

WEB 2.0 • IS YOUR CONTRACT BINDING? • LEGISLATIVE WRAP-UP

Advocate

Texas State Teachers Association/National Education Association

SUMMER 2007



Teacher of the Year
For Dana Boyd, it's all about family

Challenges Ahead

We must build our strength in numbers.

By the time you read this article, the 80th Legislature will have ended with not so much a bang, but a whimper. What was accomplished? School finance remains unfixed as we welcome about 80,000 new students a year, with higher costs to our districts for maintenance and operations. Salaries are still below the national average; we still have over 50,000 classrooms filled with inappropriately certified teachers; we still have over half of new teachers leaving the classroom after the first five years; we WILL have incentive pay to reward only a few deserving teachers; our retirement system still needs an increase in the multiplier formula; and our per pupil expenditures still rank near the bottom of all states. While the 80th session saw a decrease in the “bad bills” of the past (and we beat back vouchers again; hooray!), it was not a session that solved our education problems in our great state.



Yes, the elections of last November made our lawmakers sit up and take notice that teachers and school employees can and did make a huge difference! We banded together to take out 11 unfriendly incumbents and elected 93% of our endorsed candidates! I think that was a significant reason why a plethora of bad bills weren't filed, and that is a good thing!

So, the challenges we face have not diminished nor gone away. We must renew our strength in numbers, and that takes hard work in reaching all new employees and asking them to join our great association. As I travel to school districts, visit classrooms and talk to teachers and school employees, I encourage everyone to join TSTA/NEA. I implore our current members to talk to their colleagues, reach out and give everyone the opportunity of membership. I still have folks tell me that no one has ever asked them to join! Having a two minute face-to-face conversation is usually all it takes to convince someone to join our TSTA family; the benefits are hard to beat and their dues can be refunded through our great discounts and services available all over the state. A good motto is: “Everyone get one.” If everyone would sign up just one new member, we would increase our membership by 65,000! There is always a membership form in this publication, and there is one to be downloaded on our website, www.tsta.org.

If you believe, as I do, that the future of the teaching profession lies in our hands as we face these challenges together, encourage membership in TSTA/NEA. Remember: A teacher's work environment is a child's learning environment. Hold your head up and know that, as a teacher and school employee, YOU make the difference in a child's life. On your worst day, you are often a child's best hope.

May the 2007-08 school year be the best year for ALL our children!



Texas Teacher of the Year Dana Boyd (right) visits TSTA Headquarters with her principal, Deborah Vazquez.

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TSTA Makes a Difference in the 80th Legislature

Major threats are defeated, but slow progress leaves unfinished business.

Last year, Texas voters made it clear that public education is their top priority, and thanks to your efforts in both the primary and general elections, we saw a dramatic increase in the number of our pro-education allies in the Texas House. Due in large part to our work in the elections, TSTA members were able to call on legislators this year to make a real difference on major issues that directly impact educators and our public schools.

In January, TSTA conducted a statewide poll that showed a solid majority of Texans of all



political persuasions believe the state should increase public school funding and increase teacher pay across the board instead of granting “incentive pay” increases to only a few. Our polling indicated 80% of Texans know the school finance “band aid” passed in 2006 was not a real school funding solution; legislators, who had fought through four years of regular and special session school finance battles, left that critical unfinished business to the 81st Legislature in 2009.

CRADDICK LOSES ONE IN THE HOUSE

Despite restrictive rules the leadership imposed on House budget debate—rules that placed state surplus funds off limits for a teacher pay amendment—the House passed an amendment developed by TSTA and sponsored by Rep. Rick Noriega that redirected \$583 million from a proposed incentive pay plan to provide all teachers an across-the-board pay raise of roughly \$800 - \$900. The leadership did everything possible to stop this amendment, and they failed on an 82-65 vote. While a conference committee later cut this amount in half, after losing this fight, the House leadership never put another bill that would have a negative impact on educational employees on the floor.

IS DR. LEININGER IN THE HOUSE?

Dr. Leininger spent an estimated \$7 million of his own money trying to elect pro-voucher candidates in the last election cycle. Unlike the 2005 session, when he was working out of the Speaker’s Office, Dr. Voucher was noticeably absent this session, with good reason—no voucher bill ever made it to the floor of the Texas House. Furthermore, a TSTA-supported state budget rider by Rep. Joe Heflin, prohibiting the use of state funds for private school vouchers, was adopted by an overwhelming House majority.

In the Senate, a coalition of 11 Democrats and 4 Republicans kept a voucher bill sponsored by Education Chair Florence Shapiro from ever coming to the floor.

OLD ENEMIES, NEW FRIENDS

The Governor’s Business Council, which played a major role in the reforms adopted during the last special session, became the Texas Institute for Education Reform this session and was pushing the same old high stakes testing agenda. Headed up by Sandy Kress (one of the chief architects of the No Child Left Behind law), James Windham (a staunch pro-voucher supporter), and Bill Hammond (president of the Texas Association of Business), they found life much more difficult after the 2006 elections.

In the Senate they, along with the Texas Public Policy Foundation, were pushing legislation that would have made due process and non-renewal protections a sham by changing the teacher appraisal system in a way that could have made student performance on high-stakes standardized tests the determining factor in personnel decisions about discharging or not renewing a teacher. TSTA and the newly founded Raise Your Hand group, headed up by former Lt. Governor Bill Ratliff, kept this bill (which was sponsored by Chairwoman Shapiro) off the floor of the Senate for over a month. The legislation never made it to the floor of the House.

OFFENSE WAS ANOTHER STORY

Unfortunately, we were never able to get the bills that moved our agenda to the floor of the House. Offense is difficult when the leadership opposes your agenda, but the bottom line is clear. In the last 18 months, we learned that we can affect policy through our work to elect candidates and hold them accountable. By the time the 2009 session convenes, we must be prepared to take the next step and demand that our elected leaders make a real commitment that respects the long term needs of our children and those who educate them. TSTA has proudly supported a majority of the members of the Legislature, but neither TSTA nor the majority of Texans are likely to support those who support future budgets that do not adequately address our highest priority: public education.

IMPORTANT NOTE ON SALARIES

Although school districts will receive enough money to provide an average \$425 pay raise, since the budget rider does not include pass through language, local associations will need to work with their school boards to insure that local teachers get the money.

BILLS TSTA SUPPORTED THAT PASSED

SB 135 by Wentworth provides a school district may not restrict the ability of an employee to communicate directly with a member of the local school board regarding matters relating to the operation of the district except for communications relating to the termination/nonrenewal of an employee.

SB 136 by Nelson directs TEA to develop and make available to school districts an internet safety curriculum that a district may use to educate students about the potential dangers of allowing personal information to appear on the internet.

SB 158 by Seliger adds educational diagnosticians to the list of people who, beginning September 1, 2008, must have appropriate certification by the SBEC in order to be employed.

SB 230 by Harris provides that if a student with legal issues changes schools, the parole or probation office having jurisdiction over that student shall notify the superintendent, or designee, in the new district of the arrest, etc., of the student. The superintendent shall notify all instructional and support personnel that will have regular contact with the student.

SB 282 by Gallegos directs school districts to notify parents of ninth grade and above students about programs in which the student can earn college credit, dual credit, advanced placement and international baccalaureate programs.

SB 370 by Shapiro provides a school district may not adopt a policy to require an employee, who acts in good faith, to pay for or replace student property that was in the employee's possession because of inci-

dents within the scope of the employee's duties. Similarly, a district may not require an employee, who acts in good faith, to pay for a textbook, an electronic textbook or technological equipment that is damaged, stolen, misplaced or not returned. An employee may be required to assume financial responsibility for school property if the property is used for personal business.

SB 389 by Shapiro authorizes the SBOE to increase the amount of school bonds that it will guarantee with the Permanent School Fund, up to five times the value of the PSF. Current law allows the SBOE to guarantee local bonds up to 2.5 times the value of the PSF.

SB 1039 by Lucio provides an exception to the TRS rule that allows a retiree/rehire to work six months in public schools without affecting his or her TRS annuity. This bill allows a retiree to work into June, but not past the 15th of the month, without affecting his or her June TRS annuity.

SB 1433 by Van de Putte creates an Employers for Education Excellence Award. The awards are to honor employers that implement policies to encourage employees to actively participate in activities of schools.

SB 1456 by Uresti directs TEA to maintain on the agency website a list of links to websites that provide information regarding the prevention of child abuse. TEA will also develop and periodically update a training program on child abuse that a school district may use for staff development.

SB 1713 by Eltife provides a school district shall (current law says may) allow a parent to designate a childcare facility or grandparent's residence as the place the student will ride the bus to, if the location is an approved stop.

SB 1871 by Zaffirini provides that information TEA collects on students of limited English proficiency shall be disaggregated by the method of instruction used for each student.

HB 208 by Flores provides for protections to students who participate in extracurricular activities or UIL competitions to remain eligible even though the student is enrolled in a course offered for joint high school and college credit.

HB 314 by Eissler allows parents to make a written request to have multiple birth

siblings placed in either the same or different classrooms. The district must honor the request unless it is determined by the principal and teacher in consultation that the placement is disruptive by the end of the first grading period following the multiple birth siblings' enrollment in the school. A parent may appeal the principal's classroom placement of multiple birth siblings. During an appeal, the multiple birth siblings shall remain in the classroom chosen by the parent.

HB 426 by Madden mandates that educators employed for Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs be properly certified, and that the TEA adopt minimum standards for the operation of the programs including student/teacher ratios, student health and safety and training for teachers in behavior management and safety procedures.

HB 776 by Dutton provides that when a child is taken into custody, that child may be brought to the school campus to which the child is assigned if school is in session and if the principal, the designee, or a peace officer assigned to the campus agrees to assume responsibility for the child for the remainder of the school day. Current law mandates that the child be released to a parent, brought to a juvenile detention facility, brought before the juvenile board, to a secure detention facility, or to a medical facility, if necessary.

HB 828 by Hochberg provides a hold harmless provision for the funding formulas for districts using Austin ISD as the baseline for determining each district's funding levels.

HB 973 by Eissler provides that an employee of a district participating in designated health plans who resigns after the last day of an instructional year is entitled to maintain insurance through the first anniversary of the date the plan was first made available to district employees for the last instructional year in which the employee was employed by the district; and the district may not diminish or eliminate the amount of a contribution available before the last date on which the employee is entitled to participate.

HB 1563 by Bolton mandates that a district issue a high school diploma posthumously to each student who died while enrolled in the district in the 12th grade upon a parents' request. The student must have been academically on track at the time of death to receive a diploma, and

KEY

SBEC State Board for Educator Certification

SBOE State Board of Education

TEA Texas Education Agency

TRS Teacher Retirement System

For a complete list of the education-related bills that passed, see www.tsta.org/legislative/update/07wra pup.shtml.

For details on the bills, go to www.capitol.state.tx.us.

not convicted or adjudicated of certain felony offenses.

HB 1609 by Crowover provides for the duties of the Commissioner of Education for the Communities in Schools program including establishing standards for improvement in student behavior, academic achievement and promotion, graduation, retention and dropout rates. Also provides the responsibilities of the TEA in encouraging business participation, obtaining information from participating schools, use of federal and state funds, and other area concerning the program identified by the Commissioner. The Commissioner may withhold funding if it is determined that a program consistently fails to achieve performance goals, objectives and measures. Funding for these programs will come from funds appropriated for other allotments for service programs under Chapter 33 of the Texas Education Code.

HB 1622 by Delisi mandates that a district grievance policy must permit an employee to report a grievance against a supervisor that alleges that supervisor's violation of the law in the workplace or unlawful harassment of the employee to a supervisor other than the one complained against.

HB 1700 by Hilderbran adds the "Nature Science Curriculum Project" to be developed by SBOE for grades 6-12 to comply with the new 4x4 curriculum.

HB 2112 by Patrick provides for a criminal offense if a person intentionally exhibits, uses or threatens to exhibit or use a firearm in a manner intended to cause alarm or personal injury to another person or to damage school property in or on any property, including a parking lot, garage or other area, that is owned by a private or public school or on a school bus.

HB 2383 by Lucio creates a subsidy for certification examinations for students who successfully complete a career and technology program for a certain trade or occupation, passes a certification exam to qualify for a license or certification for the trade or occupation, demonstrates financial need, and attended a public high school.

HB 2399 by Delisi provides twenty-five percent of the funds a campus receives under the Texas Educators Excellence Award program may now be used for a teacher retention demonstration project to identify and retain highly effective teachers including a selection strategy focused

on attracting new and experienced teachers who have deep content knowledge and a commitment to long-term participation in the teaching profession, and an alternative certification program that prepares individuals who have deep content knowledge and outstanding academic or professional achievement for long-term participation in the teaching profession.

HB 2504 by Eissler mandates the Commissioner of Education to establish an intervention program in which a participating campus provides intensive math intervention for students not performing at grade level in four through seven, and algebra readiness intervention for grade eight.

HB 2646 by Rose allows for stipends to be paid under the Texas Educator Excellence Award Program to teachers who have obtained national board certification.

HB 2814 by Eissler creates a Language Immersion Pilot Project to be used at campuses that demonstrate a substantial enrollment of students with limited English proficiency or bilingual students, demonstrate parent, teacher and community support, and commit to a language immersion program for a minimum of three years.

HB 3171 by Swinford mandates TEA to develop an internet safety and use curriculum that a district may use to educate students about dangers of internet, copyright laws and consequences of cyber plagiarism and theft of audiovisual works.

HB 3659 by Dunnam prohibits the release under the Open Records Act of the name of a person who is enrolled in a public or private primary or secondary school and involved in an improper relationship with an educator.

BILLS TSTA OPPOSED THAT WERE DEFEATED

SB 1000 by Shapiro which would have created a voucher program for students with autism. The student could have attended any public or private school, at the parent's option, at public expense. Once eligible the student could have received a voucher each year until the student graduated or turned 22.

SB 1643 by Shapiro directed the commissioner to establish an accountability system for educator preparation programs, including the performance of students taught by teachers in their first three years

of teaching and the percentage who remained in the profession for five years. The commissioner was also to adopt a new appraisal process for teachers with a majority of the appraisal based on student performance and at least 25% based on test scores. An unsatisfactory appraisal would have resulted in an improvement plan and three consecutive poor appraisals would have been cause for termination.

HB 1607 by Zedler would have given the Attorney General authority to impose penalties on an association for disseminating false or misleading information or omitting relevant facts to elicit a particular opinion and could have restricted free speech rights.

HB 2136 by Hancock would have required districts with 5,500 students, that made 20 referrals in middle school or above, to report each agency or organization and the number of times a student was referred by a counselor for services.

HB 2508 by P. King would have prohibited a school employee from using state or local funds or facilities, including time for which the employee was being paid, to electioneer for or against a candidate, measure or political party.

HB 2697 by Hancock would have authorized public and charter schools to operate distance learning schools which essentially created a virtual voucher. Home school and out of state students could participate, no fees were allowed, and districts could have lost state aid.

HB 2785 by Paxton would have further reduced the maximum local property tax to \$0.91 and would have taken \$1.25 billion per year that could have been spent on improvements in schools and health care.

HB 2887 by T. King would have allowed an administrator to give a prospective employer information about the performance of a school employee, including confidential evaluations and given the administrator immunity for information given in good faith.

HB 3423 by Eissler was very similar in content to SB 1643.

HB 3868 by Paxton expanded the public education grant program and could have become a vehicle for a private school voucher amendment.

OTHER EDUCATION LEGISLATION THAT PASSED

SB 7 by Hinojosa requires each school district to make available annual training for employees and volunteers in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and the use of a defibrillator. Coaches, nurses, PE instructors, marching band leaders, etc., must take the training. The SBOE shall, by rule, include CPR and the use of a defibrillator in the health curriculum. Each school district shall have at least one defibrillator on each campus. To the extent practical, each district shall make a reasonable effort to have a defibrillator at each athletic practice. Each school district, in cooperation with the University Interscholastic League (UIL), shall determine the extent to which defibrillators must be available at UIL competitions, including a staff person trained to use it.

SB 8 by Janek directs the UIL to prohibit student participation in UIL activities unless the student agrees not to use steroids and agrees to submit to random drug testing. Parents have to sign a form acknowledging that the student may be subject to random drug testing. The bill requires coaches in seventh grade and above to complete an educational program developed by the UIL. The UIL will adopt rules to randomly test a statistically significant number of students for drugs in 30% of high schools. The UIL will provide for a period of ineligibility to participate in UIL athletic competitions for any student who tests positive or refuses to submit to random testing.

SB 9 by Shapiro directs SBEC, on receipt of an alleged incident of misconduct by an educator, to place a notice of the incident on the educator's certification record, if the alleged misconduct presents a risk to the health, safety or welfare of a student. If it is determined the educator has not engaged in the alleged misconduct, the board shall immediately remove the notice from the educator's certification record. It provides that SBEC may suspend/revoke or deny certification to people convicted of offenses ranging from moral turpitude to sexual or physical abuse of a minor, etc. It requires a national background check, using fingerprints, for current and future school employees. The state will pay for the current employees to have the national background check. Future applicants for certification or employment shall pay this cost. It creates a national clearinghouse,

administered by the Department of Public Safety, to maintain information on each person submitted for a background check. In the future, SBEC will be notified of any arrest of an educator on file in the clearinghouse, and that information will be made available to the employing school district. It directs school districts to refuse employment to and terminate a person whose background check found a conviction for a felony offense under Title 5, Penal Code (murder, kidnap, sexual assault, etc.) or conviction for an offense for which the person has to register as a sex offender, unless the date of the offense is more than 30 years ago.

SB 82 by Van de Putte directs the commissioner, by rule, to adopt an extracurricular activity safety training program that must be completed by coaches, trainers, sponsors of athletic activities and marching band directors. The training must include certification by the American Red Cross or similar training in CPR, recognizing symptoms for potentially catastrophic injuries, etc. Students participating in athletics must receive training, including warnings about substances marketed to enhance athletic performance. Each competing student must complete and sign a UIL form on medical history and an acknowledgement of the rules. A school that is determined to be out of compliance with these requirements shall be subject to penalties to be determined by the UIL.

SB 530 by Nelson provides that school districts shall require students in grades K-5 to participate in moderate or vigorous physical activity for at least 30 minutes each day or at least 135 minutes per week. For grades 6-8 the district shall require 30 minutes of moderate or vigorous activity for four semesters of that time. School districts shall assess the physical fitness of students in grades 3-12.

SB 556 by Lucio creates an interagency obesity council, including the commissioner of education. The council shall meet at least once a year to discuss each agency's programs to promote better health and prevent obesity and to consider the feasibility of tax incentives for employers who promote activities to reduce obesity.

SB 606 by Ogden provides that the name of a student or minor included in a report

as a victim of abuse or unlawful conduct by an educator is not public information.

SB 670 by Ellis provides that local school boards, by December 31, 2007, may adopt a resolution changing the length of terms for trustees. The resolution must provide for either three or four year terms and must specify the transition methodology.

SB 673 by Zaffirini provides a district shall issue a certificate of attendance to a student who receives special education services and has completed four years of high school but has not completed an Individualized Education Program. The student shall also be allowed to participate in graduation ceremonies.

SB 827 by West expands to middle schools a Department of Agriculture program that currently demonstrates agricultural products and creates awareness of agriculture to urban elementary schools.

SB 883 by Deuell provides a school district may not be required to pay an impact fee unless the district enters into a contract with the political subdivision that imposes the fee.

SB 960 by Shapleigh directs the commissioner of education to allow a student, who is a military dependent, to meet the Texas exit level exam requirement by taking a recognized norm referenced test, if the student transfers to Texas after their sophomore year.

SB 962 by Shapleigh provides a district's wealth is reduced by 25% in the formula to qualify for state facilities assistance, if the district demonstrates to the commissioner's satisfaction that the money is necessary to serve students who are military dependents, who are transferred to the district because of the federal base closure and realignment act.

SB 1031 by Shapiro phases out the high school TAKS tests and replaces them with end-of-course exams in the core subjects starting with students entering the ninth grade in 2011-12. The 12 end-of-course exams will be in math (algebra I & II and geometry), science (biology, chemistry and physics), social studies (world history, world geography, and U.S. history) and English language (English I, II, and III). To graduate from high school, a student must get an average score of 70 on the three tests in each core subject area. A student who scores below 60 on an exam must re-

take the test. The end-of-course exam will count as 15% of the student's score for that course. The end-of-course exams shall not be administered before the first week of May (except the English exams, because additional time is needed to grade the writing sections). The state will pay for each eighth grade student to take a nationally norm-referenced preliminary college prep assessment instrument for the purpose of diagnosing academic strengths and deficiencies of each student prior to high school. The state will pay for each tenth grade student to take a preliminary college prep assessment instrument to measure the student's progress toward college readiness and the workplace. The state will pay for eleventh or twelfth grade students to take one nationally norm referenced assessment instrument used by colleges as part of their undergraduate admissions process. The bill directs the commissioner to establish security procedures for these tests and makes it a Class C misdemeanor to intentionally disclose any portion of the secure assessment instrument. The bill created a 15-member select committee, co-chaired by the chairs of the House and Senate education committees, to do a comprehensive review of the current accountability system.

SB 1161 by Jackson increases from seven to 10 days the time a school district has to file a complaint against a student/parent for failure of the student to attend school.

SB 1447 by Duncan authorizes TRS to invest in a wider range of products in order to efficiently manage the fund and reduce the risk of the overall investment portfolio.

SB 1504 by Van de Putte directs a school district to include in its multi-hazard emergency operations a plan for responding to a train derailment if the train track is within 1000 yards of school property.

SB 1517 by Janek provides that no pass/no play provisions do not apply to honors courses, AP classes, international baccalaureate, or dual credit classes in the core subjects or a foreign language. TEA shall, on a biennial basis, determine if other courses should be added to the list.

SB 1788 by Shapiro creates a virtual school network run by the SBOE and paid for by the state. These electronic courses would be primarily delivered over the internet and would require the same number of instructional hours and include the same essential knowledge and skills re-

quirements as a traditional class. Online course could be offered by institutions of higher education or a school district rated acceptable or higher. Teachers of online courses would have to be certified by SBEC. The SBOE shall establish criteria for electronic courses, provide a list of approved courses, and evaluate the courses.

SB 1846 by Duncan provides an increase in the state contribution to TRS to 6.58%. It provides that, if needed to fund the retiree's 13th check, the active employee's contribution may be increased to 6.58%. It provides that if the system is actuarially sound TRS will provide retirees a 13th check in September 2007. The 13th check will be equal to the lesser of the retiree's regular monthly annuity or \$2400. However, if on September 1 TRS determines the system is not actuarially sound, the active employee's contribution could be increased in order to help fund the 13th check. If there is still not enough money to cover the retirees' increase, TRS may delay the delivery of the 13th check. TRS may not provide a 13th check if the board determines that doing so would extend the unfunded liability period beyond the 30 year allowable limit. It changes the current law that requires districts to pay a surcharge for employing retire/rehire employees who retired after January 1, 2005 to cover people who retired after August 31, 2005.

SB 1877 by Averitt clarifies that salary amounts designated as health care supplementation (the \$500 state health insurance stipend) count as salary for TRS purposes.

SB 1912 by Shapleigh provides SBEC may issue temporary certification to an out-of-state teacher who has met all the requirements for certification except passing the exit exam. A certificate issued under this provision to a teacher, who is employed by a district that has constructed or expanded at least one instructional facility due to increased enrollment because of the federal base closure act, may not expire before the first anniversary of the date on which SBEC completes the review of the educator's credentials.

HB 121 by Dukes requires each school district to adopt and implement a dating violence policy in the district improvement plan.

HB 155 by Pickett provides procedures for TRS when incorrect payment to a retiree is discovered; mandates that TRS,

upon discovery of an overpayment, adjust any future payments to recover the overpayment; and provides for a complaint process by which a person may grieve the notice of overpayment and adjustment.

HB 188 by Hochberg mandates school boards to designate a request for production of textbooks in a subject area and grade level by the school year in which the textbooks are intended to be made available in classrooms. It also allows for the purchase of supplemental textbooks, and if the cost is under the state limit, districts are entitled to receive a credit of the difference at 50% of the amount. Credits may be used to pay the difference if the cost is more than the limit allowed and may also be used to pay for additional textbooks and electronic textbooks.

HB 189 by Hochberg prohibits a superintendent from receiving any financial benefit for personal services performed for any business entity that conducts or solicits business with the district. Any financial benefit received by a superintendent for performing personal services for any other entity must be approved by the school board in open meeting on a case by case basis.

HB 323 by Hamilton requires that each school bus purchased after September 1, 2010 shall be equipped with a three-point seat belt for each passenger. Districts may implement a disciplinary policy to enforce the use of seat belts by students. The bill also mandates that districts report annually the number of accidents involving their school buses.

HB 566 by Hamilton allows for a school district to adopt a policy requiring a person that is at least 18 years of age to attend school until the end of the school year.

HB 708 by Puente designates the week in which September 17 falls "Celebrate Freedom Week" in public schools to educate students about the sacrifices made for freedom in the founding of this country and the values on which this country was founded.

HB 890 by Hilderbran establishes the "Trust for County Permanent School Fund" which would protect proceeds from the disposal of county school lands and put them into a trust. The principal of the trust must be held in perpetuity for the strict use for public schools in the county.

HB 1059 by Parker requires that the Department of State Health Services prepare a list of all the immunizations required for admission to public schools and a list of immunizations recommended for school-age children in English and in Spanish. It further requires that a district that maintains an Internet website to post the above lists, health clinics known to offer the influenza vaccine, and a link to the Department of Health Services Internet website prominently on the website in English and in Spanish.

HB 1137 by Hochberg extends funding for schools to include people over 21 years of age but not over 26 years of age who are admitted to complete the requirements for a high school diploma. It provides a student who attends class between 75%-90% of the days class is offered, may be given credit for completing a plan approved by the school's principal to meet the course requirements.

HB 1270 by Eissler changes the current permissive provision to require the commissioner to establish an intensive reading and language intervention pilot program. The pilot program must be made available to participating campuses during the 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 school years. Students will be selected to participate based on certain assessment data and be administered a benchmark test at the beginning and end of the program.

HB 1287 by Chisum establishes elective courses in grades nine and above on the Bible and its impact on the history and literature of western civilization.

HB 1844 by C. Howard creates the "Home Schooled Student Merit Scholarship and Advanced Placement Testing" program to permit a home schooled student to participate in an administration of the PSAT/NMSQT test or a college advanced placement test offered by the district. Home schooled student must pay the same fee an enrolled student would pay.

HB 2171 by Swinford allows that a district – if it does not offer each grade level from K to 12 and its students generally attend a school in another state for grades not offered — may start school on any date permitted by the laws of the other state.

HB 2176 by Deshotel requires the SBOE and the Attorney General to develop a parenting and paternity awareness program that a district must use in its high

school health curriculum. The program must address parenting skills, relationship skills and skills relating to prevention of family violence.

HB 2237 by Eissler deals with dropout prevention initiatives. First, it mandates that best practices be placed in the online clearinghouse administered by TEA and requires a study be conducted relating to best practices to include high-performing and highly efficient dropout prevention programs, select the best programs identified for use in Texas, and recommend future legislation or other actions for implementation of programs. Second, it creates the Science Laboratory Grant Program which will be a competitive grant program for additional funds to be used in constructing and renovating high school science labs. Third, it provides for additional professional development activities for teachers and administrators not to exceed \$2.5 million each year, and the training under this provision shall include training relating to implementing curriculum and instruction that is aligned with the foundation curriculum and college readiness standards. Fourth, it establishes the Mathematics Instructional Coaches Pilot Program to provide assistance in developing the content knowledge and instructional expertise of teachers who instruct students in mathematics at middle, junior and high schools. Approved service providers such as academies and training centers including T-STEM centers are approved for the use of this grant. Fifth, it creates Teacher Reading Academies to be developed by the Commissioner of Education to include training for a teacher providing instruction in reading to students at the sixth, seventh or eighth grade levels in various subject areas. Teachers covered that are assigned to an academically unacceptable campus must attend a reading academy. The bill also provides for the implementation of a reading instrument at the beginning of seventh grade to students not demonstrating a reading proficiency in the sixth grade. Sixth, beginning with the 2008-09 school year; the SBOE shall incorporate college readiness standards and expectations into the TEKS of the foundation curriculum. This bill also provides for College Preparatory Courses and the development of TEKS of courses in college preparatory mathematics, science, social studies, and English language arts. Finally, this bill includes Grants for Student Clubs, Collaborative Dropout Reduction Pilot Program,

Intensive Technology-Based Academic Intervention Pilot Program, Intensive Summer Programs, Education "Go Get It" Week, Higher Education and Workforce Readiness Programs, Dropout Prevention Strategies, Technology-Based Supplemental Instruction Pilot Program, High School Innovation Grant Initiative, and the High School Completion and Success Initiative which creates a council for future recommendations.

HB 2411 by Strama provides for a conflict of interest provision for a board member who also is a stockholder, officer, director or employee of a bank submitting proposals to become a depository for school district.

HB 2427 by Truitt is the TRS Sunset bill which requires TRS to reduce disability annuities on a sliding scale based on other income for people who exceed an income level, to be determined; requires TRS Board members to get training on TRS, after election and before beginning to make decisions; and requires that TRS provide more retirement benefit counseling around the state and do more oversight of qualified investment products it approves for use by educators to supplement their TRS annuity.

HB 2455 by B. Cook makes it an excused absence when a student attends a required court appearance including travel without penalty.

HB 2503 by Eissler creates the "Technology Literacy Assessment" Pilot Program which is a competitive grant program. It allows a district to participate in the program in order to assess student technology proficiency, and assessment instruments shall be adopted by TEA for use by the districts. Each year the assessment instrument shall be implemented in the participating districts to students in either fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth or ninth grade. All results must be reported to TEA.

HB 2532 by Patrick authorizes the board of trustees to expel a student charged with a Title 5 felony regardless of whether the incident occurred on or off school property. After a hearing, a student charged with assault, sexual offenses or other crime in Title 5 of the Penal Code must be placed in Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program if one is available or in a Disciplinary Alternative Education Program.

HB 2563 by Hancock creates a legal duty for school boards regarding their superintendents and mandates that school boards implement and monitor plans, procedures, and other stated initiatives to achieve appropriate, clearly defined and desired results in major areas of district operations. The bill also mandates other board duties and legal obligations including making all hiring and firing decisions of educators and other employees. The board may delegate employment decisions on non-contract employees to the superintendent. The acceptance and rejection of employment of contract employees must be reflected in the minutes. The board will assume responsibilities for termination or suspension of an employee or the non-renewal of an employee's contract.

HB 2864 by Chisum creates a pilot program to provide supplemental technology-based instruction to students in rural school districts. The Commissioner must establish a grant program for instruction for grades 6-12.

HB 3190 by Giddings establishes minimum guidelines for operating a multifunctional school bus and disqualifying those convicted of drunk or reckless driving in the past 10 years. It also requires school districts to conduct emergency bus evacuation exercises.

HB 3259 by Branch creates an International Assessment Instrument Program in which districts may participate. The Commissioner shall compare performance on international assessment instrument in this state with students of same grade level in other countries. It also provides for professional development for educators under this program.

HB 3457 by Hochberg requires buses with diesel engines to keep engines off when at school or a school event except when arriving or departing, or as necessary for pre-heating/cooling before departure.

HB 3485 by S. King instructs TEA to establish a panel to review and recommend revisions to the career and technical education curriculum; and review and recommend revisions for the program in which high schools and articulated postsecondary institutions allow high school students to take advanced technical credit courses.

HB 3495 by Otto requires the wording on

public notices of a governing body, including school boards, for a meeting to vote on a change in tax rates to specifically say the meeting is about a tax revenue increase.

HB 3618 by Raymond adopts a pilot program for type 2 diabetes along the border counties. It requires school districts participating in the program to track the height, weight, and blood glucose levels for student in K-8.

HB 3678 by C. Howard provides for public forums for which a student may express religious viewpoints. A district must treat a student's voluntary expression of a religious viewpoint in the same manner as it would treat a student's secular or other viewpoint on an otherwise permissible subject and may not discriminate against a student based on a religious viewpoint. Districts must adopt a policy that includes a limited public forum for a student to speak at all school events at which a student is to publicly speak. Students are also now free to express their religious beliefs in homework, artwork, and other written and oral assignments free from discrimination. Students must also be free to organize religious groups and activities before, during and after school using school facilities to the same extent that students are permitted to organize for other non-curricular activities and groups.

HB 3826 by Morrison provides that to qualify for college admission under the top 10% rule a high school graduate must have taken the recommended or advanced high school program or gotten a 1500 or better (out of 2400) on the SAT exam.

HB 3851 by Morrison requires the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to establish a uniform method for computing a high school GPA using a 4.0 scale by assigning weights for different level of instruction such as advance placement, honors, and international baccalaureate. The bill is to ensure a uniform standard for college admission. Each university or college will also be required to file a report on the composition breakdown of each freshman class.

HB 3900 by Morrison creates the Texas Tomorrow Fund II and allows for pre-paid tuition programs. There are three different programs or tiers that may be purchased for pre-paid tuition based on what type of college a student is expected to attend.

Haecker Reelected NEA Director

Elections were held at the TSTA House of Delegates in El Paso on April 28, 2007.

Rita Haecker of Education Austin and Reagan Hawkins of Nederland Teachers Association ran for NEA Director Place 1. Rita Haecker was reelected for a second three year term beginning September 1.

The delegates also elected five ESP at-large members of the TSTA Board of Directors: Claudette Thomas, Pasadena Educators Association; Linda Estrada, Donna Education Association; Leonor Terrazas, Ysleta Teachers Association; Karen Barnes, Education Austin; and Raymond Flood, NEA-Dallas. Their two-year terms will run from July 15, 2007 to July 14, 2009.

Notice of Filing Deadline for Officers

TSTA Officers: Nominations are open for TSTA Officers (TSTA President and TSTA Vice President) with nominations being due at TSTA's Organizing Center for Executive and Governance on September 15, 2007. The election will be conducted at the April 2008 Annual Convention. Contact TSTA's Center for Executive and Governance, 316 West 12th Street, Suite 510, Austin, Texas, 78701, 877-ASK-TSTA, ext. 1514 or 1510, for a filing form and information regarding the filing process. The term of office for TSTA President and Vice President shall be for three (3) years or until successors are elected beginning on July 15, 2008. Those who file for either of those offices are automatically filed for Alternate NEA Director from Texas.

NEA Director: Nominations are also open for NEA Director for Texas Place 3 and three (3) Alternate NEA Directors with nominations being due at TSTA's Organizing Center for Executive and Governance on September 15, 2007. The election for NEA Director for Texas Place 3 and three (3) Alternate NEA Directors will also be conducted at the April 2008 Annual Convention. Contact TSTA's Center for Executive and Governance, 316 West 12th Street, Suite 510, Austin, Texas, 78701, 877-ASK-TSTA, ext. 1514 or 1510, for a filing form and information regarding the filing process. The term of office for NEA Director for Texas Place 3 and the three (3) Alternate NEA Directors is for three (3) years beginning on September 1, 2008.

Can I Accept My Dream Job?



Every day the Help Center handles numerous calls regarding employees' rights. These are a few of the common questions we see. Your TSTA Organizing Center for Legal Services and Member Advocacy is headed by TSTA Deputy Executive Director Roger Montgomery. On a day-to-day basis, Legal Services Manager Joey Moore supervises the Help Center, staff attorneys, and other legal staff. The TSTA Help Center (877-ASK-TSTA) is manned by Help Center Coordinator Erick Schaudies, and attorneys Julie Chen, Molly Leder and Chip Waldron. Eve Bell is our new NEA-Dallas Help Center attorney. Staff attorneys John Grey and Russell Ramirez handle litigation cases. The staff is rounded out by Legal Assistant Karen Denton and Administrative Manager Yolanda King.

Dear TSTA:

I signed a contract with my district in March for the 2007-2008 school year. A neighboring district has just offered me my dream job for the upcoming school year. Can I accept the new job?

—Dreaming of greener pastures

Dear Dreaming:

The answer to this question depends on timing. Generally, a contracted teacher may unilaterally resign from his teaching contract if the teacher does so in writing at least 45 calendar days before the first day of instruction. You must determine the first day of instruction for the 2007-2008 school year, and then count backwards 45 calendar days. If there are more than 45 days before the first day of instruction, you may still submit your resignation. You should submit your written resignation to the board of trustees, or if your district policy allows, to the superintendent. To be safe, send the resignation in a manner that provides confirmation of when it was sent and received, such as certified mail/return receipt requested.

If an educator submits his resignation less than 45 calendar days before the first day of instruction, the educator's certificate could be sanctioned. The school district may submit a complaint to the State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC); however, SBEC will not pursue sanctions against the educator unless the board of trustees of the school district makes a finding that good cause did not exist to abandon the contract and the district files a written complaint within 30 days after the educator separates from employment.

Dear TSTA:

I have been teaching first grade for 20 years. At the end of the last school year, without so much as a conversation with me, my principal informed me that I would be teaching third grade for the 2007-2008 school year. I am certified to teach third grade, but I have no interest in that high-stakes testing stuff. Can my principal reassign me without my permission?

—First grade Fran

Dear Fran:

Unfortunately, yes. Almost all teacher contracts provide that teachers work for the school district, and are subject to assignment and reassignment. If you are certified to teach a different course or grade, you may be reassigned at the discretion of district administrators. Only reassignments which are made for illegal, discriminatory reasons are improper. If you believe you have been illegally discriminated against for reasons such as your race, age, gender, disability or religion or any other illegal reason, you should contact the TSTA Help Center.

Dear TSTA:

The upcoming school year will be my first year of teaching. I signed a probationary contract with the district for 187 days. I am very nervous, though, because I have heard that with a probationary contract I can be let go at any time. I think I will be a great teacher, but if I make one mistake, can the district fire me on the spot?

—Nervous in Navasota

Dear Nervous:

Great question. On a day-to-day basis, probationary contract teachers have all of the same rights as term or continuing contract teachers. Just like term or continuing contract teachers, you are contracted to work for the district for a certain amount of time. Therefore, you are not an "at-will" employee who can be fired at any time. Like term and continuing contract teachers, probationary contract teachers have the right to a due process hearing if the district wants to end the employment relationship before the end of the contract. That means probationary contract teachers cannot be "fired on the spot." If such a situation arose, the district would have to give you notice of its intention to terminate your contract during the contract period, and you would be given the opportunity to challenge the action in a hearing.

The only difference between probationary contracts and term contracts comes at the end of the contract term. Towards the end of the contract, a school district may inform teachers of its intention not to reemploy them for the upcoming school year. This is referred to as a nonrenewal. Term contract teachers are entitled to a hearing to challenge a proposed nonrenewal.

Probationary contract teachers are not. With at least 45 days before the last day of instruction, a school district may simply inform a probationary contract teacher that she will not be issued another contract with the district for the upcoming school year.

The probationary contract teacher is not entitled to a nonrenewal hearing, but may file a grievance about the decision.

Dear TSTA:

I believe I am being paid less than other employees in the district who hold the same position. I want to file a grievance, but I have no evidence to back up my suspicions. The principal tells me that he can't discuss other employees' salary information. What should I do?

—Underpaid in Uvalde

Dear Underpaid:

Under the Texas Public Information Act (PIA), general salary information of public employees is covered by the Act, meaning that it should be disclosed. To submit a proper PIA request, you should do so in writing, to the district's public information officer. You should state that you are making a request pursuant to the Public Information Act and then name the specific information you want to see regarding other employees in question.

You have the right to ask for copies of the information, or to inspect the documents. The district may charge you for the cost of copies or gathering the information. If the cost will exceed \$40, the district must provide you with a written estimate so that you may decide if you wish to proceed.

What Happened at the El Paso TSTA Convention?



PHOTOS

left page: The convention opens with student mariachis

right page, top row: “Come to the Metroplex next year” skit; Superintendents Lorenzo Garcia and Hector Montenegro

second row: NEA’s Lily Eskelsen, top ESP Ernesto Salinas, Councilman Alejandro Lozano, Teacher of Year Dana Boyd

third row: TSTA Executive Director E.C. Walker, School Bell winners, Rep. Mark Homer

fourth row: PAC awards to Regions 3D and 1A; TSTA Vice President Ann Heuberger (left) and President Donna New Haschke (right) thank Connie Roccato for 30 years on staff

bottom row: Pride in Communication Awards to El Paso, Ysleta, and Garland locals

- NEA Secretary-Treasurer Lily Eskelsen warned of attempts to make teachers into test technicians. “It’s okay to want your kids to do well on a test but don’t ever believe that’s all they need from you,” she said.
- Texas Teacher of the Year Dana Boyd talked about the importance of advocating for kids and the profession and fixing No Child Left Behind: “Tell your legislators your stories. Tell them what you do every day!”
- Rep. Mark Homer and businessman Keith Compton of Paris received Human and Civil Rights Awards.
- Ernesto Salinas Jr. of Donna was named Ronnie Ray Education Support Professional of the Year.
- Postcards about protecting Social Security were mailed.
- Ysleta Superintendent Hector Montenegro, El Paso Superintendent Lorenzo Garcia, and City Councilman Alejandro Lozano welcomed delegates.
- Media representatives were honored for outstanding efforts at reporting on education issues.
- Locals and regions were recognized for their membership gains and communication efforts.
- More than \$16,000 was raised for TSTA’s political action committee, and there were 59 new continuing contributors and 61 upgrades.
- Delegates reelected NEA Director Rita Haecker of Austin and voted on new business items and constitutional amendments.



MORE ON THE CONVENTION www.tsta.org



A CONVERSATION WITH...

DA





DANA BOYD

For this Texas Teacher of the Year, it's all about family.

Standing outside the Oval Office, Dana Boyd was nervous.

It was her turn to walk in, shake hands with the President and First Lady, then join the other state Teachers of the Year in the Rose Garden. She took a deep breath, stepped out onto the tile floor....and fell. "Everything in Texas has got to be big," President Bush quipped about her entrance.

A couple of days later, Dana was back home in El Paso, telling that story to 400 of her fellow TSTA members at the April state convention. "It was truly embarrassing, but I got some extra time with the President," she said with a grin.

The fact that she told them that story reveals several things about Dana: her sense of humor, her warmth, and her feeling that, when she's among TSTA members, she's with family.

"My parents raised me to believe that no matter what, family will never give up on you," she said, so she creates family wherever she goes, including her classroom at Dolphin Terrace Elementary in El Paso's Ysleta ISD.

"On that first day of school, before new supplies are passed out or the name game is played, I let my students know that the people they are sitting next to are like a second family. We discuss what a family does for each other. I let them know that no matter what we encounter, we will be there for one another."

That feeling of safety is crucial to the children's progress, Dana believes. "If the students know they can trust their teacher, the possibilities are endless of what can go on in the

CREATING FAMILY

When we get our class rosters, I call the parents and students and welcome them to my family. I tell them I'm glad they're going to be coming to my class. I think it's important to build that relationship from day one. My first weekly newsletter is addressed to "My New Family." I tell my students, "We'll be spending more time together than you'll spend with your own family, and you all need to see each other as brothers and sisters who are going to help each other." Every three months we have a potluck; food always brings people together. Once we build trust, that's where the relationship starts.

GIVING BACK

Our librarian's mom was diagnosed with Alzheimer's. We needed to do something to help. The Alzheimer's Association came in and gave us information on a child's level. Come to find out there were many of our kids whose grandparents had either passed away from or been diagnosed with Alzheimer's. The kids started bringing in their penny jars, not buying chips, getting donations. A lot of these kids don't have a lot of money, but they'll dig in their sofas and their cars looking for change. Our class raised \$500 and our campus had close to \$2000. It has been an awesome experience and we do better each year. It's all about giving back to the community. I want the kids to know that there's ways to give back, even with just nickels and dimes.

BOOSTING ATTENDANCE

I thought it was important for our kids to have an incentive for coming to school. I got Walmart and Target to donate bikes. Every nine weeks, we give away four bikes, to a boy and a girl in K-3 and a boy and a girl in 4-6. Everyone who has been in school every day for that nine week period is eligible. It's enormous. If you could see their faces! By the grace of God, it's usually been those students who have never had a bike so their faces light up. You have to fight back the tears. This is what it's all about. It has been a tremendous success. We're at 96 or 97% for the year on attendance. It's important for them to be at school every day. Whatever we need to do to get them there, so be it.

classroom," she said. "I've had several students who have been abused or come from very bad family environments, but they can come to my classroom and know that they're safe and that they'll be able to tell me, 'Mrs. Boyd, there's something going on I need to talk to you about.'"

By building a sense of family with the other children, she's teaching collaboration, an important life skill. "From the beginning, I let my students know that 'I can't' is not an option in my class. Each of them must set high expectations for themselves," she said. "Everyone has their strengths and weaknesses. Although they might not be able to reach the same outcome, they will all try and praise each other for their strengths and encourage each other to overcome their challenges."

One of her tools for building family is potluck lunches every three months. "Food is always a way to bring people together. We believe in celebrating all occasions. It is through these beliefs and past experiences that I have the opportunity to learn about the families in my classroom and to incorporate these experiences in my daily lessons," she said. "Students and family members bring in a dish, and we sit back, eat, and get to know one another a little bit better."

They celebrate cultural diversity with an ethnic potluck during Hispanic Heritage and Black History months; focus on family traditions in December, when each student prepares a presentation about their family favorites; and end their year together with a big cookout.

Dana has taught first, second, and third



grade, but this year, when she's not traveling for the Teacher of the Year program, she's playing a broader role at her school as lead teacher. She does a pull-out program for kids who need extra help and mentors new teachers and 20 student interns.

"Every other Friday I provide professional development opportunities to the student interns. I address, in depth, areas that the local university doesn't," Dana said. The topics include handling difficult parents, classroom management, interview techniques, district policies and procedures, and best practices in all content areas.

"I want to do whatever I can to help teachers stay in the profession. We're losing good teachers because they are not coming in prepared and knowing what is expected."

It is hard to believe, but Dana is only the second African American to receive the Texas Teacher of the Year Award in its 38-year history. "I was happy but amazed," she said. "That tells me we still have a lot of work to do."

It was an African American teacher, Ruth Gallington at Sageland Elementary in El Paso, who sparked Dana's interest in teaching. "I was raised in a school where there weren't a lot of African Americans. Mrs. Gallington, my fifth grade teacher, sought me out and told me I could do anything I wanted to," Dana remembers. "She was strict but she was fair, and the kids had a lot of love for her. What I saw her do with the kids, I thought that was something I'd love to do."

When Dana called to tell her she had been named Texas Teacher of the Year, Mrs. Gallington replied, "I am not surprised at all."

"Hopefully, I can be a role model to another African American student out

there," Dana said, "do the same for someone, teach them that the only one who stops you from reaching your dreams is yourself."

Her dream currently is to be more involved with the legislature, the State Board of Education, and other policy-making bodies. "I don't want it to be 'hi' and 'bye.' I want to be involved as Teacher of the Year. It's important as educators that we let our voices be heard."

While in Washington, D.C., Dana and other state Teachers of the Year met with their members of Congress and held a press conference at the National Education Association Building about fixing the No Child Left Behind Act to better serve children. While in Austin, she spoke at the Capitol about increasing teacher pay and mentoring for new teachers.

"It's my mission to be pro-active for the teachers of Texas," Dana said. "I want to go everywhere."

El Paso may be 579 miles from Austin but Dana had the largest turnout ever for the Texas Teacher of the Year luncheon – 70 people.

"We had a representative of everyone in our school," she said. "We had a custodian, a P.E. coach, office personnel, cafeteria, our superintendent, some students, one of our parent volunteers. It was just an awesome event."

"That's what it's all about," Dana said. "It's bringing all those people together to work for the kids."

One big family.

If you would like Texas Teacher of the Year Dana Boyd to speak in your area, you can reach her at dolphin-teach2@yahoo.com.

WHAT OTHER PEOPLE SAY

"I remember the first time I went into her classroom; there were signatures all across the top of the ceiling...they were the signatures of all of Mrs. Boyd's past students. Another display that showed her students would forever be a part of her."

"The encouragement from Mrs. Boyd and the ability to find the good in each student made a difference not only with my daughter but with all her students as well. She treated all children with respect, regardless of their abilities. Her classroom was challenging and fun for her students."

"Children in her classroom have a great time each and every single day."

"My daughter, who began the year as a very quiet and shy individual, blossomed and frequently reminded me of what a fantastic writer she was."

"Mrs. Boyd's room was a classroom where a child was encouraged to be a risk taker and where mistakes were not seen as something negative but were an opportunity to grow and learn."

"I remember when I was in third grade, Mrs. Boyd was very caring when my mom passed away. She went to my mom's service and sat right next to me to make sure I was OK."

"Mrs. Boyd always made learning fun. Mrs. Boyd taught me things I will never forget. She is an outstanding and unforgettable teacher. She taught me to never give up! Mrs. Boyd treated us like we were her children."

Let's Read!

Members share photos of their celebrations.

March 2 is the national day to celebrate and encourage reading! Now in its ninth year, NEA's Read Across America is held on Dr. Seuss' birthday to encourage everyone, young and old, to read a book. Read all about it at www.nea.org/readacross; see more photos in the photo album at www.tsta.org.



TV STAR Taylor Kitsch, who plays Tim Riggins on NBC's "Friday Night Lights," joins TSTA President Donna New Haschke at Metz Elementary in Austin.



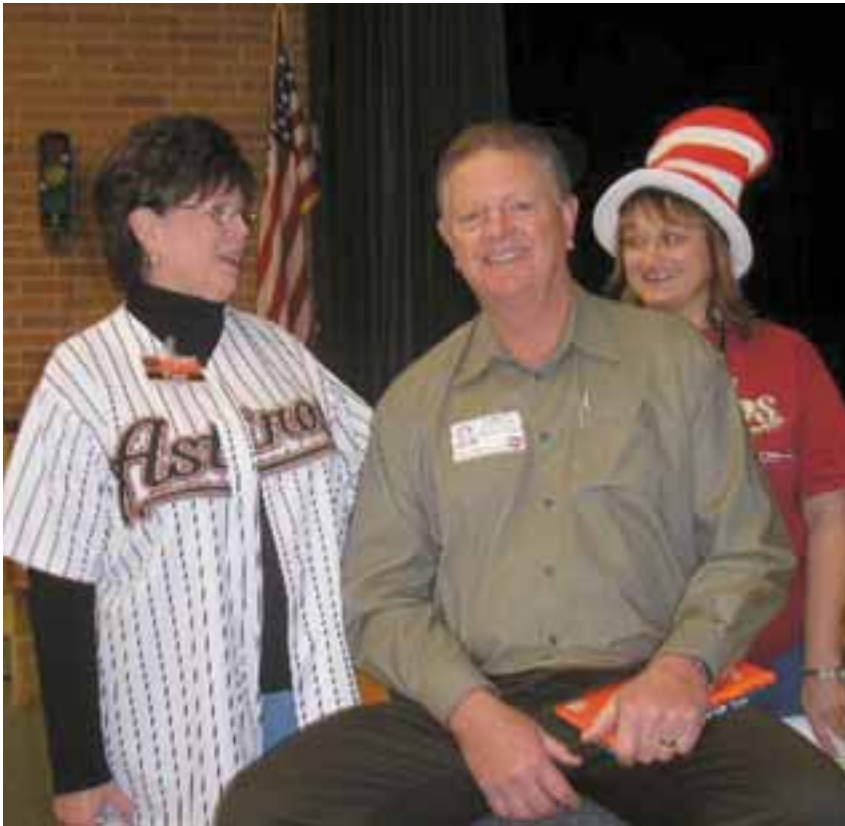
CATS Region 3D retired teachers visited schools.

PARENTS READ In Donna, parents read at lunch to their children.



INVOLVING LEADERS School Board President Rhonda Lowe read to students in Deer Park ISD.





HOUSTON ASTROS Larry Derriker—Houston Astros former pitcher, manager and now broadcaster—read at Grangerland Intermediate in Conroe ISD.

PARADE Donna students dressed as their favorite characters for a parade in the hallway.



PERU Lucy Reza-Morales sent Seuss books in English and Spanish to the school her husband's company adopts in Arequipa, Peru.

STUDENTS HELPING STUDENTS Mendez Middle School students read to Widen Elementary students in Austin.





Hays Celebrates Wins!

Local earns salary victories for support professionals and teachers.

A small but rapidly growing school district just south of Austin is epitomizing the TSTA revival in Region 2D. Hays CISD is the home of Hays Educators Association (HEA), a local that is now pushing 400 members with just 16 campuses. Spurred on by a new generation of leaders and local President Esperanza Orosco, a young but assertive graduate of TSTA's emerging leaders program, HEA has recently won some stunning salary victories.

At a school board meeting in April, filled to capacity with supportive members donning association shirts, Orosco delivered a

well-researched salary proposal on behalf of district employees, calling for a living wage for education support professionals and compression of the teacher salary schedule. Front page coverage of the salary proposal in the local press quickly followed, and representatives from HEA were duly invited to sit down with the

district to resolve the compensation issue.

As a result of these discussions the district abandoned its initial paltry proposal of a 3.5% midpoint raise for ESPs in favor of an across-the-board raise of \$1200. For some ESPs this represented a 9.5% increase and when coupled with the HEA-driven 8% increase in 2006, it amounts to raises of \$2 per hour for many support staff in a two-year period.

In addition, the district awarded a \$1500 across-the-board raise for teachers and agreed to compress the salary schedule from 38 steps to 33 with the intention of compressing further next year.

Congratulations to Hays Educators Association and, as their staff person, I look forward to continuing to work with HEA as it proceeds on its journey to becoming a full capacity local.

—Jason Wylie, TSTA Organizer



HEB HONORS THREE TSTA EDUCATORS

This year, HEB presented both of its Lifetime Achievement Awards and a Principal Award to TSTA members! HEB's Excellence in Education Awards celebrate the contributions of public school professionals whose leadership and dedication inspire a love of learning in students of all backgrounds and abilities. Awards are given to teachers (\$5,000-25,000 plus a matching grant for their school), principals (\$10,000 plus a \$25,000 grant for their school), and school districts (\$50,000-100,000). Get the details at www.heb.com/aboutHEB/HH-excelTeachAward.jsp.



DR. SERGIO REYNA

Birdwell-Horn Elementary, Alief ISD

Dr. Sergio Reyna says his classroom is characterized by the noise resulting from thinking and creative minds at work, and that is exactly the way he likes it. He began his career in education 24 years ago and is currently a bilingual teacher at a school where an estimated 90 percent of the student population is considered at-risk. What makes his classroom unique is that his students are actively taking responsibility for developing their own learning in a meaningful and fun way.

He believes that family encouragement is essential for student success and incorporates family participation in classroom activities throughout the year. "At the end of each year, families join Sergio and his students in celebrating their learning," said Principal Joanna Dodson. "A literacy night is held just for Sergio's classroom, but the attendance is so high, the meeting has to be held in the school cafeteria."

He already has plans for the money. "I am going to purchase books for our school library, lots of books, so students, parents and teachers can check out books and enjoy them at home," Sergio says.

Sergio has been named bilingual Teacher of the Year in schools and districts at least a dozen times. He is a past Disney American Teacher nominee and a published author. He holds a Ph.D. in Hispanic literature and linguistics from the University of Houston, master's and bachelor's degrees in education from National Pedagogical University, and a bachelor's degree in Hispanic literature from Superior Normal School.



DAVID JOURNEYAY

LBJ High School, Austin ISD

David Journeay is a self-described 55-year-old kid who gets excited about almost everything. After more than 30 years in education, he currently teaches a myriad of courses including anatomy and physiology, AP biology, medical microbiology and pathophysiology. His classroom is a combination of every zoo and museum he has visited and every interesting journey he has taken. It is filled with unique sights, sounds and smells. For David, he has created a world where his students can learn and question and hopefully get as excited as he does about discovering new things.

Referred to as the "one who always knows everything," he uses his passion for the sciences to get kids to understand how biology relates to them directly. By discussing and analyzing the most current diseases or getting them involved in role play diagnoses, he works to ensure that everything that happens in the classroom remains relevant to the real world and the lives of his students. "We are keenly aware of the fact that Mr. Journeay is not only knowledgeable but also passionate about the subjects he teaches," said student Zarine Garcia. "This in itself lends his classroom to being a place where people enjoy learning."

For the past six years, David has held the position of LBJ Science Department Chair. In the summer of 2006, he co-authored the Magnet Biology curriculum LASA, and this year, he achieved his National Board Teacher Certification. He is a graduate of Colorado State University with a bachelor of science in biological sciences and a master's degree in education.



DR. LINDA WEBB

Pillow Elementary, Austin ISD

As the principal of Dorinda Pillow Elementary School for the past six years, Dr. Linda Webb has worked with an extremely diverse population representing 31 different home languages, multiple ethnicities and many versions of what constitutes a family unit. This diversity can make it challenging to set a single vision for success. But in spite of the challenges, Linda has created an environment where students feel safe to learn, parents feel that they belong, and the community understands that they can make a difference.

"Together we can do anything" is the motto Linda uses when asking students' families to share life experiences so that teachers can assist. This motto was initiated last summer when she was diagnosed with breast cancer. She decided to treat it as a valuable learning opportunity for the school and invited students and parents to an assembly to help everyone understand the effects of cancer. When Linda shared her own experience, the students and faculty learned to communicate feelings and discovered the power of working together and supporting one another. "Whether facing a personal crisis or galvanizing the community to fulfill a mission," said Pillow teacher Ann Smalley, "Dr. Webb exemplifies the best qualities of a leader."

Because of Linda's exemplary leadership, Pillow Elementary School was named a Blue Ribbon School by the Department of Education for the 2003-2004 school year. Linda earned her bachelor of science degree in applied learning and development, her master's degree in education administration and her Ph.D. in curriculum and instruction from the University of Texas at Austin.



Students Hear National Teacher of the Year

Kimberly Oliver, the National Teacher of the Year, was the keynote speaker for the TSTA-Student Program state convention in Austin this spring.

“Never let anybody underestimate what your students can do. Set high expectations and know and believe they can achieve them,” Oliver said. She said great teachers must have high expectations for students; know who they teach, what they teach and how to teach; keep a positive attitude; build relationships with colleagues and students; and think outside the box.

“Get to know your students not only as learners but as individuals. Find ways to connect with them,” Oliver, who teaches at Broad Acres Elementary in Montgomery County, Maryland, said.

Share your ideas with your colleagues, she encouraged. “We need to honor tradition but if it’s not working, we need to move on,” she said. “Don’t be shy about what you have to offer.”

Rep. Mark Strama spoke the first night of the conference on how the legislature affects the classroom.

TSTA-SP is TSTA’s affiliate for college and university students who are preparing to teach. Call 877-ASK-TSTA for more information.

New Officers for TSTA-Retired

TSTA-Retired has new officers for 2007-08: President Letha Grace McCoy, Vice President Johnetta Williams, Treasurer Bobby Southwood, and Immediate Past President Pauline Dixon.

Mary Hellberg has been appointed and approved by the TSTA-Retired Board of Directors to complete the term of secretary. Pauline Dixon and Letha Grace McCoy will be NEA-Retired Delegates to the NEA Convention; Johnetta Williams is the first alternate.

- April was a very busy month for retired members. Starting on April 18, the TSTA-Retired House of Delegates was held in Austin with Representative Joe Pickett as the guest speaker. Besides sharing legislative information, he brought copies of his book, *Margo, the Weird Cat*. All money from the sale of his book goes to programs for children’s literacy.
- For the first time, the NEA-Retired Western Regional Conference came to Texas. NEA-Retired officers, board members, and members from at least 32 states and the District of Columbia attended the conference in Austin. State Representative Mark Strama and Lily Eskelsen, NEA secretary/treasurer, were special guests helping to make this conference very informative on retired issues. We appreciate the special help and support from TSTA and its officers, Liz Picone of NEA Member Benefits, and our TSTA-Retired members. This conference was a SUCCESS!
- The TSTA State Convention in El Paso was the last of the April activities. We presented one new business item: “We move that TSTA work for legislation to establish a yearly cost of living increase for retired educators’ TRS annuities.” It passed! TSTA-Retired continues to work with TSTA for our retired members.
- Several members are making plans to attend the NEA-Retired Annual Meeting in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on June 26-28. The NEA Convention will follow from June 30-July 5.

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Student-Generated Learning on the Internet

Web 2.0 offers teachers new strategies but poses new risks.

When the Internet first arrived, websites were controlled by very few, expert designers. Today, with user-friendly software, nearly everyone can create their own web page. In the last three years, however, new sites focus on what users provide. These websites fall into two main categories, user-generated content sites (UGC's) and online social networking sites (OSN's). This article will help explain the sites, offer classroom ideas, and make you aware of potential pitfalls of some of the major sites.



Online Social Networking (OSN)

OSN sites have caused problems in the education community. Perhaps the greatest local incident of this involved Warner High School in San Antonio. Students placed a violent threat on a MySpace page. The threat became widely known. The next day, a school of nearly 3000 had an attendance of about 400. Some teachers have lost jobs for personal information posted on websites, while other teachers have initiated slander lawsuits against students.

These situations are the absolute minority in a world of 180 million MySpace members and millions more on similar sites. OSN's have become a venue of choice for information and messages. Musical groups, as well as political candidates, use these outlets to convey their messages. Even the Chinese are involved, with 51.com's membership surpassing 60 million. In the financial world, social network advertising spending is projected to reach \$2.5 billion in 2011.

Students use these sites to connect to each other. They use these sites to connect to other people throughout the world. They use these sites to learn about news events, musical events, and social events. Whether you are using these websites to aid instruction or not, it is important to know about them.

MYSPACE

MySpace describes itself as an interactive, user-submitted network of friends, personal profiles, blogs, groups, photos, music and videos. MySpace is the largest of all OSN's and ranks as the fifth most popular English language website. Within minutes, a person can create a web page, including pictures, biography, and personal thoughts. The site is advertised in rotation called, "Cool New People." Every time MySpace launches, the user is shown three CNP's. Friends can be offi-

cially added. All user posts can receive comments and "kudos." The site even provides its own email system.

Usefulness: Students spend a lot of time on MySpace. Using it as a teaching tool can make the content more relevant to their world. You'll be teaching to today's students on their own terms.

Problems: If you send students to MySpace, they can easily get distracted from any assignment. Also remember that anything you teach can and will be seen by people from around the world. (Be careful.)

FACEBOOK

Facebook is a social networking site aimed at colleges and universities. However, many high school students are impersonating college students and creating their own pages. Students can create profiles where they can post pictures and other information about themselves. They link to other students by listing them as friends. The site also offers discussion forums and other groups. Facebook did not offer a blog feature, but now matches what other sites offer.

Usefulness: Facebook may give students a true look at college life.

Problems: The site is designed for college students, not public school students. An OSN specifically designed for older users could cause problems with dishonest and dangerous relationships. Some material may be inappropriate, and there is little filtering.

TWITTER

Twitter describes itself as "a global community of friends and strangers answering one simple question: What are you doing?" Twitter's OSN approach is powerful because it is ever-present. A student's friends could post at any second, whereas blogs, no matter how simple, take more time to develop.

Usefulness: Twitter shows how the in-

ternet can keep everyone connected at all times. (Example from Barak Obama on 5/11/07 "In Indianola, Iowa and heading to Des Moines"—about 15 hours ago). It could be a wonderful tool to map the campaign trails of candidates for a week in the fall or the moment-by-moment work of research scientists in an exotic location. Content is generally, though not always, safe.

Problems: Twitter deals with the immediate, so a teacher needs to prepare to incorporate this OSN site. Otherwise, the class could find no entries from a busy author or a sleeping scientist.

User Generated Content Sites (UGC's)

The user-generated web world is also the focus of magazine cover stories, television news stories, and humor-based cable programming. YouTube has become a web version of "America's Funniest Home Videos," as well as an outlet for video diary and amateur movie makers. Flickr has become one of the most viewed sites for interesting photographs, and many now use Wikipedia instead of standard dictionaries and encyclopedias.

Yahoo!, MySpace, Google, and others are now offering similar services. Some even pay their contributors for each viewing. However, Flickr and YouTube were the first to use UGC. Further, they remain larger than their competitors.

YOUTUBE AND FLICKR

Would-be professional photographers and directors fight for viewer attention. Family home-videos can now be watched by millions of people, including friends, family, and other loved ones. YouTube, which focuses on video, has spawned the careers of many would-be actors, directors, and writers. Flickr, a photograph storage site, has shown some of the best new digital photographers' work in recent years. Millions browse this work every

day, giving aspiring video artists and photographers a venue for their work.

Usefulness: Television episodes, documentaries, important photographic images, and other noteworthy video may now be found online, on-demand, and without cost to students and their teachers.

Problems: The search engines can be vague, and it offers perhaps the most direct possibilities for student interaction with inappropriate material. Although both sites work to maintain copyright integrity, students are capable of violating the law in some cases.

WIKIPEDIA

Wikipedia is a user-generated encyclopedia. The term, wiki, means “a collaborative website.” Wiki, like Google, can be used as a noun (thing) or verb (action). People who know a topic write what they know, often including pictures. Others add their knowledge, and soon a relatively complete and useful entry is created. Currently, the English version of Wikipedia has almost 1.8 million entries. One interesting point: many of the entries deal with specific schools and school districts.

Usefulness: Wikipedia is an initial go-to guide for just about everything. Yes, the Wonders of the World are there, but so is your elementary school!

Problems: Although Wikipedia has near-perfect accuracy, it can be written (and re-written) by anybody. Few of the writers are trained linguists or researchers. Because of this, Wikipedia cannot be used as a final source for information and definition.

A HYBRID OSN/UGC

Del.icio.us: Most websites we use involve one of two “domain” names, .com and .org (all sites mentioned in this article are .com except Wikipedia.org). When the .us web domain label became available, Joshua Schachter took a very creative ap-

proach, both in the name and in the site use. Del.icio.us is a collection of favorites: favorite websites, favorite recipes, favorite people, and even wish lists. Instead of keeping things like bookmarks in a browser, users keep these on their del.icio.us site. Using a “tagging” feature, users can share and cross-tab important information with others.

Usefulness: del.icio.us is a fantastic tool for research. Your searches for information can move more quickly because you can find what others have already uncovered first. If you take the time to teach students to use this site, research papers will become better and overall exploration will become more efficient.

Problems: Although the tool becomes valuable with use, it is pretty confusing at first. If you do not have someone walking you through the process, this site can be confusing for awhile.

There are other sites that match OSN and UGC formats. Xanga was among the very first OSN sites. Friendster, Yahoo! 360, and Bebo are similar versions of those discussed here. Yahoo! Answers allows a user to ask a question to the 6 million users and choose the best answer. One of the most recent additions to this world is Second Life, a site which involves actual money and involves 3D profiles with simulated social situations like bars, restaurants, beaches, and parties. Today, presidential candidates and corporations are using Second Life to promote their messages and products.

Education's Reaction

Rather than teaching students how to participate online safely and effectively and guiding them to more appropriate sites, parents and educators tend to respond by blocking them from being on these sites.

Blocking is a temporary fix. Only one person has to find a way around the block. Once that happens, the response

will be shared, and the block will be meaningless. One site, www.kroxi.com, offers a tool to avoid any blocking from a school or library technology center.

Blocking-only policies also fail on educational levels. Such actions leave the education community battling the technology field for the attentions and efforts of students. If schools are supposed to touch the future, these sites need to be touched, as well. Ignoring OSN sites and UGC sites also shows a refusal to make our education system relevant to the world that young adults see off of school property. Online communities are becoming more and more important, and the education community could marginalize itself if it keeps ignoring the obvious.

Conclusion

OSNs and UGCs are not a passing fad. They grow in number of users and significance on a daily (hourly) basis. To ignore these sites is to ignore the next wave of the World Wide Web.

As the phenomenon grows, three educational implications grow:

- The potential for classroom learning.
- The potential dangers to our students.
- The need for schools to teach students the skills to effectively use, learn from, and enjoy these new technologies.

As one veteran blogger put it, “In the end, it's just another example of Future Shock. As technological growth accelerates and culture, not to mention parents, struggle to keep pace, these challenges will continue to be a daily fact of life. But I worry that younger MySpace and Facebook users might be unpleasantly surprised when future partners, friends, and employers Google them and unearth the skeletons in their closets. I'm certainly glad that my teenage and college-age growing pains aren't indexed on the web.”

—Dr. Paul Henley, TSTA Teaching and Learning Specialist



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2007-08 ENROLLMENT FORM

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NAME		SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER	DATE OF BIRTH
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ADDRESS		LOCAL ASSOCIATION	HIRE DATE
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
CITY	STATE	ZIP	NAME OF ISD
<input type="text"/>		<input type="text"/>	
EMAIL AT HOME		CAMPUS/WORKSITE	
<input type="text"/>		<input type="text"/>	
EMAIL AT WORK		POSITION (I.E. CLASSROOM TEACHER, LIBRARIAN, BUS DRIVER, ETC.)	
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
AREA CODE	HOME PHONE	AREA CODE	WORK PHONE

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	ANNUAL DUES AND CONTRIBUTIONS	AMOUNT
	1. Professional Dues—TSTA/NEA (Active)	\$409.00
	Professional Dues—New to the profession	\$280.00
	2. Educational Support Dues—Full-time	\$214.50
	Educational Support Dues—Part-time	\$111.50
	3. NEA Fund for Children and Public Education (suggested amount \$15.00)	
	4. TSTA-PAC (see disclaimer below)	\$ 9.00
	5. Region Dues	
	6. Local Association Dues	
	TOTAL	

NOTE: Membership must include local and region dues if eligible.

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The TSTA Political Action Committee (TSTA-PAC) and the National Education Association Fund for Children and Public Education collect voluntary contributions from Association members and use these contributions for political purposes, including, but not limited to, making contributions to and expenditures on behalf of friends of public education who are candidates for federal office. Contributions to TSTA-PAC and The NEA Fund for Children and Public Education are voluntary; making a contribution is neither a condition of employment nor membership in the Association, and members have the right to refuse to contribute without suffering any reprisal. Although The NEA Fund for Children and Public Education requests an annual contribution of \$15, this is only a suggestion. A member may contribute more or less than the suggested amount, or may contribute nothing at all, without it affecting his or her membership status, rights, or benefits in NEA or any of its affiliates.

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"I decline to contribute to TSTA-PAC and I understand this will not in any way affect my membership status or rights." _____

INITIAL

Former student member?

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Annual membership dues to NEA include \$4.90 for NEA Today, \$2.85 for NEA-Retired, \$2.85 for Tomorrow's Teacher and/or \$19.25 for the Higher Education publications. The NEA publication(s) received by members are based on membership category. Annual membership dues to TSTA include subscription to the TSTA Advocate. Membership is open only to those who agree to subscribe to the goals and objectives of the Association and to abide by its constitution and bylaws.

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Legal Liability Coverage: Members of TSTA/NEA are automatically covered by \$6 million for most legal claims (\$300,000 for civil rights claims) while acting in the scope of employment. \$1 million is underwritten by Horace Mann Ins. Co. or successor provider selected by NEA. \$5 million excess is underwritten by United National Ins. Co., an A.M. Best Rated A+ (superior) carrier or successor provider selected by TSTA. Coverage is subject to the terms, conditions and exclusions of the policies which are available to members upon request by calling the TSTA Help Center at 877-ASK-TSTA. Notice required by Art. 21.54 of the Texas Insurance Code: These insurers may not be subject to all the laws and regulations of Texas. The insurance solvency guarantee fund may not be available to you or to TSTA.

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DATE

LOCAL ASSOCIATION REPRESENTATIVE

Why I Chose TSTA/NEA

Answers from a random sampling of members at the TSTA convention.

I was so excited about teaching and I wanted to learn as much as I could to be effective in my classroom. Since becoming a TSTA/NEA member, I have attended many trainings on effective leadership, communication, and strategies that help me to engage my students in meaningful learning opportunities.

XOCHIL SILVA





MAXINE GUIDRY
I joined TSTA/NEA when I first started teaching in 2002. How glad I am that I did. I love the resources and perks made available to me as a member.



AMANDA RUTLEDGE
TSTA/NEA has allowed me to have tremendous personal growth, professional exposure, and intelligent guidance to prepare me as a voice for all of us. Think globally, act locally. That's why I joined.



JOSE LUIS MARTINEZ
I joined TSTA/NEA after being a member of the other organization. I am proud to say I am a member of TSTA/NEA.



ESTHER JAIMES
Joining TSTA/NEA was important to me because there are many affordable member benefits and programs that I could not find locally in our district.



RENE DE LA VINA
I joined TSTA/NEA because they are a powerful advocacy school employee union. They are our voice at the national level.

A FEW MORE REASONS TO JOIN

- When we take a case, the cost of an attorney will never be an issue. We have a legal defense fund; other organizations have an insurance policy with limits on attorney services. We also protect you with a \$6 million liability policy, and we have seven in-house attorneys and a statewide network of attorneys who are experts in education employment law.
- TSTA Help Center experts are standing by to help you with your legal, professional, and organizational needs. Call us toll free at 877-ASK-TSTA from 7 a.m.-7 p.m. during the school year, 8 a.m.-5 p.m. summers.
- Capitol Insider ranks TSTA as the top educational employee lobby in the state. We fight for laws that support you and the students and against those that would harm you. We lobby for high standards, and we never quit.
- Out of the 113 candidates we endorsed in the last election, 104 won. Our members are the reason: they contributed over \$400,000 and worked hard to elect pro-education candidates.
- We have field staff across the state. We provide leadership opportunities and training.
- We offer professional development with CPE credits, survival tips for first year teachers, and assistance with lesson plans and classroom management.
- We keep you informed with our electronic newsletters (TSTA Briefing, Member Matters, Legislative Update, and Teaching & Learning); our magazines, the Advocate and NEA Today; and our websites, www.tsta.org and www.nea.org.
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