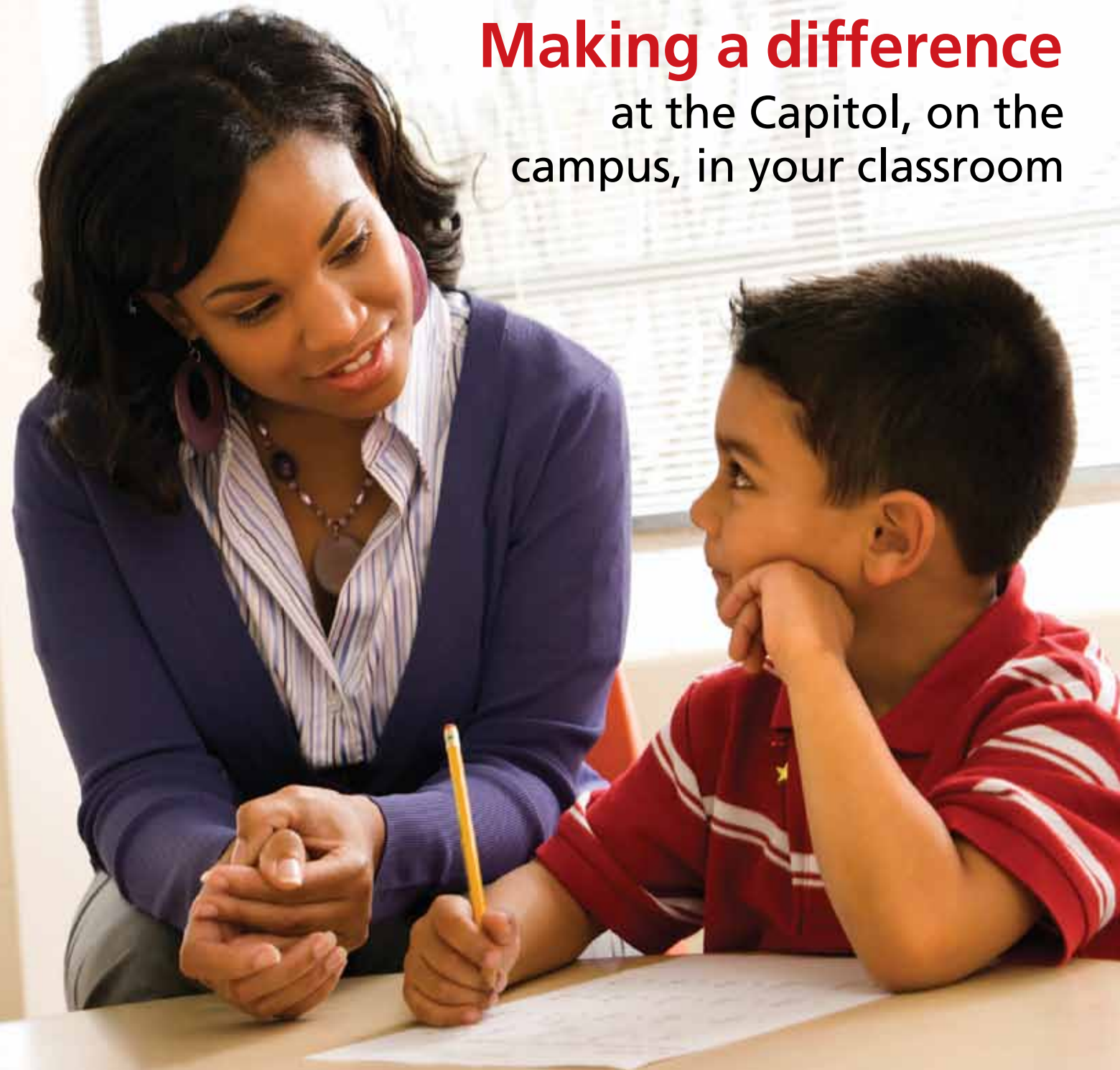


ADVOCATE

Texas State Teachers Association/National Education Association

Summer 2013

Making a difference
at the Capitol, on the
campus, in your classroom



Most state funds restored
Make sure your schools benefit

High-stakes tests cut back
The joy of teaching returns!

Local advocacy pays off
Electing school boards that care

What do we do now? We organize.



Thanks to the active involvement of TSTA members, the 2013 legislative session was definitely an improvement over 2011. Every one of you who supported our endorsed candidates, signed petitions, and contacted your legislators deserves credit. But the well-funded forces of privatization also made some progress, presenting us with new challenges — and new opportunities.

One of our biggest victories was convincing legislators to restore almost \$4 billion of the \$5.4 billion the legislative majority cut from public schools two years ago. It was a step in the right direction.

TSTA also was instrumental in killing a proposal for private school vouchers and enacting legislation to cut back on high-stakes standardized testing and strengthen the Teacher Retirement System (TRS) defined benefits pension plan.

The progress we made in 2013 was not an accident. Our work started after the 2011 session, when we began meeting with pro-education legislative candidates. On Feb. 1, 2012, we launched our Stop the Cuts campaign, which made restoration of school funding a major issue in key legislative races. We helped replace education-cutters and school privateers with pro-education candidates.

We did not win every battle. A bill passed that will raise the cap on charter schools from 215 to 305 by 2019, even though the Texas Education Agency lacks the resources to adequately regulate the charters already operating. And we were unable to defeat a provision of that bill that allows a district to convert campuses serving an entire high school feeder zone to charters. Remember, charters are free from many important state protections for educators and students, including class size limits, teacher contracts, and the salary schedule.

What do we do now? We organize. These legislative issues provide us opportunities to organize and recruit new members based on the impact they have on employees, their pocketbooks, and their students. And we must work to elect local school board members who value educational employees.

The exact amount will vary from district to district, but on average, school districts will receive a little more than \$500 per student in additional state funding over the next two years. Your local field staff and our Public Affairs office can provide you the exact number for your district. With that figure, you can make a case before your school board for a pay raise or funds to cover costly health insurance premiums. School employees suffered the brunt of the 2011 cuts with layoffs and overcrowded classes. We should receive some of the benefit from the recovery.

One key feature of the strengthened TRS plan is an appropriation of state funds to pay for a requirement, beginning in 2014-2015, that school districts contribute 1.5 percent of their payroll to TRS. If your district tries to take that money out of employee salaries, remind your school board that the Legislature appropriated \$330 million statewide to cover those costs.

If your school board tries to use the “district charter” provision in SB2 to convert some of your neighborhood schools to charters and take contractual rights from employees, push back— loudly and aggressively. Tell the local media why this is bad for educational quality. Recruit and organize new members to increase your power, and recruit and elect new school board members.

Education Austin used the school district’s controversial charter conversion to launch a community-based campaign that overhauled the Austin school board last November. They were successful because their membership was engaged, and they remain a force to be reckoned with in Austin ISD.

The campaign for excellent schools — and respect for educational employees — doesn’t begin and end with legislative sessions. It is ongoing. We had better results at the Capitol this year. Now we have to organize those results to reach our members and fellow educators at the local level.

—Rita Haecker, TSTA President

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How do we begin to address gaps in achievement and disproportionality?



Locals score impressive wins in board races

Public schools are governed by volumes of state and federal laws and regulations, but many of the most important issues that impact students and school employees every day are made by the local school board.

For example, the state just restored almost \$4 billion of the funds cut in 2011, but local school boards will decide how much of that money is invested in teachers, students, and school employees.

One of TSTA's top strategic goals is working to win school board majorities. Through those efforts, we have an opportunity to develop true educator-community partnerships that can have a powerful impact on local school board decisions.

At least 18 TSTA locals were involved in the May school board elections. Thanks to the work of TSTA local leaders, members, and staff, we scored some impor-



tant victories. At last count, our preferred local candidates won 26 elections and lost eight, with four elections going to a June 15 runoff.

In locals where TSTA provided political action committee support in addition to grassroots local efforts and member communication, we won 16 races, lost four, and have four runoffs.

- Clear Creek — one win, one loss
- Dallas — four wins
- El Paso — one win, two runoffs (one leading at press time)
- Garland — one win
- Harlandale — two wins
- Harlingen — one loss
- LaMarque — one win
- Pflugerville — two wins

- Pt. Arthur — one win, one loss
- Spring Branch — one win, one loss
- Ysleta — two wins, two runoffs (one leading at press time)

In locals where TSTA provided staff support, assisted with candidate screening, and, in some cases, provided mail and phone communication to members, we won 10 and lost four.

- Killeen — one win, one loss
- San Marcos — one loss, bond election passed
- Socorro — one loss
- San Antonio Alliance — four wins
- Southside — three wins
- Judson — two wins, one loss

— By Ed Martin, Director of TSTA Public Affairs

NOTICE OF FILING DEADLINE

The filing deadline for TSTA state president, TSTA state vice president, and NEA director for Texas, place 3, is Sept. 15, 2013. Each position carries a three-year term; the state officers' terms begin July 15, 2014, and the NEA director's term begins Sept. 1, 2014. The NEA director also will serve as a voting member of the TSTA Board of Directors for a three-year term beginning July 15, 2014. Your filing form must be received at TSTA Headquarters in Austin by Sept. 15, 2013. Please contact Neocha Campbell in the Center for Executive and Governance at neochac@tsta.org or 877-ASK-TSTA for more information.

ELECTION RESULTS FROM THE HOD

At the April TSTA House of Delegates, Angela Davis of Dallas was elected NEA director for Texas, place 1, and Leonor Terrazas of El Paso and Karen Barnes of Austin were elected to ESP at large positions on the TSTA Board of Directors.

STATE COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS COMING SOON

TSTA has several statewide standing committees that focus on a wide variety of important issues and processes for our members. If you would like more information or to be considered for an appointment, please contact the Center for Executive and Governance at 877-ASK-TSTA.

BRIEFING: TIME TO SWITCH EMAIL ACCOUNTS

If you are receiving the Briefing newsletter through your school email account and would like to continue hearing from us during the summer months, email your name and home email address to clairem@tsta.org and we will switch it for you.



Education Austin sponsors immigration forum

Thousands of children in Austin schools are from immigrant families who wrestle daily with a confusing array of regulations and choices that affect their work and living environments. A family's ability to navigate this maze of regulations can directly impact a student's educational opportunities.

Education Austin co-sponsored a four-hour community forum for immigrant families on June 1 at Mendez Middle School. The event included workshops on topics such as immigration reform, how to become a U.S. citizen through the naturalization process, how to obtain special visas and other government permits, and how to obtain help with everyday living needs.

More than 25 nonprofit agencies provided information about their services, including Safe Place, American Gateways, Foundation Communities, Manos de Cristo, the Mexican Consulate, Growing Roots, Health Window, LifeWorks, Bernardo Kohler, and American Youth Works.

The event was made possible through a grant from the National Education Association — which supports comprehensive immigration reform — and the collaboration of the Austin Public Library, American Gateways, the Mexican Consulate, the Workers Defense Project, the Austin Immigrant Rights Coalition, and the University Leadership Initiative.

The vast majority (71 percent) of undocumented immigrants in the United States have relatives who are citizens, according to a recent poll by Latino Decisions. Immigration reform that includes a path to citizenship would benefit many of these families.



FIXING THE DAMAGE

It's a start

By Clay Robison, Public Affairs Specialist

The Stop the Cuts campaign made a difference. Elections results mattered. All the work done by TSTA members, other advocates, and legislators who truly value neighborhood public schools — and want to keep them public — had a very real impact on what happened in Austin. We won some important victories for educators and school children, but with dozens of well-funded school privateers masquerading as “education reformers” at the Capitol, it wasn’t easy, and the battle will continue.

Almost \$4 billion of the \$5.4 billion cut from public education two years ago was restored, private school vouchers were soundly defeated, high-stakes testing was reduced, the Teacher Retirement System was strengthened, and many retirees were given a long-overdue cost-of-living adjustment.

A new law was enacted to increase the number of charter schools allowed to operate in Texas, even though the state can’t adequately regulate and weed out the bad schools already operating. But an effort to totally eliminate a cap on charters failed. And so did bills that would have repealed the teacher salary schedule, allowed school districts to ignore important state standards governing class sizes and employment rights, and allowed unelected state bureaucrats and private contractors to take control of struggling schools away from their local communities.

For all our successes, however, TSTA and other public school advocates still face many challenges. The hole that the 2011 Legislature dug into the education budget hasn’t been completely filled, and enrollment will continue to soar by about 85,000 students each year. And the school privateers will be back, trying to peddle the same unproven “reform” schemes. In fact, the fight may have resumed by the time you read this.

Immediately after the 140-day regular session adjourned on May 27, Memorial Day, Gov. Rick Perry called a special session on legislative and congressional redistricting. Although his initial call was limited to that topic, the gov-

ernor could add additional issues at any time, and the forces of school privatization were lining up to be added to the list.

Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst also served notice that he would seek a change in Senate rules to allow bills to be debated in the Senate during the special session by a simple majority, rather than the traditional two-thirds vote. That would make it more difficult for public school advocates to continue to block bad legislation — such as private school vouchers — in the upper chamber. But vouchers have faced strong opposition in the House, where an overwhelming bipartisan vote helped kill them during the regular session.

Watch for legislative updates and alerts from TSTA and check our website, www.tsta.org, for other education bills passed during the regular session. **At press time the bills listed below could still be subject to a veto by the governor.**

Here is a summary of how major education issues played out during the regular session:

SCHOOL FUNDING

Thanks to an improved economy and increased tax revenue, the Legislature convened in January with an \$8 billion surplus and a projected Rainy Day Fund balance of almost \$12 billion. That was more than enough money to fully restore the funding cut from schools in 2011 and meet other important state needs. TSTA reinforced this point through our Stop the Cuts campaign and a bipartisan poll, conducted early in the session, showing that 66

percent of Texas voters favored using the Rainy Day Fund to restore the education money.

The fight at the Capitol, nevertheless, was tough. The first version of the new state budget, as approved by the Senate, would have restored only \$1.5 billion of the lost education funding. The House budget increased that to \$3 billion, but it was still short. Gov. Perry and the legislative leadership resisted spending Rainy Day dollars on education. But TSTA and other public school supporters continued to press our case, and the education funding level continued to rise as budget negotiations continued.

In the end, the Legislature left a projected \$8 billion of the Rainy Day Fund unspent — and spent none of it for education. The biggest chunk of Rainy Day spending — \$2 billion — was invested as seed money for future water development projects.

But since using the Rainy Day fund and a constitutional amendment related to the water funding both required a two-thirds vote, the support of Democratic legislators, as well as Republicans who valued public schools, was essential. During last year’s election, pro-education Democrats, with the support of TSTA, regained seven House seats, enough to increase their numbers from 48 to 55 in the 150-member House and break a two-thirds Republican stranglehold in the lower chamber. Throughout the session, House Democrats, led by budget conferee Sylvester Turner of Houston, refused to vote for the water funding until Republican leaders agreed to increase funding for

schools. The result was a restoration of \$3.93 billion to public education.

This is how the money breaks out.

- \$3.4 billion to the Foundation School Program, which would provide an average gain in maintenance and operations (M&O) revenue of \$228 per student in the 2013-2014 school year and \$300 in 2014-2015. The actual figures, however, will vary among districts.
- \$330 million to cover the cost of a new contribution — equal to 1.5 percent of payroll — that school districts will have to start contributing to the Teacher Retirement System fund.
- \$200 million for various grant programs, including pre-kindergarten and the Student Success Initiative, administered through the Texas Education Agency.

VOUCHERS

Before the session began, Senate Education Committee Chairman Sen. Dan Patrick, R-Houston, and Lt. Governor Dewhurst announced that legislation to dip into tax dollars to pay for private school vouchers was a top priority. Patrick, calling himself an “education evangelist,” preached that the legislation would help students in failing schools, and he deliberately mislabeled the proposal a “school choice” bill. In truth, as TSTA repeatedly pointed out, the bill had nothing to do with school choice because the vast majority of school children will continue to be educated in traditional public schools. And the legislation would have undermined public schools by diverting tax

money away from them for the benefit of private school owners.

A strong majority of legislators — Republicans and Democrats alike — agreed with TSTA and other members of the public school community that stood together against vouchers. Patrick succeeded in winning committee approval of his voucher bill, SB23, but he never could muster the necessary two-thirds vote to bring it up for debate by the full Senate.

The House also decisively slammed the door on the idea. Rep. Abel Herrero, D-Robstown, offered an amendment to the House version of the state budget to prohibit any spending of tax money on vouchers. The amendment was adopted, 103-43, with all the House Democrats and half the Republicans voting for it.

RETIREMENT BENEFITS

The Teacher Retirement System’s defined benefit plan, which some privateers wanted to convert to a risky 401(k) style plan, was saved — and strengthened. And, despite political pressure to support a weaker version of SB1458, the TRS legislation, TSTA withheld support until we were certain that the state was stepping up to increase its contribution to this crucial nest egg for retired teachers, most of whom don’t receive Social Security benefits, and that active members wouldn’t end up with a take-home pay cut.

SB1458 increases the state’s contribution to the TRS fund by almost \$100 million over the next two years and also requires a contribution equal to 1.5 percent of payroll from school dis-

tricts. The state budget will pay for the local districts’ 1.5 percent contribution, and the state’s contribution rate will increase from the current 6.4 percent to 6.8 percent in fiscal 2014 and fiscal 2015. The bill will increase employee contributions from the current 6.4 percent to 6.7 percent in 2015, 7.2 percent in 2016, and 7.7 percent in 2017, a phased-in change TSTA requested to avoid an immediate reduction in take-home pay for active teachers. And any future decrease in state and school district contributions will be matched with an equivalent decrease in employee contributions, keeping the employee contribution rate lower than the state-local government contribution.

The measure provides a 3 percent cost of living adjustment (COLA) for retirees who retired on or before Aug. 31, 2004 — about two-thirds of retirees — and it will be the first COLA since 2001. SB1458 also raises the retirement age for full benefits to 62, but all employees who have five years in the system by Sept. 1, 2014, will be grandfathered, meaning their retirement benefits will be covered by previous law.

HIGH-STAKES TESTING

Yielding to angry parents and teachers weary of students being robbed of valuable class time, the Legislature enacted HB5, which reduces the number of end-of-course (EOC) tests under the STAAR testing program from 15 to five — English Language Arts I and II, Algebra I, Biology, and U.S. History. Individual school districts, at their own discretion, can administer English III and Algebra II tests for diagnostic purposes only. The bill also repeals the require-

ment that EOC scores determine 15 percent of a student’s course grades.

Reducing high-stakes testing was a major priority of TSTA, which recognizes the importance of allowing teachers the time to teach and students the time to learn. Testing and its dominant role in school and district assessments were requiring teachers to spend large amounts of each semester administering tests and preparing their students for them, and HB5 is a big step

toward correcting the problem. The Legislature also enacted HB866 to limit the number of tests for students in the lower grades.

HB5 creates a foundation plan for high school graduation that will include 22 credits — four in English Language Arts, three in math, three in science, three in social studies, two in a foreign language, one in fine arts, one in PE, and five electives. Students also will be allowed to earn an additional endorse-

ment in one of these areas — STEM, Business and Industry, Public Services, and Arts and Humanities. Each endorsement will require students to earn a total of 26 credits, including an additional flexible math credit, a flexible science credit, and two additional electives.

All students must select an endorsement but may choose to complete only the basic foundation plan after grade 10 and with parental consent.

Students also can choose a distinguished level of performance, which would include completing the foundation program, an endorsement, and an Algebra II credit. Students who complete the distinguished level would be eligible for automatic admission to state universities under the top 10 percent law. But all high school graduates would be eligible to apply for admission to a state university and apply for a TEXAS grant.

CHARTER SCHOOLS

As originally filed by Sen. Patrick, SB2 would have removed the state cap of 215 for charters and allowed an unlimited expansion of charter schools. It also would have required school districts to sell or lease unused buildings to charter schools for a nominal \$1 a year. In other words, public school facilities constructed with local tax dollars could have been turned over virtually for free to private companies operating charters.

Patrick removed the free raid on public school facilities from the bill, and he agreed to a new charter cap — 305 — in the version of SB2 approved by the Senate. But that still allowed the cre-

ation of 90 new charters, in increments, from now until 2020. And the Senate bill allowed districts to grant charter status to campuses serving an entire high school feeder zone — or as much as 15 percent of a district’s students. These so-called “district charters” would not be required to have teacher contracts, certified teachers in classrooms, class size limits, or other important protections for educators, students, and parents. The Senate did add a stricter accountability provision for charter school operators.

The House removed the “district charter” provision from SB2, and it reduced the number of new charters that could be created, incrementally over the next several years, to 60. But a House-Senate conference committee, heavily influenced by school privatization lobbyists, restored the “district charter” provision in the final version of the bill. And it raised the current 215 cap on charters to more than 300 during this decade, the Senate level.

TSTA opposed the final version of SB2 because it will expand charters at a time when traditional public schools are still struggling to recover from last session’s budget cuts, and the Texas Education Agency has been unable to effectively regulate existing charters. Charters can operate without important state standards, such as class size limits and teacher employment rights. And the “district charter” language could remove these important safeguards from a large number of neighborhood schools.

Charters are not a “silver bullet” or sure-fire solution for educational prob-

lems. On average, they do not perform as well as traditional public schools. Some charters are good. Others are bad. But SB2 offers the school privatization interests who led the push for charter expansion an additional opportunity to reap profits from public schools — and at the expense of most school children — through new charter operator contracts.

One of the major groups pushing charter expansion was the deliberately misnamed Texans for Education Reform, whose leaders include several key players from a better-known group, Texans for Lawsuit Reform. For years, these conservative business leaders have spent millions of dollars on political contributions and lobbying efforts to win laws making it difficult for consumers to sue businesses and insurance companies for medical malpractice, fraud, and other damages. In essence, they were protecting their business profits under the guise of “lawsuit reform.” Now, the same individuals are trying to convert public schools into business profit centers under the guise of “education reform.”

VIRTUAL SCHOOLS

Texans for Education Reform also supported HB1926, which passed and will expand the online Virtual School Network to for-profit operators. TSTA was successful in preventing the bill from including a statewide “virtual voucher” for anyone wanting to establish a for-profit online school. But the bill will allow tax dollars to be diverted to for-profit operators of some online instruction while demanding little, if any, public accountability.

ACHIEVEMENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

SB1718, which would have created a statewide charter “Achievement School District” for low-performing schools, failed during the regular session. So did HB300, which would have allowed school districts to ignore most state educational standards, including class size limits, teacher compensation, and curriculum. But either bill, especially SB1718, could be revived during the special session.

CERTIFICATION AND EVALUATION

SB1403 was enacted to address educator preparation and mentoring programs, professional development, and certification examinations. TSTA was instrumental in the removal of objectionable provisions from the bill, including a provision that would have repealed the minimum salary schedule and another that would have tied teacher pay to student test scores.

DISCIPLINE FOR SCHOOL BUSES

The Legislature enacted SB1541, which will allow school bus drivers to discipline disruptive students by sending them to their school principal.

This has been only a small sampling of the hundreds of education-related bills considered during the regular session. To find out what else passed — or was vetoed by the governor — check for a more complete listing on our website, www.tsta.org.

TRS CHANGES

Here’s a quick rundown of what the changes in SB1458 will mean for active Teacher Retirement System members and retirees.

CONTRIBUTION RATES

- State employee contributions will increase gradually over four years – from 6.4 percent in 2014 to 7.7 percent in 2017 – to protect employees from facing a sudden increase.
- The state contribution will increase to 6.8 percent in 2013-2014. Local school districts will make a 1.5 percent contribution starting in 2014-2015, and, for that one school year only, the state budget will pay for the 1.5 percent.
- If there is a decrease in the state rate, the active member rate and the school district rate would be reduced by an equivalent percentage, keeping the active member rate below that of the combined state and local contribution.

Contributions	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
State	6.4%	6.8%	6.8%	6.8%	6.8%
School District	--	--	1.5%	1.5%	1.5%
Member	6.4%	6.4%	6.7%	7.2%	7.7%

RETIREMENT BENEFITS

- The bill grandfathers full pension eligibility for all vested active members (those who have five years in the system on 9-1-14). Active members now in their third year in the system will not receive full benefits until they reach the age of 62.
- It provides a 3 percent cost of living adjustment (COLA) for all who retired on or before Aug. 31, 2004, which is about two-thirds of the retirees.

TRS CARE

The state contribution to TRS Care was increased by \$80 million.

TSTA poll

Hispanics take school cuts personally

By Clay Robison, Public Affairs Specialist



Hispanic Texans in the three major border population centers have a strong, personal connection to their public schools and believe they and their children were personally hurt by the \$5.4 billion in state budget cuts two years ago. These are among the findings of a Latino Decisions survey commissioned by TSTA this spring.

Latino Decisions — a respected, national Hispanic research firm — interviewed 400 Latino adults in El Paso, Laredo, and the Rio Grande Valley. The poll was conducted March 14-24 with respondents selected at random in both landline and cell phone only households. Interviews were conducted in Spanish and English at the subject’s discretion. The poll’s margin of error is plus or minus 4.9 percent. For more on the poll, see Latino Decisions’ blog for May 6 at www.latinodecisions.com/blog.

results of the cuts became defining campaign issues.

Some 67 percent of border Hispanics, according to the poll, knew about the budget cuts and cited specific negative consequences for their children, including fewer teachers, crowded schools, and cuts to after-school and extracurricular programs.

The poll also shows it is unlikely that Hispanics, who have watched enrollment in their local schools grow rapidly since the cuts, will give lawmakers credit for only partially restoring the funding. Some 75 percent of respondents favor tapping the Rainy Day Fund to increase school funding.

“The importance of public education to border area Texans should not be underestimated,” said poll director Sylvia Manzano. “Our findings demonstrate education policy commands significant attention and concern.”

She noted that three incumbent Republican legislators who voted for the school cuts in 2011 were unseated by Latino Democratic challengers in 2012 after the specific, negative

More than 90 percent of Hispanic parents want to see their children at least graduate from college, and more than 60 percent want their children to attend graduate school or obtain a professional degree. The education funding cuts, Manzano said, “are seen as an obstacle to the high aspirations they hold for their children.”

Some 77 percent of border Hispanics, according to the survey, have children currently or previously enrolled in local public schools. Nearly 40 percent have close family members or friends who work for their local school district. Most volunteer and raise funds for their schools, and 82 percent attend school-sponsored events, making public schools the heart of their communities.

TV SPOTS HIGHLIGHT CRITICAL PARTNERSHIP

Three teacher members were featured in Spanish-language television spots that aired this spring in the Rio Grande Valley, Laredo, and El Paso. Sponsored by TSTA and funded by an NEA grant, the ads emphasize the partnership and hard work of parents and teachers in helping children succeed in school and, later, college.



ARISA CARR

Many of Arisa Carr’s first grade students at Pebble Hills Elementary in Ysleta ISD would be the first in their families to graduate from college. “I tell them that they can do it, as long as they try and work as hard as they can,” Carr said. “They are very interested, very excited.”

She enjoys working with parents to prepare their children to reach that goal. “It’s a joint effort. It does take work from the parents, as well as the teachers and the school,” she said.

Carr moved to El Paso as a child, attended Ysleta ISD — where she now teaches — and graduated from the University of Texas at El Paso. She has been teaching for six years.

Watch her ad at http://tsta.org/sites/default/files/El_PasoAd.mp4.



STACY ROGERIO

Stacy Rogerio feels fortunate to be teaching second grade in the same school she attended as a second grader, Don Jose Gallego Elementary School in Laredo ISD.

She plays a critical role in building the strong foundation her students need to succeed in school. “Their minds are just like sponges. You can make a big difference early in their lives,” Rogerio, a native of Laredo and graduate of Texas A&M International University, said.

“I am happy to give back to my community and let my students see that you can be successful, even if you come from a poor family,” she said. “I let them understand they can get to college. You have to believe in yourself and pursue your dreams. There’s no limit to what you can do.”

Watch her ad at <http://tsta.org/sites/default/files/LaredoAd.mp4>.



CELIA SAIZ-GUERRERO

Celia Saiz-Guerrero grew up in Brownsville and worked in retail for several years while volunteering at her children’s schools. Six years ago, she earned a degree from the University of Texas at Brownsville and began teaching first grade at Skinner Elementary School.

Twice a year, on college awareness days, Brownsville teachers wear shirts from their alma maters and explain to their students why higher education is so important.

“You see the twinkle in their eyes when I talk about college. And the majority of them want to be teachers,” she said. Although the parents of many of her students didn’t attend college, “they look forward to their kids going to college.”

Watch her ad at <http://tsta.org/sites/default/files/BrownsvilleAd.mp4>.

Sta.bil.i.ty

By Marisa Maher

Noun: continuance without change; permanence; firmness in position. If only there were a more universal practice of this word in public education.



If only we were able to look beyond the next year or two in our profession and use the word “longevity” when making curriculum, funding, and state testing decisions. The lack of stability is the biggest issue facing public education today.

Ask most classroom teachers what their biggest concern is and likely they will tell you “budget.” Their issue isn’t necessarily lack of money, although clearly it is difficult to provide an optimum educational environment with decreasing funds. It is the unpredictable nature of funding that distracts from our planning. Teachers are very resourceful and wear many hats. Asking us to do more with less is nothing new. We are flexible and adaptable. But the unknown regarding the future of our job, our curriculum, or programs is disconcerting. The lack of stability is felt by every student in our classrooms.

There is a funding crisis in our state. The budget, in this state and in this nation, is being balanced on the backs of educators, and the bottom line is programs and personnel are being slashed. Who does this hurt the most? The students. Programs such as Advanced Placement, foreign languages, and electives are being cut. This leads to a narrower focus for students, and the well-rounded background of these students begins to diminish. Opportunities are lost. Potentials are never discovered.

Ask the same teachers what their second concern might be, and likely they will tell you “standardized testing” — not necessarily their existence but the constant change of requirements, standards, and subject area every election. Teachers realize the importance of testing students and holding them accountable. However, sweeping change in requirements every few years makes curriculum planning, school scheduling, and in-service training unpredictable, inconsistent, and inefficient. In transition years from one mandated test to a new format, students are out of class testing an inordinate number of days that could be spent in a classroom discovering new content. Instability creates an ineffective learning environment.

In my business classes, I teach that organizational change is difficult. Change makes people in all areas uncomfortable. And I teach them managerial tactics to help reduce the stress on employees and to facilitate a smooth transition. We as educators try to do this very thing in our classrooms.

We try to make natural alignments with the state standards. We implement cross-curricular material to help transition one subject to the next. We vertically align our courses so that subject material can be built upon with ease. We give explanations behind the decisions we make to provide students with a clearer understanding.

The same managerial leadership is not being displayed at the political levels where the change is occurring for our

“results-oriented production.” Show how taxpayer money directly contributes to students.

This is where the NEA comes into action. This organization IS our stability. This organization IS our support. This organization IS our voice. When we feel the system might be crumbling, or at least weakening around us, the NEA is our fortress. So much is accomplished through our government and policy thanks to this group. Due to

Asking us to do more with less is nothing new. We are flexible and adaptable. But the unknown regarding the future of our job, our curriculum, or programs is disconcerting. The lack of stability is felt by every student in our classrooms.

public schools. Without warning funding is altered. Course standards are realigned or cut altogether. Testing is newly generated and implementation is mandated before all the kinks are worked out. The instability of the educational environment makes planning and implementing successful teaching strategies demanding and difficult. And who does this hurt? The students.

So what’s the answer? Greater minds than mine have been working towards a solution, and although I don’t have the direct power to influence those at the top, I believe a viable solution is to begin at the local level. Begin with the stakeholders of the district. Keep your financial position transparent. Give explanations and SHOW you are financially responsible; don’t just say you are. Create a local environment of

the diligence and integrity of those involved, I have hope and optimism for the future of our professional and educational well-being.

As for me and my classroom, I will continue to adapt, alter, do more with less, and create a positive learning environment. I will stretch my creativity in order to accommodate all the new mandates while staying true to my curriculum, students, and fostering the transition of constant change.

Marisa Maher received the Ermalee Boice Instructional Advocacy Award (www.tsta.org/news-center/awards-grants) at the April TSTA Convention in Houston. She is a business teacher and head coach of the cross country and girls’ track teams at Dripping Springs High School in Dripping Springs ISD.



Fostering a love of reading for 16 years

“As an actor, I get to be different characters and experience different worlds. I want children to be able to do the same through a good book.”

Uma Thurman’s reading of “The Cat in the Hat” was dramatically different from her work in such movies as “Kill Bill” and “Pulp Fiction,” but it was just as impressive to her target audience.

“As a mother of three, with one now a teenager, I’ve seen the benefits of reading to and with my children throughout the span of childhood,” said Thurman, who read to more than 200 elementary school children at the New York City Public Library as part of NEA’s Read Across America event March 1.

“Reading has helped develop my children and my family. Spending that time together means so much,” she said.

“As an actor, I get to be different characters and experience different worlds,” said Jake T. Austin of “The Wizards of Waverly Place” television show, who joined Thurman and NEA President Dennis Van Roekel at the annual celebration of reading. “I want children to be able to do the same through a good book.”

Read Across America is the award-winning literacy program founded by NEA in 1997 through a partnership with Dr. Seuss Enterprises, L.P., and Random House. It is celebrated on or around the March 2 birthday of children’s author Dr. Seuss, aka Theodor Seuss Geisel. Interested in hosting your own event next year? Visit www.nea.org/read-across for ideas and resources.

SCENES FROM READ ACROSS AMERICA: Jake T. Austin, Uma Thurman, and NEA President Dennis Van Roekel in New York; a classroom full of cats in hats in Abilene; TSTA Vice President Noel Candelaria in Southwest ISD (San Antonio); and, on page 27, retired teachers, including Joanne Peschel, in Region 3D.



One region’s pledge: 10 books per member

Each year, TSTA members in Region 3D collect books for disadvantaged schools and volunteer to read during Read Across America. This year, schools in the Klein, Spring, and Aldine school districts were the beneficiaries.

“The schools are selected because of their need and because someone at the school is willing to coordinate the reading schedule,” said Joanne Peschel, a retired member who has supported Read Across America from its beginning, when she was still teaching and mentoring future teachers.

Every Region 3D member is asked to donate 10 or more new or gently used books. “They collect the books throughout the year from resale stores, garage sales, book sales, and friends whose children have grown,” Peschel said. “We especially like the Dr. Seuss books, and so do the children.”

How did Texas schools celebrate?

- ANGLETON:** We had a Dr. Seuss Day and invited guest readers from the community to read with the students. We also had “Help a Friend Read” time for our 3rd, 4th, and 5th graders to sit with a K-2 student and read a Dr. Seuss book together. Our Wildcat Ranger environmental club donated trees to plant around the campus after reading “The Lorax.” — Jai-Cheri Young
- AUSTIN:** Texas School for the Deaf’s Drama Club celebrated with Roald Dahl’s “Charlie and the Chocolate Factory.” Students adapted the play into American Sign Language and have each been developing their fun and quirky character! Which character is your favorite? Are you a Charlie or a Veruca? Maybe you’re a gum-popping Violet or a television-watching Mike! Students from TSD and Austin’s West Lake High School joined together for a character mixer on TSD’s campus! — Gabrielle Nocciolino
- 134 kindergarten students from Andrews Elementary celebrated with the help of representatives from the Austin Police Department, the Austin Public Library, Americorps, and the UT School of Information, along with Principal Laurie Barber. First-year librarian Danny Ramos commandeered Marines from the Public Affairs Division at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina, a female small-business owner, and a music educator from south Texas to conduct read-alouds via Skype. — Daniella Ramos
- DEL RIO:** We dressed a little different each day, with a catch phrase. Knock your socks off, read a good book: Crazy Sock Day! Be cool, read a book: Sunglasses Day! Let’s slip into a good book: Slipper Day! Hats off to reading: Crazy Hat Day! Read to your favorite bedtime friend: Stuffed Animal Day! — Rosella Ramon
- IRVING:** In our third grade classroom, we created Dr. Seuss character books, watched “The Lorax,” wrote Dear Mother Earth letters, read individually for 30 minutes, and wrote book reviews on our favorite Dr. Seuss books. — Talitha Basom
- KATY/DALLAS:** My grandsons attend Dallas International School. Since I am a retired public school teacher, a lifetime NEA member, and a former local president in Katy, I had some materials in storage that I had my grandsons give to their teachers...to inspire students to read. I plan to purchase and donate materials again next year.— Janene Adam
- KRUM:** Our PTO challenged every class to read 100 books in a week. The classes that met the challenge got cupcakes from our PTO to have a birthday party for Dr. Seuss. — Marian Martin
- ROBSTOWN:** Kick-off with author Gary Soto, door decorating contest, literary character dress-up day, crazy socks day, Seuss-themed meals, limerick contest, and much more! — Debra Murphy
- SOCORRO:** Socorro ISD students celebrated with videos. Community leaders — including the mayor, school board members, and University of Texas at El Paso athletes — are featured on the district’s YouTube channel, www.youtube.com/SocorroISD. — Glenda Hawthorne
- THE COLONY:** We set up a “story walk” — pages from a book placed along a walking trail — to encourage people to get outside in the fresh air AND read a story along the way. — Jenny Smith
- WESLACO:** The children dressed as characters from Dr. Seuss books, and each of our five classrooms presented itself to the others with chants, dances, and singing. — Hidalgo County Head Start Weslaco III
- WYLIE:** My students created a Wordle with at least 10 words that described their favorite book. We displayed them in the library windows and school hallways. — Shelley Salcido

A leadership challenge



The NEA president urged teachers to step up and take charge of the debate over what works in the classroom.



NEA President Dennis Van Roekel and TSTA President Rita Haecker challenged leaders attending TSTA’s House of Delegates meeting in Houston to lead the way for educators to save their local public schools from privatization “reformers.”

Educators, Van Roekel pointed out, want public schools to “make a difference and make the lives of their students better.” But, he said, public school educators are under attack from privatization advocates who want to “de-professionalize” the education profession through high-stakes standardized testing and replace effective classroom experience with untried technology.

“I am sick and tired of people on the outside telling us what we ought to do,” he said.

Van Roekel cautioned that it wasn’t enough for educators to simply try to play defense against such intrusions.

“I want us to take charge of our profession,” he said, urging teachers to step up and take charge of the debate over what works and what doesn’t in the classroom.

He said teachers should no longer tolerate an educational system that was designed to graduate only about 70 percent of the students, and they should demand that administrators and policymakers fix the problem — and listen to teachers tell them how to do it.

The NEA president challenged educators

to “have the courage to do whatever is necessary to change that system and deliver.”

“Don’t you ever shy away from the word, ‘power,’” he said.

Haecker reminded delegates that TSTA’s power starts “from the ground up” — in locals throughout the state. And, she added, the “compelling reason to organize is our students,” five million of whom walk into Texas classrooms every day.

She recounted TSTA’s campaign against the school budget cuts and urged delegates to continue the fight,

“I want us to take charge of our profession.”

demanding that the Legislature restore all of the \$5.4 billion slashed from public schools two years ago.

Haecker warned that the opposition in Austin, the special interests that would rather privatize schools than adequately pay for them, is well-funded. But building on an effective organization — beginning at the campus level — TSTA will continue to make itself heard, she said.

To illustrate the fight and TSTA’s determination to carry it through, Haecker donned a pair of boxing gloves and urged delegates, united, to punch their way to success — for public schools and public school students.

“There’s more power in ‘we’ than there is in ‘me,’” she said.



Award winners

TSTA annually honors individuals who make a difference for students, public education, and educators, and locals that have increased their ability to effect change by improving communication or growing their membership. This year’s winners are:

FRIEND OF EDUCATION

- Ernesto Nieto, president, National Hispanic Institute (bottom photo, left page)

RONNIE RAY ESP ADVOCATE OF THE YEAR

- Jerri Harrison, Ysleta Teachers Association

ERMALEE BOICE INSTRUCTIONAL ADVOCACY

- Marisa Maher, Dripping Springs Education Association

PRIDE IN COMMUNICATION

- Alief TSTA/NEA
- San Antonio Alliance

PAC CONTRIBUTIONS

- Regions 1D and 3D

MEMBERSHIP AWARDS

- Del Valle Education Association
- Southside Education Association

- La Marque Education Association
- Association of Brownsville Educators
- Education Austin
- Port Arthur Teachers Association
- Edinburg TSTA
- Beaumont Teachers Association
- San Antonio Alliance
- Donna TSTA/NEA
- NEA Dallas
- Denton Education Association
- New Caney Education Association
- Judson Education Association
- Marshall Education Association
- El Paso Teachers Association
- Lubbock Educators Association
- Lancaster Education Association
- Edgewood Classroom Teachers Association
- Irving Education Association



ESPs build a network of organizers

“You wouldn’t be here today if you weren’t defined as a leader.”

“You need to be involved,” keynote speaker Laura Montgomery of Arkansas said at the second annual TSTA Education Support Professionals Conference April 14 at the Hyatt Regency Houston. The theme was “The Power of Organizing.”

“You wouldn’t be here today if you weren’t defined as a leader,” she said. “You wouldn’t be doing this if you weren’t proud and this didn’t matter to you.”

Montgomery is president of the National Council for Education Support Professionals, an organization that works within NEA to represent the specific interests of ESPs.

She urged the group to consider applying for the intensive NEA ESP Leaders for Tomorrow training (read the details at www.nea.org/esp).

Each of the roughly 100 conference participants also went through training on overcoming the fear factor, building long lasting coalitions and partnerships, building successful campaigns, and making changes in policy.

- Photos: www.flickr.com/photos/tstapublicaffairs/sets/72157633245256161
- TSTA ESP on Facebook: www.facebook.com/TSTA.ESP
- Rio Grande Valley RESPECT Campaign: www.facebook.com/valleycampaign

ESP of the Year empowers her students

Who is Jerri Harrison? To incoming TSTA Board of Directors member Leonor Terrazas, she is a team player; a champion for members and public education; and a caring and loving advocate for her special needs students.



“She challenges her students and shows them respect; they feel empowered to do great things,” Terrazas said.

To her local president, Arlinda Valencia, Harrison is a very determined woman and a born leader.

“I don’t remember a time when Jerri has said no to the Ysleta Teachers Association,” Valencia said.

In her 16 years as a special education aide at Del Valle High School in Ysleta ISD (El Paso), Harrison said her proudest accomplishment was helping organize a club for her students; club members learn job skills by making and selling holiday crafts and running a concession stand at lunch. With the proceeds, they’ve bought three computers and a television for their classroom and donated to Special Olympics and the Fight Against Lymphoma.

Her talents have been noticed by TSTA/NEA: she was a delegate to four NEA conventions, attended four NEA Education Support Professionals (ESP) conferences, and was asked to participate in a national focus group on ESP job descriptions.

She was the first ESP to serve on her local and regional boards of directors. And now she is TSTA’s Ronnie Ray ESP Advocate of the Year.

“Family comes first for me, and YTA and TSTA have become a part of that family,” Harrison said.

In her acceptance speech at the state TSTA convention, she urged delegates to educate their communities about the difference between school-based and for-profit support services.

“Privatization equals a cut in services for schools, a cut in benefits and wages for employees, and a safety risk for our children,” Harrison said, adding that private companies’ “only interest in our community is profiting from our tax dollars.”

“The needs of our children are best met by skilled, committed, and experienced ESPs,” she said.



“In our organization, we’re family. When one person hurts, we all hurt. When one has a grievance, we’re all here to help.”
—**Betty Flores, library assistant, San Benito**



“I guess my fight is for equality amongst all district employees, as well as fair pay. When you have roughly 12,000 to 13,000 employees and a considerable portion of those employees can’t afford to live off the paycheck they make, there’s a problem.”
—**Lonnell Davis, bus driver, Austin**



“I encourage all you locals out there to nominate someone for the Ronnie Ray ESP Award. I know there are lots of ESPs out there that are shining in your communities. Get that paperwork turned in, and have someone in your community shine for your area and shine for TSTA. That’s my challenge to you!”
—**Leonor Terrazas, teacher aide, Ysleta**

San Antonio

Books Build Character Campaign

“In America’s poorest neighborhoods, the average number of books in the home is only one for every 300 children,” Gracie Oviedo, a TSTA Board of Directors member and San Antonio Alliance vice president, said.

“In San Antonio — where there are no bookstores south of the downtown area and our community’s homeless and highly mobile children are particularly challenged when it comes to access to books — we knew we had to do something.”

During a consultation session with San Antonio school district leaders, San Antonio Alliance shared statistics on children’s lack of access to books and the impact on academic achievement, and the Books Build Character partnership was born, with a goal of giving three new books to every student in the district.

Their first step was to partner with First Book, a nonprofit that connects book publishers with community organizations to provide new books to children in need (www.firstbook.org).

“Through First Book, we could purchase around \$1.2 million in books for about \$267,000,” Oviedo said. “We



then began to solicit contributions from every organization and business in the city, state, and country.”

When Books Build Character had collected \$28,000 (including \$25,000 from National Teachers Associates), they bought “Freckle Juice” by Judy Blume for 4,500 second graders and “Wonder” by R.J. Palacio for 3,600 seventh graders.

“Second grade and seventh grade are critical years leading to major achievement tests, so providing these students with books and creating a positive book experience was crucial,” Oviedo said.

The reading curriculum was suspended in those grades for a week so teachers and students could focus on the new books and hold book launch events.

The impact on students was huge.

“We have gotten thank you cards, notes, and letters. We had a mother call our office to say her seventh grade daughter had received her book on Friday afternoon and had not put it down since. She was texting friends to ask what page they were on and whether they had read this part or that,” Oviedo said.

“We know that we are making a tremendous difference in the lives of our students, and we are more determined than ever to keep this program alive and thriving,” she said, adding that H-E-B has already pledged \$5,000 for next year.

If you would like to help Books Build Character provide books to the rest of their students, please contact Gracie Oviedo at 210-225-7174 or gracieo@sanantonioalliance.org.



Teachers involved in politics? ‘It’s about time’

When Ann Bryan Rucker Ray was 10, women won the right to vote. That was 93 years ago.

“When I was old enough, I started voting, and I haven’t missed an election since,” said Ray. “You’ve got to have a say in who’s going to rule over you and make laws that affect you.”

Her voting ethic comes from her parents, who made it a priority to get to the polls whenever there was an election of any kind.

“I knew that the most important thing in life, practically, was to get out there and vote,” Ray said. “Voting is your right and your obligation.”

It’s an ethic she’s passed on to her daughter and fellow TSTA Retired/NEA Retired member, Jay-Ann Rucker.

Rucker, who is currently the state vice president of TSTA Retired, helps with local school board elections, stays in contact with her senator and all El Paso representatives, assists with her local political action committee, and contributes to the state TSTA PAC at the “Virginia Stacey level” (the top level, \$80/month, nicknamed for the late TSTA president and political activist).

“(Female) teachers couldn’t vote until I was 10 years old, but now they’re becoming a part of politics,” Ray, who spent her career teaching first grade at Ramona Elementary School in Ysleta ISD, said. “Now teachers are taking a hand in it, and thank goodness. It’s about time.”



ALL FOR ONE AND ONE FOR ALL IN EDINBURG

In April, the Edinburg school board heard a grievance from TSTA member Alfredo Soto who told them he had been subjected to retaliation. More than 40 Rio Grande Valley ESP Respect Campaign activists came to support him.



DEL VALLE: WE NEED HELP WITH PREMIUMS

Over 50 Del Valle Education Association members came to the May school board meeting and eight addressed the board, demanding an increase in the district contribution to employee health insurance premiums.



PFLUGERVILLE BLOCK WALKS

Pflugerville Education Association members turned out to block walk for their endorsed school board candidates. One issue in the race was whether health benefits for domestic partners would be taken away. PEA’s candidates won.



LOCALS HOST CANDIDATE FORUMS

Killeen Educators Association and San Marcos Educators/TSTA hosted school board candidate forums, and Judson Education Association interviewed and rated six candidates for three open seats on their school board.



HAYS ASKS FOR SALARY, STIPEND INCREASES

Hays Educators Association members attended a school board meeting in May to support local president Esperanza Orosco as she called on the board to make teacher salaries competitive and increase the bilingual stipend by \$1,000.



HARLINGEN ESP MEMBER RUNS FOR SCHOOL BOARD

Lorenzo Hernandez Jr., an education support professional member and custodian at Dishman Elementary in Harlingen, ran for a spot on the Harlingen CISD school board. His fellow TSTA members turned out to block walk for him.

Social Security

Help us restore justice

Help TSTA Retired repeal the unfair Social Security Government Pension Offset (GPO) and Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) by joining their letter-writing campaign.

In May, the Social Security Fairness Act of 2013 (S. 896), previously introduced in the U.S. House as H.R. 1795, was introduced. This legislation would repeal the GPO and WEP.

GPO reduces public employees' Social Security spousal or survivor benefits by two-thirds of their public pension.

Nine out of 10 people lose their entire spousal benefit, even though their spouse paid Social Security taxes for many years.

WEP reduces the earned Social Security benefits of an individual who also receives a public pension from a job not covered by Social Security, which means hard-working people lose a significant portion of the benefits they have earned themselves.



Loss of benefits can result from moving from private to public employment and vice versa, or moving between states that have different GPO/WEP rules.

A GPO/WEP workshop, presented by TSTA staff members Mark Maldonado and Sam Blackman at the April TSTA

Retired Annual Meeting, spurred a letter-writing campaign to President Obama, which spilled over to the TSTA House of Delegates.

More than 500 letters to the President were collected, and letters are still coming in.

To participate, download the letter from the link below, then sign and return it to TSTA Retired, 316 West 12th Street, Austin, Texas 78701.

To get the latest updates, access the Activist Toolkit, and share your story, visit www.nea.org/home/16491.htm.

LINKS

- Download letter: www.tsta.org/sites/default/files/Letter-to-Obama.doc
- Campaign Facebook page: www.facebook.com/repealwepgpo
- Learn more: <http://educationvotes.nea.org/educators/retired-educators>



Mentoring program prepares to expand

What went well? What could be improved?

In April, participants in TSTA/NEA's Intergenerational Mentoring Program met to critique its trial run; the pilot program, launched in January, matched TSTA-Student Program members at the University of Houston at Clear Lake (UHCL) with TSTA-Retired members from the Houston area.

Mentors and students shared the great experiences they had. Several students said they felt more comfortable seeking advice from experienced educators who were outside of the classroom; as one person put it, "I didn't feel I was being graded when asking a question."

All look forward to continuing the program with another group of UHCL students in the fall, and to expanding the program to El Paso in the near future.

In other TSTA Student Program news, President Brandon Swaringim, staff liaison Clinton Gill, and members of the UHCL student group will attend the NEA Student Leadership Conference this summer in Atlanta to participate in sessions on organizing and in the annual Outreach to Teach program, in which student, retired, and other NEA members give a local school a makeover.

NEWS FROM TSTA RETIRED

Officer elections were held in February; winners take office July 15 for two years. Louise Watkins of Aledo ran unopposed for president; Rose Champion of Brownsville was elected vice president in a race against Clarence Phinisee of Dallas and Ysreal Valencia of El Paso; Katherine Milano of The Woodlands was elected to a one-year unexpired term for secretary over Yvette Gonzales of El Paso. Treasurer Paul Haupt's term continues for another year. In 2014 a secretary and treasurer will be elected to two-year terms.



NEA's Retired Leadership Conference was March 22-24 in Orlando. Attending were Johnetta Williams, president, Dallas; Louise Watkins, incoming president; Geraldine Palmer, Retired School Personnel of Dallas, Region 4D-R; Bobbie Duncan, candidate for Alternate NEA delegate, Odessa; Letha Grace McCoy, immediate past president, Burleson; and Gerald Haschke, TSTA liaison.

The 22nd TSTA Retired Annual Meeting was at the downtown Houston Hyatt Regency Hotel April 10-11.

- Vice President Jay-Ann Rucker handled the arrangements with the help of the host committee (the three Houston regions). Region 3C-Retired provided tote bags of goodies (thank you, Betty Jo Brown and Carrie Cotton).
- We welcomed our newest local affiliate, Region 2F-Retired. Judy Clark of Lubbock is the interim president.
- Members voted on a variety of bylaws changes and conducted association business. Dinner was at the downtown aquarium where the wide variety of aquatic life was just spectacular.
- Antonio Galindo of NEA Member Benefits talked about ways to save money, from buying cars and theater tickets to securing pet insurance and hearing aids. Brandon Watson of California Casualty Insurance shared the benefits of using the association-endorsed company for both auto and home insurance. See www.neamb.com for more information.
- Money was collected for the Jack Kinnaman Scholarship Fund, operated by the NEA Foundation, which provides at least two scholarships annually to students in the NEA Student Program. Jacqueline Horseman of Texas was one of this year's winners! If you are interested in making a donation, send your check, payable to the NEA Foundation, to TSTA-Retired, 316 West 12th, Austin, TX 78701. Donations will be presented during the NEA-Retired Annual Meeting in June.
- Members were also invited to donate to the NEA Fund for Children and Public Education (www.neafund.org).

The TSTA Convention delegation included 23 retired delegates who took an active part in the business sessions. Katherine Milano led the pledges to the flags during the opening ceremony. Two individuals who signed up for pre-retired TSTA Retired memberships won prizes. A silent auction was held on a variety of items, and the one-of-a-kind T-shirt quilt, made by Gail Durham of Burleson, was won by retired member Judy Clark. T-shirt donations for the 2014 quilt are currently being accepted in the TSTA Retired Austin office.

The NEA Retired Annual Meeting, June 28-30 at the Hilton Atlanta, is open to all NEA Retired delegates, members, and guests. There is no fee, but you must register at nea.org/retired and wear a name tag. For hotel reservations, call 877-677-7210.



It's time to get serious about closing the gaps

By Bryan Weatherford, Teaching and Learning Specialist

Achievement gaps are real. On the 2012 STAAR test administration, 44 percent of Hispanic students and 45 percent of African American students met the satisfactory standard on English I Writing. This compares with 70 percent of white students and 80 percent of Asian American students. Across gender, girls outperformed boys by 60 percent to 49 percent.

A greater number of minority students receive services under IDEA, and African American and Hispanic students, especially males, are more likely to be suspended, sent to juvenile justice alternative education programs, or expelled from school for misbehavior.

The number of students meeting one or more of the federal poverty guidelines is over 85 percent in the Rio Grande Valley, compared to just under

50 percent in the Fort Worth area. This gap is not limited to the Valley; it spreads out to many of the rural parts of East and West Texas.

President Obama issued an Executive Order to close the gap in disciplinary action for African American students, and Texas Education Commissioner Michael Williams has spoken of the need to close the achievement gaps.

A Texas district court ruled in February that the way Texas funds its public schools is unconstitutional, because the money is insufficient and not distributed fairly.

Proposed legislation for reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act/No Child Left Behind has included language to close achievement gaps and ensure all students graduate from high school college- and career-ready.

The mandate is here to address the achievement and disproportionality gaps. How do we start?

1 Reduce class size across all grade levels and content areas – and not just by a few students. Aside from the academic benefits, smaller class sizes promote social development, individualize attention in an environment begging for more and more individualized attention, and promote school health. Did you know the average class size for physical education in Texas is 45 students?

2 Foster school connectedness. Students who feel connected to their school environment are more likely to be successful in school, stay in school, and make positive life choices. Create

an environment in your classroom where respect is more than just a word on the wall. Take time to get to know your students, target resources to those who need them, and address bullying and misbehavior in an assertive manner.

3 Make sure students help maintain a clean and neat learning environment. Students need to take some responsibility by making sure their materials are in the proper place, their chairs are pushed in, and the area around their desks is neat.

4 Invest in social capital. Teachers in our higher-need schools are more likely to have less experience and be teaching out of their field of certification. This creates a revolving door. Advocate for quality, purposeful, and embedded professional development to ensure that all teachers are ready to teach from day one. The era of “one size fits all” professional development is over.

5 Ensure the equitable treatment of all students. Model the behavior you want students to demonstrate in your classroom with your words and actions. Recognize and reinforce positive behaviors and deal appropriately with misbehavior, making sure your discipline is consistent.

6 Establish and clarify high expectations. Students will rise to your expectations when they know and understand them. Success is an endorphin, and as students achieve at higher levels, they will get the rush elite athletes experience and be motivated to do better.

7 Failure is not an option. Help your students identify their attributes of learning; that is, how they learn from their own mistakes. Conference with your students one-on-one to help them to realize that there is no such thing as failure, only feedback.

8 Practice inclusion. Inclusion is not just for special education students. Your classrooms are populated with students who are at-risk: English language learners, migrants, Section 504, and many others. Organize to get your school district engaged effectively with guidelines to ensure professional development that prepares teachers for inclusion and a collaborative model in classrooms so all students get the support they need.

9 Focus on your own efficacy. Effective teachers engage in a continuous cycle of self-evaluation and reflection; when you focus on your practices and behaviors, you increase your efficacy. Identify what you need to do to move your class to your desired reality, then write it down and make it happen. Your students' achievement is linked to your effectiveness.

10 Join with TSTA to advocate for increased funding. Our schools need money. Teacher salaries have barely kept pace with inflation. Teachers should not have to work two jobs to make ends meet, nor should they need to leave the classroom to earn a higher salary. Students should not have to learn in substandard buildings with substandard equipment and outdated instructional materials. We cannot expect our students to succeed if all we're willing to do is let the schools “get by” with what they have.



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