each other is mutual.” — Yolanda Molina, Mercedes
Focus on TSTA’s Future

It still is about the future

Even as he approaches retirement, TSTA Executive Director E.C. Walker is focused on the future of TSTA, explaining how the principles that have guided us for the past decade can take us to even greater success in the years to come. By E.C. Walker

In July of 1965, as president of the Missouri Student NEA, I attended my first official NEA Representative Assembly in New York City. Twenty years after that, on July 1, 1985, I began working for the Missouri NEA as director of Government Relations and Research, and my first day on the job was working the PAC (political action committee) at the NEA Representative Assembly in Washington, D.C.

During the 20 intervening years, I taught social studies to seventh, eighth and ninth graders in New Franklin, Missouri (where I also coached some basketball and track, and drove a school bus). I attended graduate school at the University of Arkansas and Indiana University, and taught at North Dakota State University. I worked for the Indiana Oral History Project, and did research and speechwriting for a gubernatorial campaign in Indiana. I worked, briefly, for the Indiana State Senate and then for the Missouri Senate for six years. I left the Senate staff when I was elected County Commissioner, and did some contract lobbying while serving my term on the Commission. After that term is when I went to work for Missouri NEA.

After working for Missouri NEA for almost 16 years, then spending the last 10 1/2 years as executive director of TSTA, I am finishing my career at the NEA Representative Assembly in Chicago, 46 years after that first one.

There is a great temptation, as I write these words for the final chapter in my career, simply to revisit all of the successes we have had in the past decade. Over the course of those years, I have provided, through various speeches and reports, the details of how we moved the Association from the brink of bankruptcy to financial stability and strength. I have shared with you the changes we have made to strengthen our democratic principles and build the capacity of our locals. I shared the membership success stories from locals around the state, talked about how we ended decades of membership loss and turned it into a decade of membership growth, up by almost 30 percent over the past nine years. And that’s all true — we did all that, or rather you did all that, and I got to report it to you and talk about what was coming next. But I do not want to end my career talking about the past. I always have been more interested in what comes next than in what just happened. Rather than dwell on the past, I would rather draw from that past while focusing on the future.

So what I want to do in this final article is to highlight some of the basic principles we have emphasized over the past 10 years and look at how they will guide you to greater success in the future.

MISSION AND VISION

The Guiding Coalition was active for 10 years and look at how they will guide us well in the future.

DO MATTER

The leaders elected by the members at
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the local level will speak for the mem-
bers of that local — but only within
the parameters and positions set
and agreed to by the other elected of-
cicers and board members of the
local. If the members believe those
local leaders have violated their trust by not speak-
ing up, or by taking positions that
are contrary to the expressed interests of
the local, then the same members
that voted them in, could, and should, vote
them out in the next election.

Likewise, the delegates elected by those
local members to represent them at the
TSTA House of Delegates and the NEA
Representative Assembly will elect offi-
cers for TSTA and NEA, amend bylaws
and adopt standing rules to guide the
process of governing this association.

That is why TSTA governing docu-
ments place such emphasis on ensur-
ing open nominations, secret ballots
and other democratic procedures: It is
the bedrock for driving the collective
decision making process that guides the
future of the Association.

And when the election is over, when
the policy is set and the position is
stated, then every member and leader
has the responsibility to support the
winners, follow the policy and give
voice to the position. The only excep-
tion is that they can work internally,
through the process described above,
to change the leaders, policies and po-
sitions. But while they are working in-
ternally to change leaders, policies or
positions, all members and leaders are
called upon by the TSTA Bylaws to
support those leaders, policies and po-
sitions until they are changed through
the appropriate process.

Power is created not when 70,000
members each speak their own voice,
but when all 70,000 members speak
with one united voice, delivering the
message chosen through the collective
decision making process.

SELLING PROTECTION WILL BUILD NEITHER A STRONG ASSOCIATION NOR SUSTAINABLE POWER

For many years, TSTA recruited mem-
ers on the basis of “come join us and
we will take care of you.” We empha-
sized protecting the rights of individual
members above all else. And over a
30-year period of using this approach, we
had membership losses in 27 of
those years. We didn’t lose those mem-
bers because we weren’t any good at
protecting members; on the contrary,
we were very successful at getting the
legislature to pass laws providing better
working conditions for education em-
nployees and at enforcing those rights
at the local level, especially through
grudges and “bringing in the
lawyer.” We were the best at it — and
still are.

The problem is you cannot build
strong local associations based solely
on selling and providing protection to
members. It simply is not enough.

Fewer than 10% of the members ever
need that protection! There are
many other thing issues that have to be dealt
with, too many other interests that
members have waiting to be met, to
focus only on this one thing.

At the same time, this does not mean
that we don’t have to provide protec-
tion. It may not be what we should
sell, but there is no question we have
to provide it. One of the first responsi-
ibilities of a union is to protect its mem-
bers, especially leaders; this is even
more important in Texas where we are part
of an education system that is
becoming increasingly dysfunctional
every year. We must protect our
members from this dysfunctional
system to the best of our ability and
and to the limit of the resources available
for that purpose.

But if all we do is protect members
from that system, how are we going to
change the system? And if we don’t
change the system to get rid of the dys-
function, there will come a point when
the protection needs of individual
members will overwhelm our ability to
meet those needs.

You cannot remove the dysfunction in
the system merely by protecting mem-
bers. You can build power — at the
local level: TSTA must
focus resources on building strong,
powerful local associations capable of
standing toe-to-toe with other powers
within the community in order to pro-
vide a quality public school for every
child in that community!

And the irony in all of this? The strongest
protection for the rights of individual
members is a powerful local association.

BUILDING POWERFUL LOCALS IS THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENT FOR TSTA SUCCESS

Much of the recent success of TSTA
stems from the renewed focus of the
state association on building strong,
powerful local associations. While this
focus was in the documents from the
Guiding Coalition, real shape to the
effort was provided by the recommen-
dations of the Collective Bargaining
Task Force, established pursuant to an
NBI from the 2003 TSTA House of
Delegates, calling for TSTA to develop
and implement a plan to achieve col-
llective bargaining for education em-
nployees in Texas.

The Task Force determined that the
best way to get collective bargaining,
eventually, was to build enough power-
ful locals capable of pushing for exclu-
sive consultation rights with their
school districts. If that happened in
enough locals, eventually the legisla-
ture would have to act (as they eventu-
ally did when they gave meet-and-con-
er rights as a local option to police
officers and firefighters).

The Task Force then went on to pro-
vide something of a “road map” for
locals seeking to build this kind of power
in the form of the “power profile con-
tinuum.” Over the next few years, var-
ious locals began to build plans based on
this power profile, and to make sig-
nificant progress both in increasing
membership and in building power.

Based on what was learned from those
experiences, several “tweaks” were
made in the documents and it came to
be called the “Full Capacity Local”
plan. The TSTA Bylaws were amended
to require adoption and implementa-
tion of a Full Capacity Local plan in
order for a local to receive the full re-
bate from TSTA, making the plans a
part of the minimum standards for
TSTA locals.

Building strong, powerful locals with a
culture of organizing is the key to any
future success for TSTA. We have
demonstrated in several places, in dif-
ferent sized districts and locals, that
creating and implementing a Full Ca-
pacity Local plan is a successful way to
build such locals.

As TSTA moves forward, the primary
way we can cause positive change for
public education in Texas is by having
more and more local associations adopt
and implement such plans to achieve
power.

LEADERSHIP PIPELINE: KEY TO TSTA’S FUTURE

One of the key concepts inherent in
a successful culture of organizing is the
idea that every member is partly ac-
countable for the success of the organi-
zation and is expected to contribute
to achieving that success. In fact, for
us to be successful, the entire organ-
zation need to view themselves not
as members, but as citizens of our
community.

As with any successful community,
finding and training the right leaders is
necessary to ensure not only success
today, but sustained success in the fu-
ture. To that end, TSTA has developed
and now is implementing a “Leader-
ship Pipeline” based on the concept of
“Every Member a Citizen, Every Citi-
zen a Leader.”

During the tough times for TSTA in the
1990s and 2000s, TSTA lost sight of
the importance of a robust leader-
ship development effort in sustaining
the future of the organization. As we
began the task of rebuilding the
strength of TSTA by following the ef-
forts of the Guiding Coalition, we
began to re-emphasize the value and
necessity of a strong leadership devel-
opment program.

However, it was the vision of the Lead-
ership Pipeline brought by current
TSTA President Rita Haecker that
called caus us to accept the reality of leader-
ship development in an organizing
culture, which is that we need all
members to accept their citizenship
and become engaged in building the
success of the association.

The vision of a “pipeline” as the mode
of this kind of leadership development
emphasizes the “intake” point of the act
of joining — every person who joins
becomes not only a citizen but a poten-
tial leader. Not all citizens have the
same talents, circumstances or inter-
ests, so there must be a system for
“funneling” the citizens through the
pipeline and its series of filters to iden-
tify the strengths and interests of each
citizen and making sure that those citi-
zens with the right circumstances, tal-
ents and interests are able to move for-
ward through the right series of
trainings, workshops, educational pro-
grams and experiences to emerge as
leaders of the community, holding
those positions that fit their talents,
time and commitment.

It is a daunting task to build the cur-
riculum for this pipeline, and to create
and implement a system of tracking
and matching, with appropriate com-
munication and selection processes,
to produce the desired result: a core
of leaders with the right knowledge, skills
and understanding, supported by a
base of citizens all committed to
achieving the mission of TSTA. While
I stand that this program will contin-
tine to need changing and improving as we move forward, I am confident that we now have the Leadership Pipeline in place and are ready to be-
come, once again, the most credible
source of leaders in the education com-
munity in Texas — and, accordingly ,
the education association with the best
leaders in the nation.

FINAL COMPONENTS: PASSION AND COMMITMENT

The final and, in some ways most es-
sential, components of strong leader-
sip are two elements that cannot be
taught in workshops or learned in
courses; yet they are the two most es-
sential elements for sustained success:
passion and commitment.

The most successful leaders for TSTA
(or, truly for any organization) are
those who are totally passionate about
the mission of the organization and
completely committed to achieving
success — for the organization. While
strong leaders often bring an element
of personal charisma, the best leaders
never let their personal ambition take
precedence over association success,
and it is their commitment to and pas-
sion about the mission that ensure the
proper perspective.

With these thoughts I bring my work-
ing career to a close. Perhaps there
could be an epilogue or two, or maybe
all that is left is an epigraph. In either
case, I ask that you remain: committed
to each other, committed to the future.
Going green in Wichita Falls

With a student achievement or professional development grant from the NEA Foundation

“Students engage in learning when they have an interest in the topic and can connect what they learn to their everyday lives,” she said. “The NEA Foundation’s $5,000 grant this year for our ‘Go Green’ project made it possible for my fifth grade team but the whole school is involved. For the ‘Go Green’ grant, Golden’s student teacher, Andrew Mosely, wrote several lesson plans; counselor Diane Lockard shared a short movie by her granddaughter Mosely; wrote several lesson plans; counselor Diane Lockard shared a short movie by her granddaughter Tom Brox, social studies; and Willis Hogan, fifth grade aide.

When she receives a grant, not just the fifth grade team but the whole school is involved. For the “Go Green” grant, Golden is the language arts part of the fifth grade team, others are Doni Kaufold, science; Robin Carruthers, math; Tom Brox, social studies; and Willis Hogan, fifth grade aide.

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“Grants allow me to meet the needs of my diverse learners,” Golden said.

How does she fund this creativity? Grants. In seven years, her students and her school have been awarded grants totaling almost $25,000, including two $5,000 grants from the NEA Foundation.

“Grants allow me to meet the needs of my diverse learners,” Golden said.

In the Classroom

Reserve Nature Center, River Bend Nature Center and Quartz Mountain Nature Park — recording their experiences on their iPods and uploading onsite field trip reports to the school website on topics such as alternative energy sources and the environmental impact of consumer choices.

Students then surveyed their school and community on attitudes about and knowledge of green topics, analyzing the results and presenting them in graphic form. They reflected on the results through blogging, texting and podcasts.

At the end of the project, students worked in teams to design lesson plans for younger students based on their experiences and held a “Go Green” fair for their school and community. Booths displayed student work for the year and included interactive electronic experiences. Local organizations and businesses also hosted booths and held seminars at the fair.

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Hays and Del Valle stop dangerous language
Take a good look at your contract. You may have agreed to work up to 300 days without additional compensation.

Here is the troubling contract language, as recommended to school districts statewide by the Texas Association of School Boards: “The District shall pay you according to the compensation plan adopted by the Board each school year. Your salary includes consideration for all assigned duties, responsibilities, and tasks, regardless of the actual number of hours or days (including days not designated on the school calendar) that you work during this contract. Your salary shall be reduced for absences in excess of authorized, paid leave.”

When Del Valle Education Association members noticed the language in their contract for next year, they took action. Their Boards: “The District shall pay you according to the compensation plan adopted by the Board each school year. Your salary includes consideration for all assigned duties, responsibilities, and tasks, regardless of the actual number of hours or days (including days not designated on the school calendar) that you work during this contract. Your salary shall be reduced for absences in excess of authorized, paid leave.”

Texas State Teachers Association, has won a great victory on behalf of the teachers in Hays CISD,” the email said. “Several weeks ago, HEA raised concerns about new language that was inserted into the teacher contract for the 2011-12 school year. This language opened the door to teachers working up to 300 days without a penny of additional compensation.”


HAWKS SOAR TO 5A CHAMPIONSHIP
“Did I think we were going to win it? I wouldn’t say that, but I knew we had the ability to win it all,” coach and TSTA member Karin Keeney said. Her Hebron High varsity volleyball team in Lewisville ISD won the 5A state championship this year.

The Hebron Hawks ended the season 44-7, and injuries plagued the team during the district race. “It definitely hurt us, but this group of kids put it together when it counted,” Keeney said. “This team had a ton of talent and, after losing last year deep in the playoffs, they also had the drive and desire to do it. We went the entire playoff run — seven matches — without dropping a single set. This has not been done at the 5A level since rally scoring came in 2004.”

Ten members of Keeney’s team graduated this year, her biggest group ever. It’s a loss on both a professional and personal level.

“Many of these seniors had older sisters that played in the program in earlier years, so I have known them since they were in elementary school,” she said. “I knew when these kids were freshmen that this was the next group that had a chance to win it all. Most of the core group were on varsity their sophomore year.”

Hebron volleyball team visited the Capitol in Austin March 9, where they were honored with a resolution on the Senate floor. “I have some great kids who deserve all the recognition they can get!” Keeney said.

TSTA-Student Program: Elections, Awards
TSTA-Student Program held its 55th Annual Conference and House of Delegates March 25-27 in Austin. Delegates and member participants engaged in association business and professional development sessions, and celebrated at an awards banquet that featured NEA Student Program Chair Tommie Leaders of the University of Nebraska- Omaha as the keynote speaker.

The newly elected state leadership team for 2011-12 includes President Danielle Thorp, University of Houston-Downtown; Vice President Kevin Jackson, University of Texas at Austin; and Secretary Lisa Benson, Texas A&M University at College Station.

All participants had the opportunity to attend three of the following professional development sessions:

• How to Build Your Classroom on a Budget: Renee Angellik, presenter

WHY I CHOOSE TSTA/NEA
Legislative Action
“I have been a TSTA member for 20 plus years. I am sorry to say I have been to only one local meeting, but I stay involved by calling and writing those who are in office when the Legislative Alerts go out. I appreciate all that TSTA does for all of us in education!” — Karin Keeney, Lewisville
Dinosaur Games: Heather Cato, presenter

Why Didn’t I Learn This in College: Kimberly Endlesy, presenter

Contract Interventions for ELL Students: Noel Bezette, Ph.D., presenter

Bilingual and ELL: Closing the Achievement Gap: Paty Marquez, presenter

TSTA-SP invited former TSTA-SP president Dennis Van Roekel to the library of Congress; Association of Bilingual Educators members and students march in the local Chorro Days parade dressed in Cat in the Hat costumes; TSTA-Retired members, including John Pochelt of Houston, return to school to read; Socrates Education Association and Slater Middle School FTO host a celebration at Barnes & Noble Bookstore, including performances by the school choir and mariachi group; High Points Elementary in Cedar Hill ISD holds a storybook parade, followed by readings by Dads of Great Students—including former NEA-Dallas president Dale Kaiser, wearing the hat.

October 2011


• Outstanding Local Leader: Margie Potter, Lone Star College-Kingwood

• Outstanding Underclassman: Jennifer Beauchamp, Lone Star College-Kingwood

• Outstanding Local Advisor: Noel Bezette, Ph.D., Lone Star College-Kingwood

OH, THE BOOKS YOU’LL READ

First Lady Michelle Obama, Librarian of Congress James H. Billington and First Lady Michelle Obama, Librarian of Congress James H. Billington and Librarian of Congress James H. Billington and Librarian of Congress James H. Billington and Librarian of Congress James H. Billington and NEA President Dennis Van Roekel welcomed a star-studded lineup of readers and 400 local schoolchildren to the library of Congress for NEAs Read Across America Day, March 2. Among the celebrity readers were Secretaries of Education Arne Duncan, Superbowl champion Donald Driver, Top Chef host Padma Lakshmi and chefs Carla Hall and Mike Isaacella, designer Camila Alves, journalists Norah O’Donnell and Luke Russert, and actors Jessica Alba, Bridget Moynahan, Carrie Underwood, Gwyneth Paltrow, Alex Rodriguez, Serena Williams, Selena Gomez and Shaquille O’Neal.

Did you miss the party this year? Check out www.nea.org/tradecross for ideas on putting together your own local Read Across America celebration in 2012. The website also has reading tips and book lists for year-round use.

NEWS FROM TSTA-RETIRED

In the March elections, there was one nominee for each TSTA-Retired office: Johnnetta Williams of Dallas for president and Jay-Ann Rucker of El Paso for vice president. They were automatically elected to two-year terms that begin July 15. The other officers are Secretary Paul Hauk of El Paso and Treasurer John Cutchel of Houston, whose terms will end in 2012.

TSTA-Retired Annual Meeting: TSTA-R met at the public library in downtown El Paso on April 13-14. Attendees welcomed a newly formed group from the Austin area, the Capital Area Retired Educators (CARE). After the business session Wednesday, members enjoyed a meal with entertainment by the Yedla High School dance group, “Dancing With The Stars.” On the second day, two workshops were held. One was by Ronald Reeves, a local high school teacher who frequently performs at a comedy club, on “Laughter in Your Life.” The second workshop, by Antonio Galindo of NEA Member Benefits, was a detailed presentation of benefits available to retired members.

Members collected funds for the Jack Kinnaman Scholarship Fund, operated by the NEA Foundation. The scholarship is given annually to a student in the NEA-Student Program. TSTA affiliates for college students. If you are interested in making a donation, make your check payable to the NEA Foundation and mail it to TSTA-R, attention Bianca Espinoza, 316 West 12th Street, Austin 78701. The TSTA-R donation will be presented at the NEA-Retired Annual Meeting.

TSTA House of Delegates: Retired members elected 24 representatives to the TSTA House of Delegates, where they presented an amendment to the TSTA Legislative Program to increase to full certification the minimum requirement for holding any supervisory or administrative position. The amendment passed without opposition. Retired delegates collected pre-retired memberships and gave prizes to two lucky recipients. For fundraising, a drawing for an Exxon/Mobil gas card was held. Retired delegates participate in interregional activities by acting as mentors to TSTA-Student Program delegates and advisors to the Texas Faculty Association delegates.

NEA-Retired West Regional Conference: This event was held April 9-11 at the Hyatt Regency Hotel Resort and Spa in Santa Ana Pueblo, New Mexico (Albuquerque). Six Texans attended. The president and TSTA staff person attended training on Saturday; other attendees joined the conference Sunday and Monday. There were opportunities for personal growth and fun, as well as association growth and stability.

Social networking and membership growth were primary themes of the conference. Geraldine Smith-Palmer of Dallas won a free room, provided by NEA-Retired for a newly involved member.

Upcoming events:

• The June 8-9 TSTA-R Board of Directors meeting was cancelled.

• The June 27-29 NEA-Retired Annual Meeting in Chicago is at the Swissotel. The meeting is open to all NEA-Retired elected delegates, NEA-Retired members and guests.

• June 30-July 5 is the NEA Annual Meeting and Representative Assembly. See details in the spring issue of the TSTA Advocate.

• Sept. 9-10 is the next TSTA-R Board of Directors meeting at TSTA Headquarters.

• Tickets for the Quilt Give-A-Way will go on sale in September. The tickets are for a chance to win a throw-size quilt made by a retired member out of donated TSTA and NEA T-shirts. Watch for more information.

You can help form a unit in your region. Help is just a phone call away. Contact Bianca Espinoza at 800-324-5355 or bianca@tsta.org or email President Williams at townview@swbell.net.
Save $5 a day, up to $25 on a weekly or weekend rental when PC® 113761 is included in your reservation. Offer valid for vehicle pickup through December 31, 2011. Include your NEA discount CDPI® 50665 on all your rentals for additional savings.

Go to neamc.com/hertz often to find more great offers, to reserve and to enroll in fee waived Hertz #1 Club Gold®. Reserve online or call 1-800-654-2200.
texas-sized savings
NATIONWIDE THRILLS!

Texas State Teachers Association members have exclusive access to great corporate discounts and specials on theme parks and attractions including the Walt Disney World® Resort, Universal Orlando® Resort, Disneyland® Park, Las Vegas & Broadway shows and performances, Sea World®, Six Flags, and Cirque du Soleil®! Also save on car rentals, movie tickets, hotels, tours and special events across the US.

Visit TicketsAtWork.com and create a new account using code: TSTA
Or call toll free: 1.800.331.6483