

Advocate

Texas State Teachers Association/National Education Association

Winter 2015

*The most important
reason to vote*



HEALTH CARE

TSTA takes the lead

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TSTA'S BOARD OF DIRECTORS: TSTA Executive Director Richard Kouri and the 2015 Board of Directors.

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Vote for your students, your job, our future



Elections are about the future — the future of our students, our own children, and our jobs as teachers and school employees. When you look at the children in your classroom and on your campus, you are looking at the most important reason to vote in the 2016 elections.

The 2016 election season is underway. Candidate filing has started, and the presidential race has been in full swing for months. Obviously, the race for the White House is important, but the races for the Texas Legislature often have a greater impact on our jobs, our students, and our schools than the presidential election.

There will be a number of critical legislative races in the March 1 Republican and Democratic primaries. The results of those races will have a direct bearing on important issues such as school funding, educator health insurance, standardized testing, and due process for all school employees.

Virtually every candidate running for

the Legislature, regardless of partisan stripe, will claim to be a “friend” of education, because politicians recognize the value Texans place on their neighborhood schools. But not all politicians live up to their claims.

If they did, the legislative majority would not have slashed \$5.4 billion from public school budgets in 2011. If they did, state leaders would not continue fighting more than 600 local school districts in the Texas Supreme Court, where the districts are seeking a fair and adequate funding system. If all political candidates lived up to their education claims, they would not keep robbing students of time to learn with a stressful, high-stakes testing regime. Nor would they let rising health insurance premiums drive excellent educators from the classroom without lifting a finger to help.

Elections have consequences, and those are some of the more obvious consequences.

Before early voting for the primary elections begins on Feb. 16, TSTA will endorse candidates for the Texas House and Senate in both party primaries. Our endorsements will be based strictly on their records and commitments to public education. Do they really walk the walk and not merely give lip service to education and tell us what we want to hear?

To earn our endorsement, we expect candidates to make a commitment to work with us on several important issues.

- School funding — Support an adequate and equitable funding system that gives all our students the opportunity to succeed, regardless of how the Texas Supreme Court rules in the school finance lawsuit. We must rid the Legislature of its boom-or-bust mentality of underfunding and cutting school budgets.
- Health care — Double the state’s contribution to educator health insurance premiums, an amount that hasn’t been increased in 14 years despite soaring health care costs.
- Testing — Make significant reductions in standardized testing and fight any proposal to tie test scores to teacher evaluations.
- Due process — Provide due process for all school employees, all of whom play important roles in providing students a safe, healthy learning environment.

These issues have a direct impact on our students and our jobs as educators. When we vote for and elect candidates who support us, our jobs will be better, and our students and our own children will have a brighter future.

Ultimately, elections are about the future of our state and nation. People vote for candidates for any number of reasons. Look at the children you see every day in your classroom, in the cafeteria, and on your bus. They are our future. It is time for educators to vote for their education — and our future.

— TSTA President Noel Candelaria

A votar por tus estudiantes, tu trabajo y nuestro futuro

Las elecciones se tratan de nuestro futuro — el futuro de nuestros estudiantes, nuestros hijos, y nuestros trabajos como maestros y trabajadores escolares. Cuando miras a los niños en tu clase estas viendo a las razones más importantes para votar en las elecciones del 2016.

La temporada electoral del 2016 ya comenzó. Ya los candidatos se están enlistando, y la campaña presidencial ha estado rodando por meses. Obviamente la contienda por la Casa Blanca es importante, pero las elecciones de la Legislatura de Texas muchas veces tienen un impacto aún mayor sobre nuestros trabajos, nuestros estudiantes y nuestras escuelas.

Habrà un número de contiendas legislativas críticas en las primarias Republicanas y Demócratas del 1ero de marzo. Los resultados de esas elecciones tendrán un efecto directo en asuntos importantes como fondos escolares, seguro médico para educadores, exámenes estandarizados y procesos legales para empleados escolares.

Prácticamente todos los candidatos en la legislatura, sin importar su partido, dirán que son “amigos” de la educación, porque los políticos reconocen el valor que los tejanos le damos a nuestras escuelas vecinales. Pero no todos los políticos estarán a la altura de sus palabras.

Si lo estuviesen, la mayoría legislativa no hubiese cortado \$5.4 billones de nuestro presupuesto escolar en el 2011. Si lo estuviesen, nuestros líderes estatales no continuarían luchando en contra de más de 600 distritos escolares locales en la Corte Suprema de Texas, donde estos distritos están buscando un sistema de fondos adecuado y justo. Si todos los políticos estuviesen a la altura de sus palabras sobre la educación, no siguieran robando a los estudiantes de su tiempo para aprender con un régimen de exámenes excesivo y estresante. Y tampoco dejarían que el precio del seguro médico afectara a nuestros educadores sin levantar un dedo para ayudarlos.

Las elecciones tienen consecuencias, y esas son algunas de las más obvias.

Antes de que las elecciones tempranas para las primarias

comiencen el 16 de febrero, TSTA apoyará a candidatos para el Congreso y el Senado de Texas para las primarias de cada partido. Nuestro apoyo estará basado estrictamente en sus récords y compromiso con la educación pública. ¿En realidad quieren arremangarse las mangas y no simplemente decir lo que queremos escuchar?

Para ganar nuestro apoyo, contamos con que los candidatos se comprometan a trabajar con nosotros en varios asuntos importantes.

- Fondos escolares — Apoyar un sistema de fondos adecuado y justo que le da a todos nuestros estudiantes la oportunidad de tener éxito, sin importar como decida la Corte Suprema de Texas en la demanda de finanzas escolares. Necesitamos eliminar de la legislatura la mentalidad de cortar presupuestos escolares.
- Cuidado de salud — Duplicar la contribución estatal a los premiums de seguros de salud para educadores, una cantidad que no ha sido aumentada en 14 años, a pesar de la subida desorbitada de los costos de salud.
- Exámenes — Hacer reducciones significativas en exámenes estandarizados, y luchar contra cualquier propuesta que ligue a resultados de exámenes con evaluaciones de maestros.
- Proceso legal — Proveer de proceso legal justo a todos los trabajadores escolares, quienes juegan un papel importante en darle a nuestros estudiantes un ambiente seguro y sano para aprender.

Estos asuntos tienen un impacto directo en nuestros estudiantes y en nuestros trabajos como educadores. Cuando votamos para elegir candidatos, quienes nos apoyan, nuestros trabajos serán mejores y nuestros estudiantes e hijos tendrán un mejor futuro.

Al final del día, las elecciones son sobre el futuro de nuestro estado y nuestra nación. La gente vota por candidatos por un montón de razones. Mira a los niños que todos los días se sientan en tu clase, en tu cafetería o en tu autobús. Ellos son nuestro futuro. Es la hora de que los educadores vote-mos por la educación — y por nuestro futuro.

TSTA to TRS: ask legislature to double state health care contribution



At the October town hall meeting on educator health care, TSTA urged the Teachers Retirement System of Texas to join educators in asking the legislature to double the state's \$75 monthly contribution to health insurance costs for school employees. The contribution hasn't changed since the program was created in 2001.

"Employee premiums have increased 10 times since 2003 — by as much as 238 percent for some employees — at a time when budget cuts have left Texas teacher pay stagnant, \$7,000 below the national average," TSTA President Noel Candelaria said. "Meanwhile, the \$75 per month state contribution for school employee health care has not increased, not even by a penny."

Depending on the level of coverage, he said, insurance for an entire family can cost some school employees more than \$1,300 per month — more than a mortgage payment for most TSTA members. Consequently, many educators delay medical treatment, wait to start a family, or leave the profession.

"After 14 years, how long must we wait for the state to do its fair share to make sure Texas teachers and public school employees have affordable, high quality health care coverage?" Candelaria asked. "Will you, the TRS board, join us in asking the Legislature to double the state contribution for educator health care?"

School districts are required to cover at least \$150 per month of each employ-

ee's health insurance premium. Some districts contribute more, but many don't, saddling employees with most of their rising health care costs.

TSTA believes this also is a fairness issue. The state of Texas covers virtually the entire cost of health care for state employees, while educational employees have seen health care premiums take bigger bites out of their paychecks, year after year.

- TSTA Government Relations Specialist John Grey's report on the town hall: <http://bit.ly/1kGyrdr>
- TSTA's written testimony: www.tsta.org/news-center/education-news#panel
- Video of testimony: <http://bit.ly/1hUx4WV> (scroll to 7:17 to hear TSTA)

TEXAS EDUCATION COMMISSIONER TO RESIGN

State Education Commissioner Michael Williams announced in October that he will resign at the end of the year. Williams was appointed to the post in 2012 by former Gov. Rick Perry.

"We wish Commissioner Williams well in his future endeavors. The Texas Education Agency faced many challenges under his watch, as the legislative majority slashed the state education budget while excessive standardized test-

ing drew the wrath of parents and educators," TSTA President Noel Candelaria said.

He urged Gov. Greg Abbott, who will appoint Williams' successor, to "listen to the vast majority of Texans and appoint a commissioner who will advocate for a greater investment in our public schools and policies that will end the punitive standardized testing that robs teachers and students of the time they need for real teaching and learning."

THE COST OF INCREASING STANDARDS BUT NOT RESOURCES

The standardized tests Texas students take in grades 3-8 will be harder to pass, Education Commissioner Michael Williams announced in October at a Texas Association of School Boards Conference.

Television station KLBK-13 in Lubbock asked TSTA President Noel Candelaria for his take on the issue.

"We are not only setting our students up, we're setting our schools up for failure," Candelaria responded. The state is raising standards for test scores, but teachers and schools still aren't getting the resources they need, he explained. "We are focusing on the symptoms not the cause."

Candelaria said his own daughter didn't want to start third grade because she knew that's when statewide testing starts. "No child at any age should feel that way about going to school," he said. "School should be an opportunity and a place for joy and learning."



NEA DIRECTORS ATTEND WORLD CONGRESS

TSTA leaders Rae Nwosu of Education Austin, Evelina Loya of Garland Education Association, and Angela Davis of NEA-Dallas were among the 767 delegates attending Education International's 7th World Congress in Ottawa, Canada on July 22-26. The Congress draws delegates from 260 member organizations in 142 countries.

TSTA LEADERS VISIT CONGRESS

The first week of October — NEA Super Week — TSTA leaders visited Texas lawmakers in Washington, D.C. In the bottom photo, NEA Director Jessica Powell, TSTA Vice President Ovidia Molina, and NEA ESP At Large Karen Barnes meet with Joaquin Castro of San Antonio, who represents the 20th Congressional District of Texas in the U.S. House of Representatives.



CANDELARIA JOINS TEACHERS HALL OF FAME BOARD

TSTA President Noel Candelaria has joined former NEA President Keith Geiger and NEA Executive Committee member Kevin Gilbert on the National Teachers Hall of Fame Board of Trustees. Founded in 1989 at Emporia State University in Kansas, NTHF recognizes career teachers, preserves and promotes education, and inspires others to enter the teaching profession. Learn more at <http://www.nthf.org>.

NEW TOOL TO SPARK EDUCATION CONVERSATION

The Center for Public Policy Priorities has a new tool to help local communities identify policies and practices that can move students from their first steps in school to higher education and a promising career.

The Texas Education Scorecard compares county-level data on five key transition points between pre-kindergarten and college completion. It also identifies 12 policy indicators that communities can use to determine where improvement may be needed, such as pre-kindergarten participation rates, adequate and equitable school funding, dual credit enrollment, and GED testing rates.

The scorecard does not grade individual schools, colleges, or educators. It is intended to spark conversations that go beyond traditional education stakeholders, involving city and county elected officials, workforce development professionals, business leaders, local chambers of commerce, and community non-profit organiza-

tions. Learn more at <http://forabetter-texas.org>.

GET FUNDING FOR YOUR HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS PROGRAM

Public high schools can score up to \$3,000 for their sports departments with a California Casualty Thomas R. Brown Athletics Grant. California Casualty, provider of NEA's Auto & Home Insurance Program, will award a total of \$100,000 in grants of up to \$3,000 to offset budget cuts that have affected high school athletics.

Details and entry forms are at www.calcasathleticsgrant.com. Applications must be received by Jan. 15 for 2015-16 consideration.

NOMINATIONS DUE FOR FIVE AWARDS

Do you know a person or organization worthy of recognition in one of the following five categories?

- The Social Justice Patriot Award acknowledges professional and human rights activities. The honoree can be a Texas educator, a TSTA local or regional association, or an individual or association that is a friend of education.
- The All-Star AR Award recognizes exemplary TSTA association representatives or campus leaders. These leaders engage members at their worksite; encourage volunteerism; help identify new leaders; attend association meetings and hold meetings at worksites; lead organizing campaigns; assist members with

problems at the campus or worksite level; and inform local association leaders of the issues and concerns of members at their worksites.

- Leaders for Tomorrow demonstrate the characteristics of future association leaders, such as possessing good listening and communication skills; being enthusiastic team players; attending association meetings; assisting with organizing campaigns; and being viewed as leaders by members at their worksites.
- Pride in Communications Awards are presented for outstanding local or regional newsletters or websites.
- School Bell Awards recognize outstanding media coverage of education issues and events. This includes newspapers, magazines, television and radio stations, and electronic media.

School Bell Award nominations are due Jan. 31; the others are due in early March. All awards listed will be presented during the TSTA House of Delegates in April. Visit tsta.org/news-center/awards-grants for more information.

ESPS: MARK APRIL 10 ON YOUR CALENDAR

Plan now to attend the statewide ESP Conference on the Sunday after the TSTA House of Delegates. Education support professionals will meet on April 10 at the Camino Real Hotel in El Paso to hear inspiring speakers and increase their knowledge and leadership skills. Watch for details in the spring issue.



NEA ESP CONFERENCE SET FOR ORLANDO

The 2016 National NEA ESP Conference will be March 11-13 at the Hilton Orlando Lake Buena Vista Hotel.

The theme is "Education Support Professionals: Uniting, Inspiring, and Leading for the Whole Student."

There will be two three-hour workshop blocks on Saturday, followed by the ESP of the Year Award dinner. On Sunday, participants will engage in a facilitated panel discussion and group exercises based on individual career categories.

Participants will learn how to actively engage in elevating their careers. Watch for updates on the conference at www.nea.org/esp.

EDUCATORS HONOR EL PASO LEGISLATOR

In El Paso, local leaders and members and TSTA President Noel Candelaria, a former Ysleta ISD teacher, took part in a November "Educators for Mary" rally honoring State Rep. Mary Gonzalez, District 75.

PLOCK REPRESENTS TSTA ON T-TESS COMMITTEE

Pflugerville Educators Association President August Plock represented TSTA on the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS) Steering Committee For Commissioner Rules Chapter 150. Texas Education Agency called the meeting on Oct. 19 to receive feedback from stakeholders, including educators.



It's time for legislators to take care of our kids

Defending the state's school funding system in a hearing before the Texas Supreme Court, an assistant attorney general argued that "money isn't pixie dust" that can magically improve public schools. He may have thought his words were clever, but he missed the point.

No educator believes money is a cure-all. But money is a necessary investment in school children and a

necessary investment in our state's future, and recent governors and the legislative majority have been selling us short. That is why more than 600 local school districts are fighting the state again for failing to adequately fund our schools, an issue that has been in and out of the courts for more than 30 years.

Some 5.2 million children are enrolled in Texas public schools, and their

number is growing by 80,000 to 85,000 a year. About 60 percent of these children are from low-income families, and thousands have limited ability to read and speak English. They need reasonably sized classes, well-equipped classrooms, and highly trained teachers. But thousands are crammed into overcrowded classrooms, where underpaid teachers don't have the time to give them the individual attention they need.

Pixie dust won't fix that problem. It will require a greater financial commitment from state leaders, who cut \$5.4 billion from the public education budget four years ago and continue to short-change our schools and our students. The spending reductions cost thousands of teachers and other school employees their jobs.

Some school districts are still spending less per student than they did in 2011, before the cuts were imposed. The Dallas Morning News reported this past summer. Financial hardships have caused local school districts to file thousands of waivers that force students in kindergarten through 4th grade classes to be educated in crowded classrooms that exceed the state maximum of 22 students.

The 2011 cuts were the final straw for state District Judge John Dietz of Austin, who presided over the school finance lawsuit filed by the school districts. He declared the school funding system inadequate, unfair, and unconstitutional. Since Dietz's ruling, the state has partially restored the funding, but Texas still lags well behind most states in how much money it invests in each student's education, and state leaders aren't preparing for the future.

Instead of using surplus funds during this year's legislative session to address Dietz's ruling by crafting a better school funding system, Gov. Greg Abbott and the legislative majority pursued an appeal to the Texas Supreme Court that was initiated by Abbott when he was attorney general. The high court, which heard lawyers' arguments in September, probably won't

The Texas Supreme Court, which heard lawyers' arguments in September, probably won't rule until next year. Meanwhile, school children continue to wait.

rule until next year. Meanwhile, school children continue to wait.

The disservice to students and educators was compounded when the legislative majority spent \$3.8 billion on selected tax cuts that most Texans will never see and left billions of additional dollars in the bank.

State leaders blamed the Great Recession for imposing the \$5.4 billion in school cuts four years ago. In truth, at the peak of the recession, the state used more than \$3 billion in federal stimulus funding to avoid cuts in education spending. In 2011, lawmakers could have avoided the spending reductions by digging deeper into the state's Rainy Day Fund. But there will be other recessions, and our children's education should not continue to be subjected to a boom-and-bust mentality when the state budget is set.

The billions of dollars that the Legislature left unspent this year were the product of a strong economy fueled by rising oil prices and oilfield production. Recently, oil and natural gas prices have dropped enough to slightly cool the state's economic outlook.

In October, state Comptroller Glenn Hegar lowered his estimate of available revenue in the current state budget by \$2.6 billion. He still predicts that state government will end the two-year

budget cycle with a \$4.22 billion surplus in general revenue plus \$10.4 billion in the Rainy Day Fund. But if oil prices and production continue to drop, and the political climate in Austin hasn't changed, public education may take another hit when the Legislature returns in 2017, particularly if the Supreme Court reverses or weakens Judge Dietz's school finance order.

Lawmakers made a nominal increase in per-student spending this year. But according to an analysis by the Center for Public Policy Priorities, per-pupil spending, when adjusted for inflation, will actually decrease by 2017 and the state investment in our students will remain below pre-recession levels.

According to the latest National Education Association rankings, Texas spent an estimated \$9,559 per student, based on average daily attendance (ADA), during the 2014-15 school year. That was more than \$2,400 below the national average. Average teacher pay in Texas that year was \$50,576, almost \$7,000 less than the national average.

Moreover, Texas teachers on average are spending about \$700 a year out of their own pockets for classroom supplies to help make up for the funding shortfall, based on the most recent TSTA survey of members. And even

Our children’s education should not continue to be subjected to a boom-and-bust mentality when the state budget is set.

though health insurance costs for school employees continue to rise, the state’s share of premium costs hasn’t been increased in more than a decade.

“Perhaps you haven’t received enough support and assistance,” state Education Commissioner Michael Williams told Texas school board members and superintendents when he announced that Texas will increase the passing standards for STAAR tests this year.

Inadequate financial support for schools extends well beyond the STAAR program, which TSTA and other public education advocates, including a growing number of parents, believe is punitive, excessive, and robs teachers and students of time needed for teaching and learning. TSTA’s “Invest, Not Test” campaign continues to focus attention on state leaders’ upside-down sense of education priorities.

So far, though, the legislative majority has refused to make significant reductions in the STAAR regime, preferring to hold children as young as third-graders more “accountable” for their test scores than they hold themselves accountable for their constitutional duty to adequately and fairly pay for the public schools that children need.

“Instead of doing their jobs for 5.2 million Texas public school children, the governor and the legislative majority are asking the Texas Supreme Court to make the funding issue go away,”

TSTA President Noel Candelaria said.

“During the last legislative session, state leaders left billions of our tax dollars sitting in the bank, instead of putting those dollars to work in the classrooms where teaching students is the highest priority,” Candelaria added. “Once again, our students have been left to pay the price for the state’s failure to provide the resources needed to put an end to crowded classrooms, hire more qualified teachers, and improve school facilities.”

The inadequate funding system also hurts some districts more than others. In 1989, the Texas Supreme Court declared the school funding system unconstitutional because of large disparities in resources between property poor and wealthy school districts, but years later, funding inequities still persist. Taxpayers in property-poor districts still pay higher tax rates but raise less revenue for their schools than residents of wealthier districts.

The so-called “Robin Hood” law, enacted in 1993 to require wealthier districts to share their tax revenue with poor districts, has helped alleviate some of the disparities. But the Equity Center, which represents many of the state’s poorer districts, has calculated the difference in funding between the wealthiest districts and the very poorest at about \$50,000 per grade school classroom.

And the Robin Hood law has angered many local taxpayers who want to see their property taxes pay for their own neighborhood schools, not schools in another district.

The law also has created situations in some districts, such as Austin ISD, which many people consider contradictory. More than 60 percent of Austin ISD’s students are from low-income families, including English language learners who require more individual attention and resources to meet state education standards.

But Austin is considered a property rich district. Consequently, Austin ISD will send \$261 million in local property tax revenue to the state this year for redistribution among poorer districts. Over the past 10 years, AISD has paid \$1.45 billion in such “Robin Hood” contributions, according to the Austin American-Statesman.

Unfortunately, such contradictions and inequities will continue to exist until the state makes a genuine investment in public education by developing a reliable long term funding source that properly funds our children’s schools.

As TSTA awaits the Texas Supreme Court ruling in the school finance case, we already are preparing to make our “Invest, Not Test” campaign an issue in next year’s legislative races. Regardless how the high court rules, TSTA will support candidates in both parties’ primaries who are committed to reducing testing and increasing state funding for public schools.

— Clay Robison, TSTA Public Affairs Specialist



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Your vote and your support matter

From a bond issue in Ysleta to a successful tax ratification election in Brownsville, a hard cap on class size in San Marcos, and other victories throughout the state, TSTA locals are successfully advocating for school district policies that will improve working conditions and provide learning opportunities for our students.

Our successes are rooted in our members' hard work and support for political candidates who work with us for educational quality. As TSTA President Noel Candelaria wrote in his column in this issue of the Advocate (see page 4),

"When we vote for and elect candidates who support us, our jobs will be better, and our students and our own children will have a brighter future."

The 2016 elections will set the tone for educational policy for years to come, and it's up to us as educators to urge our colleagues to "vote education." Races for the Texas Legislature and the State Board of Education will begin with the March 1 party primaries. TSTA will make endorsements in both primaries, and our endorsements will be based strictly on what candidates have done or will do to improve educational

opportunities for all Texas children. Additionally, many school districts will have school board races in May and November.

Recent election outcomes count as victories because the candidates we elected are now working with us to improve our schools. Now is the time to build upon our success.

- **Ysleta** — After their endorsed candidates swept three May school board elections, the Ysleta Teachers Association helped win voter approval of a \$430 million bond issue

to pay for school additions and renovations and security and technology infrastructure improvements. "Election Night was a total success," YTA President Arlinda Valencia said after the bonds were approved by nearly 60 percent of voters.

- **Brownsville** — The Association of Brownsville Educators was instrumental in voter approval of a tax ratification proposal that will generate at least \$5 million in additional state funding to improve school facilities in Brownsville ISD without raising local taxes.
- **San Marcos** — San Marcos Educators-TSTA scored a big win on class size when the school board voted to keep a 22-1 student-teacher ratio cap for grades K-4. Newly elected school board members endorsed by the local ran on that issue, and San Marcos Educators made sure they kept their commitments. "It's not just a win for us. It's a win for the students in San Marcos," San Marcos Educators President Susan Seaton, an intervention teacher at Crockett Elementary, told KXAN-TV. Earlier this year, the San Marcos local convinced the school board to increase teacher salaries by 3.8 percent and fully fund premiums for the base health insurance plan for school employees.
- **Del Valle** — Motivated by the Del Valle Education Association's effective due process campaign, the Del Valle school board unanimously ap-

proved due process language for education support professionals, becoming the third district in Texas to do so. "Del Valle should be proud to see the administration, the board, and the union come together to work on commonly held beliefs," DVEA President Sean Hurley said. The ESP due process language was drafted by a committee of administrators, DVEA representatives, and a school board member, Ann Heuberg, a former TSTA vice president.

- **Harlandale** — After winning a key school board election, the Harlandale Education Association worked with the Harlandale school board to win approval of a 3 percent salary increase for education support professionals; a \$750 retention stipend for all employees; and teacher salary increases based on salary, not the midpoint. The board also voted to discontinue, after one more year, an online elementary math program opposed by most teachers and many parents. "With the teachers having control, they can teach as they deem appropriate for their class, and kids won't have to sit in front of a computer for 70 minutes a day doing math," HEA President Julie Gimbel said.
- **El Paso** — Last August, with strong support from the El Paso Teachers Association, El Paso ISD voters approved a tax ratification proposal that guaranteed a pay raise for all EPISD employees, provided funding to improve EPISD facilities, and did not raise taxes.

THINGS YOU CAN DO TO SUPPORT TSTA-ENDORSED CANDIDATES

- Inform your colleagues about the importance of voting "pro-education."
- Encourage co-workers, family members, and friends to register and vote.
- Set up a non-partisan campus voter registration and information table.
- Invite candidates to your local and community meetings.
- Attend campaign events and volunteer to support our candidates.
- Organize volunteers to make calls or walk door to door.
- Vote and take a co-worker, family member, or friend to vote with you.

WHAT'S AT STAKE IN THE 2016 ELECTIONS

- School funding
- Standardized testing/teacher evaluation
- Educator health care premiums
- Vouchers/privatization gimmicks
- Corporate charter expansion
- Charter takeover of public schools
- Educator contract rights/due process
- Teacher Retirement System defined benefit
- Payroll dues deduction



Working for you: TSTA’s state committees

Committees will report to the TSTA House of Delegates during the April 8-10 meeting in El Paso.



AT THE OCTOBER COMMITTEE MEETINGS: Shown at top is TSTA President Noel Candelaria addressing all committee members; at the bottom of this page is the Legislative Committee.

TSTA has 10 state standing committees: Political Action, Compliance, Member Advocacy, Special Education, Education Support Professionals, School Board Policies, Teaching Profession, Legislative, Communications and Community Outreach, and Credentials, Bylaws, and Elections.

Seven of the committees met Oct. 17 and will meet again Jan. 23; most also will meet several times through conference calls. All committees will report to the TSTA House of Delegates during the April 8-10 meeting in El Paso; some will offer workshops as well.

Not pictured on these pages are Political Action, Compliance, and Credentials, Bylaws, and Elections, the committees that did not meet in October. For a list of all 2015-16 committee members, see www.tsta.org/committees.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Special Education, Teaching Profession, School Board Policies, Member Advocacy, ESP, and Communications and Community Outreach Committees.



Invest, Not Test: policymakers hear you

Ever so slowly, the powers that be in state government seem to be getting the message from parents and educators that our children are over-tested by a STAAR testing system that is stressful, punitive, and counterproductive.

The latest indication is a new state law ordering a reduction in time that students should have to spend taking a STAAR exam — no more than two hours for most children in grades 3-5 and no more than three hours for grades 6-8. State Education Commissioner Michael Williams has announced steps to meet that objective.

But parents, educators, and students also know that ridding classrooms of over-testing is going much too slowly, that more pressure needs to be applied

to policymakers. That is the purpose of TSTA's continuing "Invest, Not Test" campaign, and nowhere is that campaign being embraced with more enthusiasm these days than in Beaumont ISD, where a mini-rebellion against STAAR has erupted.

Parents and members of TSTA's local, the Beaumont Teachers Association, are urging the Beaumont Board of Managers to join them in demanding that the Legislature make significant reductions in STAAR testing to leave time for more real teaching and learning in Texas classrooms.

"Invest, Not Test" petitions have been circulated on campuses and in the community, and parents and educators have attracted media coverage by

speaking up at board meetings. So has 13-year-old Alex Trevino, a student who has vowed that she will refuse to take the STAAR when it is administered next spring.

"I feel that we are not learning anything (from STAAR) that we can use in life. We're taught to a test. Nothing comes out of it," Alex told 12News, a local television station.

Alex has started a Facebook page called STAAR SOS to encourage other people to take a stand against over-testing. The page gained more than 9,000 followers during the first four hours that it was up, the TV station reported.

Alex's parents, who fear over-testing

limits real learning opportunities, are supporting their daughter.

"We are having our kids do standardized testing, learn to a test, all year long, all to memorize something," her mother, Aubrey, said. "Basically if they can't bark it back, they fail."

The anti-testing campaign in Beaumont already has had an effect at the local level. The school district announced an immediate reduction in learning assessments for kindergarten and pre-K children.

And, nationally, the outrage over testing has prompted the Obama administration — a longtime advocate of testing — to now call for limits on testing and ask schools to make exams less onerous for students. The administration is seeking a new assessment cap to assure that no child spends more than 2 percent of classroom instruction time taking tests. The administration has asked Congress to reduce over-testing when it reauthorizes the No Child Left Behind Act.

TSTA also will continue to urge the Texas Legislature to reduce testing.

"If you ever look at a district's testing calendar, you can easily draw a conclusion that there's too much testing," Beaumont ISD Superintendent John Frossard said. And he told 12News, "Quite honestly parents have more influence over state legislators than I do."

State Rep. Joe Deshotel, D-Beaumont, said he understands parents' concerns and agrees that the STAAR test is punitive, too stressful, and is hurting students.

"What we're going to see is more drop-outs, going to see more stress, we're going to see more cheating, more negativity in schools," he told the TV station.

The Beaumont ISD Board of Managers was appointed by Commissioner Williams after the state disbanded the previous, elected board, following financial irregularities and criminal convictions of

former school administrators.

The Beaumont Teachers Association was involved in a prolonged fight against the previous board's efforts to address the district's financial problems by laying off teachers and other school employees.

— Clay Robison, TSTA Public Affairs Specialist

KILLEEN LOCAL ADDRESSES SPECIAL EDUCATION CONCERNS

"We want and need to make sure the employees of KISD and the public stay informed," Rick Beale, president of the Killeen Educators Association (KEA), said at an early September school board meeting. He was quoted in the Killeen Daily Herald. "Tonight we respectfully request the board to please provide a detailed report as to the steps being taken by the board to evaluate the issues in the special education department."

His concern: KEA polled its members following a Texas Education Agency report on the district's inadequate testing compliance and an investigative series by the Killeen Daily Herald on the special education department. Two-thirds of the respondents said they were getting their information from the media, not the district.

In response to KEA's concerns, Killeen ISD held a forum on special education Sept. 29, featuring experts that included TSTA President Noel Candelaria, a special education teacher.

The Herald reported Candelaria's advice. "Without proper funding, he said, school districts often cannot properly staff campuses with the qualified educators needed to educate special-needs children. 'We all have a responsibility to hold each other accountable to ensure that our children — who are the future of our community — have what they need. When we all work together with the child's best interest at heart, we can do great things for every child.'"

The article continued: "After an in-depth critical look at the school district's 'low-trust behaviors' in response to the special education 'crisis,' Killeen Educators Association President Richard Beale reminded the audience that a vote is often all it takes to create change. 'To our friends in the community who are here tonight — you are the ultimate deciders of right and wrong. Your tools for doing so are your presence, your voice, and perhaps most importantly, your vote,' Beale said."



Teaching in the 21st Century

Each fall, the NEA Foundation brings together union-district teams from the Institute for Innovation in Teaching and Learning and Closing the Achievement Gaps to engage in discussions led by nationally renowned thought leaders, then work collaboratively to improve learning conditions and student performance in their districts.

This year's Cross-Site Convening drew more than 200 education leaders — including the San Antonio team referenced in the following article — to Washington, D.C., in October. The theme was “At the Intersection of Heart, Mind, and Community — the Profession of Teaching in the 21st Century.”

Speakers included:

- Pasi Sahlberg, visiting professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, who described an alternative way to improve a nation's educational performance through inclusion and equity, teacher and leader professionalism, collaborative practice, and trust-based responsibility — which have been Finnish education policies since the 1970s.
- Anthony Bryk, president of the Carn-

egie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, who promoted a transformational approach to educational change.

You can watch video clips of the panels and keynote speakers here: www.neafoundation.org/pages/cross-site-convening.

SAN ANTONIO LOCAL TEAMS WITH DISTRICT TO IMPROVE SCHOOLS

Two years ago, driven by upcoming changes in Texas' evaluation system, Shelley Potter, president of the San Antonio Alliance of Teachers and Support Personnel, and Emilio Castro, deputy superintendent of San Antonio ISD, began working together to design and implement a teacher peer assistance and review program.

They are supported by the NEA Foundation's Institute for Innovation in Teaching and Learning, which is comprised of labor-management teams from across the country. Each team identifies issues most critical to their students and commits to work together to improve the quality of education.

The Institute provides teams with:

- coaching and technical support for their action plan
- online resources and courses on how to lead change and reform and promote labor-management collaboration
- opportunities to network with a nationwide community via face-to-face and virtual meetings

The San Antonio project is explained in the following blog, posted by Potter, Castro, and Sue Creekmore, their Institute for Innovation in Teaching and Learning coach.

Why did your school district and local union decide to participate in the NEA Foundation's Institute for Innovation in Teaching and Learning?

Annually, San Antonio ISD educates approximately 54,000 students, with 93 percent of students categorized as economically disadvantaged. We agreed that we could be more successful through labor-management collaboration by openly aligning our efforts.

We had some previous successes working together; however, we had never taken on co-creating a really big project, especially one that required us to shift culture and status quo. Given the various supports that the Institute offers, we thought partnering with the NEA Foundation could help guide us through this process. Having a dedicated coach who can provide us with objective feedback and new perspectives, coupled with the NEA Foundation's online courses, has been invaluable.

Tell us about the project and why you chose it.
San Antonio ISD and the San Antonio

Alliance for Teachers and Support Personnel will develop and implement a Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) program to provide mentoring support for our first and second year teachers through the use of consulting teachers. We realized this is a great area of need, given that we hire 300-400 new teachers a year. We will also offer professional development opportunities to veteran teachers on an as-needed basis.

How did you decide who should be on the labor-management team?

Our team consists of dynamic educators, including teachers, principals, school district executive leadership, and association leadership.

We wanted to be fluid, bringing in new members as a specific need is recognized. For example, we recently included the district grant supervisor and his top grant writer, as well as the district chief financial officer in an effort to secure professional development grants for teachers. We also wanted to ensure external support, like funding, so our team includes members of the community, like the local education foundation's director and a Board of Trustees member.

Since people tend to support initiatives they've worked directly on, it is beneficial to include and consider the voices and perspectives of a multitude of stakeholders.

Our core values include respect and collaboration, which directly impact our goals as we strive to be more student-centered. Co-creating with respectful, thoughtful dialogue can not only enhance collaboration, but also foster an environment of trust. While it can cer-

tainly be a time consuming process, the empowerment of all parties and the establishment of consensus building are vital to collaborative work.

We feel these processes are portable and transferable to many situations and could be a model for use in schools and districts throughout the country.

You said that people support what they have a part in creating. How are you including different groups and educators?

We were very thoughtful about who was invited to be on our joint team for this project. Every individual had an area of responsibility and made inquiries to similar individuals in other districts with successful PAR programs. Each was a part of the decision-making body. This process lent itself to authentic co-creation of a major innovative education program in the school district.

Ultimately, it spurred the Board of Trustees to sign a resolution supporting the PAR program this spring, shortly before the selection of a new superintendent. And they selected a superintendent candidate who had a positive experience with PAR in his previous district.

This summer, we met with principals to provide additional information so that they could not only share how PAR professionalizes teaching by giving teachers the opportunity to help new and struggling colleagues, but how it also creates better instructional environments for students. In the fall, we plan to begin meeting with teachers as well as additional principals.



- LOCALS IN ACTION**
TSTA locals have been busy this fall. Shown here:
- Harlandale Education Association
 - Education Abilene
 - NEA-Dallas
 - Socorro Education Association
 - North East Education Association



STUDENT PROGRAM: Clockwise from right, organizing a new student chapter at the University of Houston’s main campus; the University of Houston-Clear Lake chapter invites the entire student body to hear Dr. Rhea Seddon address their meeting; and student leaders meet at the University of Texas at El Paso.



National leaders to address Student Program

Two nationally known education leaders will address the TSTA Student Program Convention in Austin Feb. 26-28. National Teacher of the Year Shanna Peebles, an English teacher and member of Amarillo Education Association, will speak during the Friday night opening session, while NEA Student Program Chair Chelsey Jo Herrig of Minnesota will keynote the Saturday evening awards banquet and assist with leadership training on Sunday.

Both the national and state Student Program groups have been hard at work recruiting new members and working in schools and communities. TSTA-SP’s executive committee held its

first meeting of the fall to plan for the school year, and district presidents are preparing for their district conventions. Each convention will feature a panel of experts as well as wonderful and diverse professional development.

As state president, I have been learning more than I ever expected. I have attended two TSTA Board of Directors meetings. I also sit on the state Teaching Profession Committee, which met Oct. 17 and will bring a detailed report and recommendations in April to the House of Delegates in El Paso.

— Robert Berger, TSTA Student Program President

ASTRONAUT VISITS UHCL STUDENT GROUP

The TSTA Student Program chapter at the University of Houston-Clear Lake (UHCL) has done some amazing work this semester on the local level, including transforming a regular TSTA meeting into a school-wide event.

UHCL chapter president Patrick Finnerty, who is also the state vice president, recruited Dr. Rhea Seddon to speak at the meeting and do a book signing and meet and greet afterwards. On May 30, Seddon became the eighth woman to be inducted into the U.S. Astronaut Hall of Fame. She was among the first six women to



RETIRED LEADERS: The TSTA-Retired Board of Directors holds its fall meeting at TSTA’s headquarters building in Austin. At the podium is President Louise Watkins.

enter the astronaut program in 1978 and participated in three space shuttle flights, serving as a mission specialist in 1985 and 1991 and as payload commander in charge of all science activities on her final flight in 1993.

The UHCL officers also spent a Friday at Texas Children’s Hospital doing crafts with patients.

RETIREES STAY INVOLVED

For many TSTA-Retired members, retiring means more time to devote to the future of their profession and public education.

Some assist active TSTA local associations at New Teacher Orientations; others help with membership recruitment in schools. Contact your TSTA-Retired region president to find out how you can get involved in building the strength of our locals!

There were a couple of issues retirees

were watching closely as this issue of the magazine went to press:

- The Teacher Retirement System is looking at TRS-Care. There will be an interim study on retiree health insurance and its funding in preparation for the 2017 session, when benefits and funding will be considered.
- While 70 percent of Social Security beneficiaries will be “held harmless” from higher Medicare Part B premiums in 2016, the remaining 30 percent will pay \$19 more each month. (They initially faced a \$54 increase, but the Association worked with legislators to reduce it, as part of the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2015.) Please urge your member of Congress to support bills that protect ALL Medicare beneficiaries from higher Part B premiums and deductibles.

Last summer we applied for an NEA grant to assist with our membership

organizing campaign. In October, we learned the grant has been approved. We will use the money to help bring new members into our association and increase the involvement of our existing members.

A reminder: In the spring, we will conduct a statewide election for TSTA-R secretary and treasurer. The nomination form was in the fall 2015 issue of the Advocate. Also in the fall issue was the nomination form for delegates to the April TSTA House of Delegates in El Paso and the July NEA Representative Assembly in Washington, D.C. If you are interested in being an officer or a delegate, please fax, email, or mail the appropriate form to TSTA by Jan. 15. If you have questions or need assistance, email TSTA-R@tsta.org.

This year’s TSTA-R Annual Meeting will NOT be held in conjunction with the TSTA House of Delegates. At this time, we are planning to hold it in Austin at the TSTA building, over three days during the week of April 25-29. The exact dates have not been finalized yet, so please block out that week on your calendar. More information will be sent later.

Finally, don’t forget our major fundraiser! We have a beautiful quilt, once again sewn with a Texas theme, which we will raffle at the TSTA House of Delegates. Tickets are \$2 and can be purchased from any TSTA-R regional director; see tsta.org/sites/default/files/15-16bod-retired.pdf for contact information.

— Louise Watkins, TSTA-Retired President

SBEC: what you need to know



Whether it concerns an alleged STAAR test violation or a criminal allegation, receiving a notice from the State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) that you are under investigation is upsetting. Although it is unlikely that you will ever receive such a notice, every educator should have a general understanding of SBEC, including the conduct that may lead to disciplinary action, the investigation process, and possible disciplinary actions.

WHAT IS SBEC?

SBEC is a division of the Texas Education Agency (TEA) that oversees the preparation, certification, and standards of conduct for public school educators and employees.

WHAT IS THE EDUCATORS' CODE OF ETHICS?

The Educators' Code of Ethics is found in the Texas Administrative Code (19 Tex. Admin. Code §247.2). Many school districts have a version or copy of these standards in their board policies under DH (Exhibit).

The standards are grouped into three categories: (1) Professional Ethical Conduct, Practices, and Performance; (2) Ethical Conduct Toward Professional Colleagues; and (3) Ethical Conduct Toward Students. These are rules that TEA/SBEC believes you, as a certified educator, should abide by if you are to work with the students of Texas.

I'M NOT A TEACHER. DOES THIS APPLY TO ME?

It applies if you hold a certificate issued under Chapter 21, Subchapter B of the Texas Education Code. This category includes teachers, librarians, counselors, educational diagnosticians, administrators, and some paraprofessionals.

I NEVER HAVE PROBLEMS WITH MY SCHOOL DISTRICT OR STUDENTS. WHY SHOULD THIS INFORMATION MATTER TO ME?

You have invested time and money to obtain your certification. There are certain guidelines and procedures that you should be aware of in case any action is taken against your certification.

NOW YOU HAVE MY ATTENTION. HOW DOES THIS WORK?

The rules regarding disciplinary proceedings and sanctions are found in the Texas Administrative Code (19 Tex. Admin. Code §249). TEA staff may obtain and investigate information concerning alleged improper conduct by an educator. If they accept a case for investigation, here's what would likely occur:

Step 1: Investigative notice/letter of investigation

TEA is required to inform the certificate holder of the investigation within 10 days of placing a notice on the educator's certification records. This notice can also be viewed on the virtual certificate. The educator is given the opportunity to "show cause" why the notice should be removed. If you receive such a letter, you should contact the TSTA

Help Center (877-ASK-TSTA) or an attorney before you submit any response to TEA regarding the allegation(s).

Step 2: Informal conference

SBEC may also give the educator the opportunity to attend an informal conference to discuss the allegations. The conference is typically with an SBEC investigator at the William B. Travis Building at 1701 N. Congress Avenue in Austin, where both TEA and SBEC are located.

If you receive a letter about an informal conference and have not already contacted an attorney or TSTA, you should do so immediately. Before you attend this conference, you need to know what is at stake and what to expect, based on the facts of your case.

Step 3: Hearing before the State Office of Administrative Hearings

If the case continues without being resolved in any way, TEA can file a petition with the State Office of Administrative Hearings to pursue sanctions against the educator's certificate. The case will go before an Administrative Law Judge (ALJ). The educator has the right to contest the allegations and to present evidence and witnesses in his/her defense. The ALJ will then issue a proposal for decision and submit it to the Board.

Step 4: State Board for Educator Certification

After other procedural requirements are met, the Board will review the information presented and make the final decision (Texas Administrative Code §249.39). There may be other legal options available to the educator after the Board's decision, but those options can only be determined on a case-by-case basis.

Step 5: Disciplinary actions

The following are the types of disciplinary actions SBEC could take against an educator:

- Place restrictions on the issuance, renewal, or holding of a certificate, either indefinitely or for a set term;
- Issue a non-inscribed reprimand (which is a formal, unpublished censure that does not appear on the face of the educator's certificate);
- Issue an inscribed reprimand (which is a formal, published censure that appears on the face of the educator's certificate);
- Suspend a certificate for a set term;
- Issue a probated suspension for a set term;
- Revoke or cancel a certificate, which includes accepting the surrender of a certificate without opportunity for reapplication for a set term or permanently;
- Impose any additional conditions or restrictions upon a certificate that SBEC deems necessary to facilitate the rehabilitation and professional development of the educator or to protect students, parents of students, school personnel, or school officials.

An educator may choose to voluntarily surrender his or her certificate at any time. We advise that you never make this kind of decision before speaking with an attorney. A description of these sanctions is on the TEA website, tea.texas.gov. Also, TEA is not restricted to the steps listed in the order above.

However, most investigations typically begin with an investigative notice.

THIS ENTIRE PROCESS LOOKS PRETTY SCARY. WHAT SHOULD I DO NOW? I JUST WANT TO TEACH KIDS.

We want you to focus on doing the best job possible to educate students without undue concern about various accusations. There is a good chance that you will never be involved in a situation involving any kind of disciplinary action, but here are a few things to keep in mind:

- Always try to use your best professional judgment.
- Even if you feel that you are an "ethical" person, review the Educators' Code of Ethics.
- Under current TEA practices, questionable or illegal activities outside of the classroom have been used against educators to determine if they are worthy to instruct the children of Texas.
- The school district can only report allegations of misconduct to TEA. They do not have the power to "take away" your certification.
- Every case is different. Advice that may be best for one individual may not be best for you.
- The SBEC rules can be modified. Be sure to check the TEA website for updates.
- This article is only a basic overview. Please contact the TSTA Help Center for legal assistance if you are contacted by TEA/SBEC for any disciplinary reason.

— Amanda Moore, TSTA Staff Attorney



Eliminating bias from teacher observations

Recent reports identify two types of bias that can impact teacher evaluation, one linked to student achievement levels and the other to the observation process.

- In “Evaluating Teachers with Classroom Observations: Lessons Learned in Four Districts,” the Brookings Institute found that teachers of students with higher incoming achievement levels receive, on average, higher classroom observation scores: 37 per-

cent received a top observation score, compared to only 9 percent of teachers of the lowest performing students.

- The “Foundations of Observation” report, published as part of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation MET Project, acknowledges that appraiser bias is inherent and that “everyone” has professional preferences or biases that are a by-product of personal experience, environment, and even social and cultural conditioning.

However, observation is a critical cornerstone of the teacher evaluation process because the best predictor of student achievement is an effective classroom teacher. If properly constructed, a teacher evaluation instrument should minimize the impact of bias in the observation process.

The NEA Foundation identifies two major areas of observable behavior.

- The classroom environment — the

physical and emotional climate of the classroom.

- Instructional practices and activities in the classroom.

The classroom environment is the first thing the appraiser will notice — the tangible and intangible characteristics that turn a room into a place for learning.

- Tangible characteristics are the design and layout of the classroom and how it supports learning.
- Intangible characteristics reflect the value the teacher and students place on learning, as indicated by reasonable expectations for behavior, comfortable relationships between students and the teacher and between students, and a balance between the time spent on instruction and non-instructional activities.

Instructional practices are what the teacher and students say and do. This requires the appraiser to observe the purpose and utility in the lesson and whether the teacher clearly moves the students toward a desired result by asking questions that require students to think at a higher level and provides formative feedback to help students direct their own learning. Ideally, every student participates in the learning process because the teacher differentiates instruction to meet all students’ needs.

HOW CAN WE MINIMIZE BIAS IN THE OBSERVATION PROCESS?

1. Provide a clearly understood evaluation process so both teachers and appraisers understand what behaviors and practices are being appraised

An effective evaluation process should be about building an effective teaching corps.

and how they are being appraised.

2. Use multiple observers, including those from off-campus.

3. Plan opportunities for teachers and appraisers to talk and provide feedback about what was observed. These conversations should be scheduled in a way that does not take time away from teacher planning and preparation.

4. Establish policies to protect the rights of all students as learners. End the process of “dumping” students into certain classes to balance district budgets or accommodate campus-staffing limitations. To the extent possible, let the breakdown of students in a class mirror the breakdown of students in the school or district.

5. Ensure observers are rigorously trained, properly certified, and have the skills needed to interpret and apply performance rubrics.

6. Differentiate the rubric so the evaluation elements apply fairly to teachers. “One-size-fits-all” does not work for students and should not be the norm for teacher evaluation.

7. Notify teachers in advance of observations, as any change in the classroom — e.g., the presence of another adult — can alter the dynamics.

8. Require anti-bias training as a part of the appraiser certification process to help appraisers recognize their own biases and understand how

their words and actions can skew and “pre-determine” teacher observation ratings.

9. Understand that improvement takes time.

10. Emphasize the need for evaluation that encourages sustainable and continuous improvement of teacher practices instead of a short-term “weeding out” process.

If the appraiser goes into an observation expecting to build teacher effectiveness, that will be the outcome. If the appraiser goes into the observation looking for reasons to get rid of a teacher, the school culture will begin to collapse.

An effective evaluation process should be about building an effective teaching corps. It requires:

- instructional leaders who use observation effectively to develop teachers;
- deep reflection by teachers on their own practices and behaviors; and
- a collaborative environment that builds teacher effectiveness and expands school capacity.

The best way to minimize bias is to actively plan and participate in the pre-observation conference so you and your appraiser are on the same page. For more information on how to make the pre-conference work for you, email me at BryanW@tsta.org.

— *Bryan Weatherford is TSTA’s Teaching and Learning Specialist*



El Paso hosts the 137th annual TSTA Convention

This year’s convention will be held in El Paso on April 8-9. All convention events will take place at the El Paso Convention Center and the Camino Real Hotel. The House of Delegates will begin Friday afternoon and continue throughout Saturday. Voting will take place Saturday morning. Additional information and convention updates will be posted on the TSTA website in the members only, “Leaders Login” area.

BECOME A DELEGATE

The House of Delegates (HoD) serves a vital role in the governance of TSTA and

helps to shape the future of our organization. The HoD may establish goals for TSTA, amend its bylaws, and act on recommendations from the TSTA officers, board, or committees. TSTA statewide elections are held at the HoD annual meeting. This year delegates will elect the NEA Director for Texas, Place 1, and if necessary, at-large members of the TSTA Board of Directors.

Please contact your local president for details on how delegates are elected in your local. Delegate allocations are based on membership totals as of Jan. 15. Local delegate election results must be reported to TSTA by March 15.

REGISTRATION

Registration for the convention begins at 7:00 a.m. on Friday, April 8, and continues to Saturday, April 9. All TSTA members and guests are welcome to attend the convention, but only delegates with proper delegate credentials are allowed in the designated delegate section and voting area. Non-delegates/alternates and guests are encouraged to register.

HEARINGS AND WORKSHOPS

An open hearing will be held Friday morning on the TSTA budget. Professional development workshops eligible

for continuing education credit also will be offered on Friday.

HOUSING AND TRANSPORTATION

The Camino Real Hotel is holding a room block for TSTA convention attendees. Reserve your room directly with the hotel by **March 12, 2016**, to ensure your room at the group rate of \$92 (plus tax). Self-parking for hotel guests is \$3 per day based on availability. Hotel shuttle to and from the airport is complimentary at this time.

Make your reservation by calling 800-769-4300 or 915-534-3099 from 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. (MST), Monday through Friday. Identify yourself as a participant of the “TSTA Annual Convention” at the time you make your reservation to obtain the group rate.

Please note: A first night room deposit secured with a major credit card is required for all reservations. (TSTA cautions individuals not to use a debit card, or a card that can be used as a debit card, to secure your reservation.) Cancellations must be made with the hotel 48 hours before your scheduled arrival to avoid a charge for the first night.

Local associations who wish to pay by check should contact TSTA’s Center for Executive and Governance (CEG). Also please do not make your reservations through any travel site as they are not honored as part of the TSTA block.

SPECIAL ASSISTANCE

Members who do not have a room-

mate but would like to share accommodations should contact TSTA’s CEG at 800-324-5355, ext. 1510 or 1514, **before** making your hotel reservation. We will attempt to match members who want to share expenses, though we cannot guarantee a roommate for everyone.

Physically challenged delegates or delegates who have special needs should contact the CEG no later than **March 20, 2016**, to arrange assistance during the convention. Payment for special

needs requests such as wheelchairs or transportation is the responsibility of the member or delegate, but TSTA will help arrange for services.

TSTA HOST COMMITTEE

TSTA would like to thank this year’s host committee for their efforts to help ensure a successful and fun convention. The host committee members, appointed by President Candelaria, are Norma De La Rosa, Angelica Soto, and Arlinda Valencia.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE	
Thursday, April 7	
8:00 a.m.	Advisory Committee Meeting
1:30 p.m.	Board of Directors Meeting
6:00 p.m.	Candidates Meeting
Friday, April 8	
7:00 a.m.	Registration
8:00 a.m.	Special Interest Exhibits
8:00 a.m.	Open Hearings
9:15 a.m.	Professional Development Workshops (CPE Credit)
10:30 a.m.	Professional Development Workshops (CPE Credit)
12:30 p.m.	Parliamentary Procedures Workshop
2:00 p.m.	House of Delegates Opening Ceremony and Meeting
Saturday, April 9	
6:30 a.m.	Registration
7:00 a.m.	Regional/Caucus Meetings
8:00 a.m.	Special Interest Exhibits
8:30 a.m.	Voting/Elections
10:00 a.m.	House of Delegates Meeting
12:30 p.m.	Lunch and Recognized Caucus Meetings
2:00 p.m.	House of Delegates Meeting

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Texas State Teachers Association

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"I am an active member of TSTA because it gives me a stronger voice in my profession. We can't allow high-stakes, standardized tests to become the barometer for good teaching."



— Pflugerville Educators Association President August Plock, who represented TSTA at the T-TESS teacher evaluation stakeholders meeting, an opportunity for educators to provide input to the Texas Education Agency