

Advocate

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a pencil, about to fill in a bubble on a multiple-choice test. The test sheet has columns of bubbles labeled A, B, C, D, and E, with numbers 1 through 37 visible on the left side. The background is a solid blue color.

Texas State Teachers Association/National Education Association

Winter 2012-13

**4 JOBS OF TOMORROW
NEA PLEDGES TO
RAISE \$1.5 MILLION TO
PREPARE STUDENTS**

**6 TSTA TO LEGISLATORS
LEARNING ENVIRONMENT
MUST BE CONDUCIVE
TO LEARNING**

**10 BUT ONLY IF YOU ACT
83RD LEGISLATURE:
WE CAN STOP THE
ATTACKS ON SCHOOLS**

**14 TESTING'S TRUE PRICE
WHY LIMIT LEARNING TO
WHAT CAN BE GRADED
BY COMPUTER?**

**20 ALL POLITICS IS LOCAL
LOCALS WIN SCHOOL
BOARD ELECTIONS**

**Will the
LEGISLATURE
pass the test?**

No one knows education better than educators

The holidays are rapidly approaching, offering educators an opportunity to take a well-deserved break from work and relax with friends and family. The winter vacation also will give us time to recharge our batteries and prepare for a New Year replete with challenges and opportunities, both in the schoolhouse and in the statehouse. **By Rita Haecker, TSTA President**



In 2013, TSTA members will continue to do what we do best: educate children in a safe, healthy, productive environment. Each child represents a challenge worthy of our best efforts as educators and an opportunity for building a stronger future for our state, and nobody delivers better than we do.

The New Year also will usher in a session of the Legislature that promises to be crucial for our profession, our jobs, and the future of public education in Texas. It will present its own challenges and opportunities, and we must find time to strike a strong, positive impact on our legislators and the decisions they will make. Our time may be limited, but those decisions will impact what we do every day when we go to school to educate and work.

No one knows education better than educators. But no one at the Capitol will hear us if we don't speak up — loudly and often — while the Legislature is in session. We were shouted down by education profiteers and short-sighted ideologues in 2011, when the

governor and the legislative majority put extremism and privatization over public service and slashed \$5.4 billion from public school budgets. You know the consequences because you or someone you know suffered from the cutbacks.

We cannot let that happen again.

TSTA and others who value our local schools succeeded in replacing some of the education-cutting legislators during the recent election season. But self-styled education “experts” — the forces of school privatization — will be back at work at the Capitol, peddling an array of profiteering schemes for themselves and their allies.

These schemes will include private school vouchers, more high stakes testing, an attack on teacher pensions, and maybe even more budget cuts that would deprive educators and students of the resources they need to succeed. Please read more about these schemes in a separate article in this issue of the Advocate. And remember, they can be stopped only through the hard work and strong voice of TSTA members and people like us.

Our TSTA Public Affairs staffers in Austin are already meeting with legislators, studying pre-filed bills and preparing for committee hearings, and their work will increase dramatically after the session convenes on Jan. 8. We will keep you up-to-date on legislative issues through our regular online weekly briefings, postings on our website, and special alerts by email and telephone. But don't hesitate to contact us if you have questions or want more information.

It also is extremely important that you contact your own state representative and state

senator and tell them about the need to invest in our public schools, and what you think about efforts to undermine your school, jeopardize your job, force you to teach to the test, and weaken your students' learning opportunities in favor of private school vouchers and other privatization schemes. Hearing from voters back home can really make a difference in a legislator's decisions, and the more contact TSTA members have with our lawmakers, the greater our influence over decisions that will impact our profession and our jobs.

If you don't know who your state representative or state senator is, you can find out by going online to the Legislature's website. The membership list for the new session will be updated by Jan. 8. Use this link and fill in your address to find out who represents you: www.fyi.legis.state.tx.us.

TSTA is not alone in the campaign for strong public schools and our opposition to schemes to weaken them through privatization. More than 600 school districts have sued the state over inadequate and inequitable funding. And a growing number of parents and school boards are pushing back against the overreliance on high-stakes, standardized testing.

But the forces for privatization are strong and well-funded.

It is imperative that we in TSTA make our voices heard in Austin and enlist the support of parents, administrators, and others who truly value public education. Only then can we meet the crucial challenges of the new legislative session and realize new opportunities for ourselves, our students, and our state's future.



TSTA BOARD OF DIRECTORS: The new leadership team on the roof of the TSTA building across from the Capitol.

WHAT'S INSIDE

4 Upfront

NEA pledges to raise \$1.5 million to prepare our students for the jobs of the future by increasing the number of science, technology, engineering, and math teachers; TSTA testifies before interim legislative committees that learning environments must be conducive to learning; NEA Academy offers affordable online bachelor's degrees; support professionals to meet in Louisville; NEA director to be elected in April; school finance trial continues; how to help hurricane victims.

8 Opinion

Public Affairs Director Ed Martin remembers Sen. Mario Gallegos, a “true champion of public education,” while Grading Texas blogger Clay Robison is amazed that legislative “leaders” are insisting that Texans who have lost their jobs must undergo drug testing before receiving unemployment benefits.

10 Vouchers, Funding, Testing Among Major Issues in January

Political reporter Clay Robison expects the 2013 legislative session to be full of challenges, as well as opportunities, for educators.

14 Impoverishing Schools While Enriching Testing Companies

How is it that, at this moment of greatest possibility for teaching and learning, we have limited our children's schooling to content that can be measured by computer-scored multiple-choice tests? That's the question posed by Linda McSpadden McNeil, director of the Center for Education at Rice University, who says we must restore the educational capacities of our schools.

20 Advocacy in Action

Signing up student voters in Brownsville; local school board wins; the Intergenerational Project starts with a pilot project; team building in Ruidoso; news from our student and retired affiliates.

24 Leading the Profession

Flour Bluff teacher Beth Huckabee travels to China as an NEA Foundation-Pearson Foundation Global Learning Fellow.

26 In the Classroom

Some people talk about the high salaries public sector employees make. In Texas, nothing could be further from the truth.

28 Governance

Details on TSTA's 2013 House of Delegates in Houston and election of TSTA at-large Board of Directors members.

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NEA to raise \$1.5 million to prepare students for jobs of the future

President Obama has called for 100,000 new science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) teachers to prepare students for the 2.7 million new jobs expected in those sectors by 2018.

NEA responded with a \$500,000 challenge grant that calls on leading business and technology companies and philanthropists to join them in working to expand a successful New Jersey Education Association program that helped increase the number of certified science and math teachers.

“Today, NEA is pledging up to half a million dollars — and we’re committing to help raise at least \$1 million more — to expand and replicate a successful New Jersey program that placed 60 new physics and chemistry teachers in New Jersey public school classrooms last year alone,” NEA President Dennis Van Roekel, a math teacher, said. “We’re committed to

preparing students to succeed in the worldwide economy, that’s why we’re working together to get additional qualified, caring, and committed math and science teachers into classrooms. Right now, there’s a severe shortage, especially in low-income communities, and that needs to change. But we cannot do it alone.” Learn more about NEA’s program at www.nea.org/STEM.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS NEED REAL SOLUTIONS, NOT POLITICAL SIDESHOWS

“We are hopeful that the Senate majority will not allow the appointment of Sen. Dan Patrick as chairman of the Senate

Education Committee to turn undue attention to a privatization sideshow that does not address the needs of the overwhelming majority of Texas students,” TSTA President Rita Haecker said in a recent statement.

“Senator Patrick’s priority, private school vouchers, is out of touch with the majority of Texans who want real solutions for students and educators who have been forced by historic education cuts to work in crowded classrooms with inadequate resources,” she said. “Instead of trying to enrich private school operators with tax dollars, the Legislature should expand public educational opportunities for all Texas children. And the place to start is by restoring the \$5.4 billion that was cut from public schools last session, restoring the 25,000 lost school jobs and reducing the size of thousands of overcrowded classrooms.

“Texas families demand a first class public education system, because that is where the vast majority of children will continue to be educated. Wasting time and tax dollars on a narrow, ideological political agenda is not what Texans deserve,” Haecker said.

LOUISVILLE TO HOST ESP CONFERENCE

The 2013 NEA Education Support Professionals (ESP) Conference is March 8-10 at the Louisville Marriott

Downtown Hotel in Louisville, KY. This conference provides professional development opportunities to equip ESPs with the skills they need to build stronger locals, create strong internal and external relationships, organize members, and enhance NEA ESP members’ ability to positively influence student achievement. These skills are provided through two full days of professional development, as well as pre-conference workshop opportunities. Registration is open until Feb. 8. www.nea.org/grants/31430.htm

NEA DIRECTOR ELECTION COMING

The filing deadline for NEA Director for Texas, Place 1, was Sept. 15, 2012. Frances Smith of Cy-Fair TSTA and Angela Davis of NEA-Dallas filed. The election, for a term running from Sept. 1, 2013, through Aug. 31, 2016, will take place at the next TSTA House of Delegates in April.

SCHOOL FINANCE TRIAL CONTINUES

“The number of Texas public school students who need to learn English has grown, but at the same time, the state is cutting funding to bilingual programs vital to ensuring they succeed, an expert testified Tuesday in the sweeping school finance trial,” the Fort Worth Star-Telegram reported on Nov. 13. “Delia Pompa, senior vice president of the National Council of

La Raza and former executive director of the National Association for Bilingual Education, testified that from 1998 to 2008, the number of English-language learners in Texas jumped 38.4 percent. Overall, enrollment grew 17.4 percent over the same period.” The trial is expected to continue through January. www.star-telegram.com/2012/11/13/4411693/trial-focuses-on-funding-cut-for.html#storylink=cpy

SAN ANTONIO CITIZENS FUND PRE-K

In November, San Antonio voters approved Mayor Julian Castro’s Pre-K 4 SA initiative. The measure increases the

sales tax by 1/8th of a cent to fund Pre-K education for kids in the city. The program will begin in the fall of 2013. Castro estimates 22,000 children will benefit over the next eight years.

DISCIPLINE CONCERNS AIRED AT JOINT HEARING

At a joint hearing of the Senate Committees on Education and Criminal Justice on student discipline issues, committee members expressed concern over the excessive ticketing phenomenon in some school districts and campuses — a practice that involves school district or municipal police officers

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giving students Class C misdemeanor tickets for actions such as spraying perfume or sleeping in class. TSTA testified that the legislature's decision to slash the education budget, leading to fewer teachers and teacher aides, has made it increasingly difficult to appropriately control classrooms.

TSTA also agreed with the committees' concern over a statewide study that shows a pattern of discrimination in certain school districts where a disproportionate number of students of color were disciplined. Social justice is imperative in the education setting, TSTA testified.

TSTA URGES SUNSET OF SB 8

At an October hearing of the Senate Committee on Education to discuss implementation of Senate Bill 8 (local control and "flexibility," contract rights, etc.) and House Bill 3 (STAAR/accountability), TSTA pointed out that underfunding public education led to the passage of SB 8, which forced school districts to dispense with essential employees, leading to overcrowding of classrooms. Ironically, at the same time, the state entered into a massive contract to expand standardized testing.

"No evidence suggests that standardized testing increases student performance," John Grey of TSTA Public Affairs said. "The ability to pass a test does not equate to learning the necessary skills to succeed in life, nor does the passage rate of a test show the value of a teaching professional."

Given the improving state revenue outlook, TSTA urged that the provisions enacted in SB 8 be sunsetted. "You are in a position to make sure that every child in Texas receives an excellent education," Grey said. "But that's not going to happen unless you create a learning environment that is actually conducive to learning."

It was the last committee hearing before the legislative session opens in January.

NEA'S DISASTER RELIEF FOR HURRICANE VICTIMS

The NEA Health Information Network Disaster Relief Fund is offering grants of up to \$5,000 to 501(c)3 non-profit organizations that exist to serve the individuals in the education communities impacted by Hurricane Sandy. If you would like to contribute, go to www.NEAHIN.org/disasterrelief or send a check, payable to NEA HIN Disaster Relief Fund, to 1201 16th Street, NW, Suite 216, Washington, DC 20036.

Materials for parents, teachers, and crisis teams on talking to kids suffering from the effects of a natural disaster, post-traumatic stress disorder, or other traumatic event are available at www.neahin.org/blog/natural-disaster-resources.html.

ESPS: AFFORDABLE ONLINE BACHELOR'S DEGREE

The NEA Academy has expanded its education menu to include bachelor's degree programs through Western Governors University (WGU). WGU is an online, non-profit university for education professionals who are seeking to expand their knowledge and advance their career on a budget.

WGU offers bachelor's degrees accredited by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education in interdisciplinary studies (K-8), early childhood education, math, science, special education, business, sales, marketing, nursing/health, accounting, information technology, and other critical teaching disciplines. Your work is measured by competency and assessments, not seat time. Throughout the program, you are supported by faculty mentors. NEA members receive an additional 5 percent discount off WGU's already low tuition rate (almost half the cost of for-profit universities), an application fee waiver (a \$65 savings), and eligibility to apply for a WGU-NEA Academy Partner Scholarship. Visit <http://nea-academy.org/westerngovernors>.







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Remembering a hero for education and opportunity

TSTA Public Affairs Director
Ed Martin, Oct. 18, 2012

Every Texan who values public education lost a true champion this week. Every Texan who values voting rights lost a true champion, too. And every one of us who believes in loyalty, community, and public service lost a kindred spirit, state Senator Mario Gallegos, who passed away in October.

For those of us who knew Mario, there is a profound sense of loss. Mario had a genuine presence and a certainty that would never go unnoticed. Whether one knew Mario as a family member, a firefighter, a political compatriot, a friend, or a neighbor, you knew what Mario believed, what he felt, and what he was all about. When Mario was on your side, he was all the way in with you. There wasn't an ounce of blow dried politician in him.

Mario was the first Hispanic State Senator to represent Houston and Harris County, which is now home to over 1.7 million Hispanics, and Mario's pulse beat to the rhythm of his community. He understood the essential value of education from that perspective — and he did not need a calculator to compute the value of education and the educators who worked in the classrooms in his community.

Mario understood that an educated child can realize the opportunity to be free and succeed, and for over 21 years in the legislature, he was always “all in” for the children and the educators he represented. Mario the firefighter was determined to make sure no one and nothing burned down the dream and the opportunity provided by education, the right to vote and the right to be treated with respect, without prejudice. And every time the bell rang, he stood and fought the fight — even when he had to get up from a liver transplant to do it.

Mario Gallegos was a human being — full of perfection and imperfection, good and not so good — just like every one of us. When he came back to the Senate to fight the Voter ID bill in 2007, I worked with Mario on a column he submitted to the Houston Chronicle to explain the importance of the fight that brought him and his hospital bed to the Senate. After we'd gone over some edits over the phone, Mario said, “Ed, do you think Billie Carr and Mickey Leland are looking down on us now and smiling?”

Mario, please say hi to Billie and Mickey and all the rest. And know this: when you look down and see us fighting the good fight and laughing and crying as a family of good human beings, you are right here with us — we did not lose you.

How to make it tougher for jobless teachers

TSTA Public Affairs Specialist
Clay Robison, Nov. 14, 2012

Sometimes, it is an abuse of the word to refer to Gov. Rick Perry and Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst as “leaders,” but call them what you will, they are at it again. With a long list of real-life, major concerns, including public school funding, in serious need of state attention, Perry and Dewhurst are off in political La-La Land, imagining another problem that doesn't exist.

I am referring to their endorsement yesterday of the “kick-’em-while-they’re-down” proposal to require Texans who lose their jobs to undergo drug testing before receiving unemployment benefits. It was bad enough that Perry and Dewhurst championed the budget-cutting that resulted in the loss of 25,000 school jobs last year. Now, they want to humiliate teachers and other people seeking a little help while they look for work.

Unemployment compensation is not welfare, folks. To be eligible, you have to have a satisfactory work record and be actively looking for a new job. The vast majority of people seeking temporary jobless benefits have earned their unemployment compensation through hard work. They are not drug-abusers, as Perry and Dewhurst suggest.

The idea of making life even tougher for struggling Texans seems particularly insensitive, coming as it is from a multi-millionaire (Dewhurst) and a double-dipping governor who is paid more than \$240,000 a year, including salary and retirement benefits, and lives rent-free in a state-owned mansion.

But both men, it seems, would rather continue to pander to supporters who view government as a profit center for the well-heeled — private school vouchers, lucrative testing contracts, etc. — while weakening the public safety net for everyone else.

Follow www.tsta.org/grading-texas for ongoing commentary during the legislative session.

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Vouchers, funding, testing among **major issues** in January

The 2012 election is history, and soon the consequences will take shape in what promises to be a legislative session full of challenges, as well as opportunities, for educators. **By Clay Robison**

A number of major issues will confront legislators when they convene on Jan. 8.

- **School funding** — Highlighted by last session's cuts and by lawsuits brought against the state by more than 600 school districts, funding will remain high on the list for educators.
- **Vouchers** — For the first time in several years, there will be a big push to siphon state tax dollars away from public schools to pay for a private school voucher program.
- **High-stakes testing** — This issue promises to be more contentious than ever, and it may come to a head in 2013.
- **Teacher Retirement System** — There will be an effort to "reform" public pensions, an issue of critical importance to school employees and retirees alike.

- **Charter schools** — Some lawmakers may try to raise or remove the state cap on charters.

In addition to those "big" issues, TSTA will have to address thousands of bills and amendments that could have an impact on our public schools and those who work there. And quite often, policy on the big issues is set by amendments to seemingly innocuous "minor" legislation.

Although the Legislature remains overwhelmingly conservative, many lawmakers who have been strong advocates for public education were re-elected to the Texas House of Representatives and the state Senate with TSTA's support. And they will be joined by several newcomers who promise to put the



CANDIDATES FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: Sen. Wendy Davis of Fort Worth has made public school children the focus of her legislative career; TSTA leaders from Pasadena and Deer Park volunteered in the winning campaign of a new state representative, Mary Ann Perez; Beto O'Rourke, who won election to U.S. Congress, meets with members from El Paso and Ysleta; Congressman-Elect Filemon Vela receives the NEA endorsement from Brownsville members.



needs of students and educators above ideological politics.

Many of the legislators who voted in 2011 to slash \$5.4 billion in state funding from public schools — or more than \$500 per student — will be back. Some already are promoting agendas, such as vouchers, that would further undermine public education in favor of privatization. But several of those budget-cutters campaigned this year against high-stakes testing and privatization schemes in the face of strong opposition from TSTA and unhappy parents who are fed up with the STAAR program, growing class sizes, and cuts to neighborhood schools.

So this session will present an opportunity for educators, parents, and other Texans who truly value public education to halt the attack on local schools. It will require, however, the active engagement of TSTA members.

The TSTA staff in Austin will work hard for restoration of school funding and against those ideas — such as vouchers and retirement fund changes — that would harm the public schools and the people who study and work in them.

No matter how well we work in the Capitol, when your legislators hear from the "folks back home," it really makes a difference. TSTA will send regular legislative updates and alerts to our members so that you, too, can lend

your voice to the legislative process. Frequent, pro-education contacts by TSTA constituents with their legislators will be essential in protecting and strengthening the public schools against the erosion of privatization.

Both the House and the Senate will remain in Republican control. But Democrats, including many successful candidates supported by TSTA, recaptured enough House seats to trim the 101-49 Republican super-majority of 2011 to 95-55. And TSTA has met with and supported Republicans who have pledged to support public schools and fight privatization.

Much of the House agenda will be influenced by the speaker. Two years ago, Republican Speaker Joe Straus of San Antonio, a traditional conservative who appears to be the most reasonable and least ideological of Texas' top leaders, survived a leadership challenge from extremists in his own party. He may face a similar challenge in January, but he is expected to win another term as presiding officer.

The Senate will keep a 19-12 Republican majority, and although the right-wing grip on that body may have tightened, the Senate "majority" on certain key education issues may come down to three or four more "reasonable" Republicans. Four former Republican senators didn't seek reelection and were replaced

by more ideological successors. And Jeff Wentworth of San Antonio, a longtime, moderate Republican senator, was unseated by Tea Party favorite Donna Campbell in the GOP primary. However, TSTA was instrumental in the reelection of Sen. Wendy Davis, a Democrat from Fort Worth and champion of public schools, in a tough race in a swing district. Davis made public education a defining issue in her campaign, and her victory could remind senators that Texans support public education.

However, both Gov. Rick Perry and Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst, who continues to court the right wing despite losing a Republican race for the U.S. Senate to a Tea Party candidate, have already endorsed private school vouchers. Dewhurst also appointed Sen. Dan Patrick of Houston, a leading voucher advocate and founder of the Legislature's Tea Party Caucus, to chair the Senate Education Committee.

Here is a closer look at some of the major issues important to educators and public schools and how TSTA believes they must be resolved:

EDUCATION FUNDING

Governor Perry, who continues to court the right-wing crowd following his futile race for president, is trying to paint a picture of financial gloom despite the fact that the state government's budgetary outlook has improved significantly since the 2011 session. In fact,

the budgetary situation in 2011 wasn't as bad as Perry and his legislative allies led Texans to believe. Even as they inflicted deep cuts on education and health care, they left about \$6 billion unspent in the Rainy Day Fund.

Now the Rainy Day Fund has swelled to at least \$8.1 billion, according to the state comptroller, and may grow even more. And state tax collections for general revenue are running at least \$5 billion more than the comptroller projected when the 2011 school funding cuts were imposed. This is more than enough money for the Legislature to restore school funding cuts and meet other state needs, such as health care, which also are important to many public school students and their families. Those of us who value public education must lead the effort to deliver that message, loudly and clearly, to the Legislature.

The 2011 cuts cost the jobs of 25,000 school employees, including almost 11,000 teachers, during the 2011-12 school year alone, leaving thousands of students crammed into overcrowded classrooms. The cuts also were the last straw for about 600 school districts that filed several lawsuits against the state, arguing that the Legislature has failed to fulfill its constitutional duty to adequately and equitably fund the public schools. State District Judge John Dietz of Austin began hearing the litigation in October, and the trial is expected to end in January. Dietz's ruling will be appealed, and the ultimate decision will be handed down by the Texas Supreme Court a year or more from now. The Legislature will likely wait for a final ruling before making significant changes in the school finance system, but lawmakers have enough money now to restore funding cuts and start repairing the damage they inflicted in our classrooms.

PRIVATE SCHOOL VOUCHERS

Proposals for private school vouchers have failed before, but the fight will be on again during the upcoming session. Sen. Dan Patrick of Houston, the new

chairman of the Senate Education Committee, has announced that a voucher bill will be his top priority. And Governor Perry, Lt. Governor Dewhurst, new State Education Commissioner Michael Williams, and the usual profiteers have lined up to support them.

It is wrong to divert public tax dollars to a voucher profiteering scheme, especially when school districts are struggling with teacher layoffs and overcrowded classrooms following the budget cuts. We don't know the details of what will be proposed, but there has been speculation that proposed legislation may offer vouchers of about \$5,000 to as much as 7 percent of the public school enrollment. If so, that would be about 345,000 students at a total annual cost to taxpayers of \$1.7 billion. The state simply has no business giving private school owners \$1.7 billion, either directly or through tax credits for donations to a voucher program, another option that may be considered. The result will be more cuts to an underfunded public school system, with more educator jobs on the line. Some districts — particularly small districts in rural areas — may be forced to drop or cut back some extracurricular activities, including football and band. Or they may be forced to charge students to play on athletic teams or in the band, an expense that many low-income families will be unable to afford.

Advocates of private school vouchers falsely call their proposal a "choice" program for students and families. The vast majority of students will have no choice, because they will continue to be educated in traditional public schools, which will keep suffering funding cuts while tax dollars go to private schools.

Public schools accept all students. Private and religious schools do not. Public schools must meet state accountability standards. Private schools do not have to meet accountability

and curriculum standards, and voucher supporters want it to stay that way, even if they receive state tax dollars. And private schools could still discriminate in admissions on the basis of prior academic achievement, special needs, or behavioral history. In other words, they could use taxpayer dollars to cherry-pick the best and the brightest.

To add insult to injury, by charging tuition and fees in excess of the voucher amount, private schools could discriminate on the basis of family income. Even with a \$5,000 a year voucher, most Texas families will be unable to afford tuition at many private schools.

According to research compiled by the National Education Association, there is no conclusive evidence that voucher programs in other states have improved student performance. Moreover, due to the lack of public accountability in financial policies or measurement of student achievement, some voucher programs have been plagued by waste and abuse.

Vouchers and other privatization schemes are offered by supporters as a way to "improve" public schools, but, in truth, they are just another way to enrich profiteers at the expense of public education. Vouchers are based on the assumption that public schools have failed, or will fail. As such, privatization is nothing less than an attempt to undermine support for public education — a recipe for failure cooked up by big money players who want to make money by educating our children. Such schemes also are designed to divert lawmakers' attention from what educators and students really need — enough resources to succeed in the public schools.

HIGH STAKES TESTING

Although the legislative majority cut public school funding last session, lawmakers still insisted that students as young as third-graders take the new,

more difficult State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) tests. The state postponed for one year a requirement that end-of-course exams count toward high school students' final grades. But that requirement remains in effect for the current school year, and many parents are furious that the legislative majority still doesn't have its educational priorities in order. Some parents — Texans Advocating for Meaningful Student Assessment — have started to organize over the issue. And several hundred school boards have approved resolutions condemning the overreliance on high stakes testing.

What kind of public policy dictates a more difficult, high-stakes test for student and educator accountability but slashes the resources that teachers and students need to succeed? Educators and voters know the answer: it's a backwards, failed public policy, and based on some reelection campaign squirming by legislators who initially supported the tests and the cuts, the STAAR program may be in for some changes during the upcoming session. But STAAR also has its defenders, including the Texas Association of Business (TAB) and the Texas Public Policy Foundation (TPPF), both supporters of Governor Perry and his budget-cutting, privatization attack on public education. These groups complain about the high STAAR failure rate and insist that the state solve its education problems by clamping down on children and teachers. They demand that students and educators be held accountable, yet they hypocritically refuse to hold the governor and his budget-cutting legislative allies accountable.

TAB even has gone so far as to withhold support for additional education funding until the Legislature reaffirms its support of the STAAR program. That short-sighted position is particularly absurd coming from a group whose members need a well-educated workforce. If TAB and other

like-minded groups don't get their political and educational priorities in order soon, they are going to lose ground and profits to competitors in other states.

In a more realistic assessment of the STAAR problem, consultant Lynn Moak, a school finance consultant for Texas school districts, recently testified in the school finance trial that inadequate state funding makes it impossible for an acceptable number of students to meet the higher STAAR standards. "It (STAAR) is clearly a higher academic standard than we have had in the past, and...we are unprepared to meet those standards. It will take additional resources to meet those standards," Moak was quoted in the Houston Chronicle.

The fight over standardized testing is far from resolved. Some legislators are angry over STAAR's intrusion into classroom instruction. But other lawmakers will continue to defend the tests and will even try to link student test scores to teacher compensation, a proposal that TSTA will continue to fight. Ideally, the Legislature should put first things first by scrapping STAAR, restoring the school cuts, and creating an adequate, equitable school finance system. Then lawmakers, in consultation with teachers and other stakeholders, should work on developing a valid accountability system that includes more than standardized student testing.

TEACHER RETIREMENT

Ninety-five percent of Texas teachers don't receive Social Security. For many of these, their only retirement nest egg is the Teacher Retirement System's (TRS) pension fund, and fortunately it is one of the strongest public pension funds in the country. Unfortunately, it may come under attack during the legislative session, partly because of financial problems with some other public pension funds and partly because of greedy fund managers who want to

cash in by converting public funds into riskier 401(k)-style investment plans.

In 2011, the Legislature directed TRS to study the advantages and disadvantages of changing the current defined benefits plan to a defined contributions plan, such as a 401(k), or some combination of the two. The TRS study clearly showed that changing to either option would significantly increase the costs of administering pensions. A 401(k) also would shift more of the investment risk to teachers, who would become vulnerable to the volatility of the stock market and could see their retirement savings all but vanish if the market plunged as they were preparing to retire.

The TRS Pension Trust Fund is actuarially sound for the next 70 years or so. Teachers and other school employees support the fund through their own contributions, and they have earned and deserve every penny of their guaranteed benefits. TSTA will strongly oppose any effort to convert the current plan to a riskier alternative or otherwise weaken teachers' retirements.

CHARTER SCHOOLS

An effort to raise the current cap of 215 on charter school operators failed during the 2011 session but will be attempted again. TSTA will continue to oppose it because the recent budget cuts have made it impossible for the Texas Education Agency to adequately regulate the charter schools that already are operating in Texas. Moreover, despite the claims of some self-styled education "experts," charter schools are not a magic solution to education problems.

A number of studies have shown that charter schools, overall, are no better or worse than traditional public schools. Some charters are good. Others have performed poorly, sometimes through financial mismanagement, other times through fraud and poor educational practices. Charters also lack the financial and administrative transparency of traditional public schools.

By Linda McNeil

Hear her comments at
the LBJ School of Public
Affairs Measuring Up
Conference



‘What new piece of the universe did your students touch today?’

I love this quote because it captures the heart of what it means to learn. In these few words, Dr. Bruce Alberts — the former head of the National Academy of Sciences, current editor of Science magazine, and someone who is absolutely passionate about kids’ learning, not just in the sciences but in the full scope of human endeavors — gives both a vision for teaching and an operational model for evaluating teaching and learning.

These words might not be a bad guide for our education policies to follow:

- The question is addressed to the teacher: “What new piece of the universe did *your* students touch today?”
- And it embraces that essential relationship between the teacher and the children: “*your students.*”
- “What *new piece* of the universe did your students touch today?” suggests not only

ongoing learning, but building on what came before — continuity and connections, a growing, cumulative knowledge base.

- And *universe*: a reminder of the wonder of learning and of the infinite scope of all we have to teach the children. The *universe*: a moral imperative to remember the expansive possibilities for our teaching. The universe can’t be contained in a Scantron bubble.

We — the grownups — have never had more to teach our children. We are not limited by our own knowledge, by our geography or our language or our own personal experiences. We now have access to all that humanity has ever explored or studied or created or discovered.

And we’ve never known more about the ways children learn. Every day we learn more about the brain, the mind, multiple intelligences, emotional intelligence, dimensions of cognition, the sociocultural and linguistic aspects of learning.

This should be the most amazing moment in all of human history to be a teacher. And it should be the most exciting moment in all of human history to be a child in school.

How is it, then, at this moment of greatest possibility for teaching and learning, we have limited our children’s schooling to content that can be measured by computer-scored multiple-choice tests? And how is it that we have done so by force of law, first in this state and, for the past decade, by

federal law? What price have we paid for a system so limiting?

A SEVERELY NARROWED, FRAGMENTED, OFTEN MEANINGLESS CURRICULUM

The current system of standardized “accountability” began in Houston in 1994; No Child Left Behind took the system national. What do we have to show for 18 years under this system?

- A severely narrowed, fragmented, and often meaningless curriculum;
- A de-skilling of teachers, a de-valuing of teacher knowledge and of the essential relationships between the children and their teachers;
- A one-size-fits-all system of testing that ignores or completely discounts all we know about the multiple ways children learn;
- A reduction in classroom instructional practices to the production of a single indicator, a test score on a state-mandated standardized test;
- A dominance of class time and teacher professional development by test-prep drills and strategies;
- Evidence from flat or declining scores on NAEP, SAT, ACT, and international tests that state-mandated, accountability-driven schools are not educating our youth to high standards;
- The masking of old inequalities across ethnic subgroups and the production of new inequalities as students deemed liabilities to the schools’ test score ratings are pushed

HIDDEN COSTS OF TESTING

- Tests (initial and re-takes)
- Test prep materials
- Scoring the tests
- Test-prep consultants
- Benchmark/snapshot tests
- Test acquisition
- Test storage and security
- Test distribution to schools and collection
- Shipping to vendors
- Technology support
- School-site and sub-district level costs parallel to central office costs
- Test prep tutorial programs

HIDDEN COSTS OF THE ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM

- Managers of the accountability system
- Staff of clerks and statisticians
- Accountability officers in sub-district offices
- Principal-accountability supervisors
- School-accountability supervisors
- Teacher-accountability supervisors
- Accountability liaison to Texas Education Agency and U.S. Department of Education
- Federal accountability reporting staff
- Signs in front of schools
- Interim scoring and reporting of benchmark tests
- Administrative time and travel for staff training
- Central office staff allocated to district-wide accountability
- Sub-district staff allocated to sub-district-wide accountability
- Counselor time for testing and retakes
- Accountability consultants



This should be the most amazing moment in all of human history to be a teacher. And it should be the most exciting moment in all of human history to be a child in school.

out, counseled out, or strategically held back in grade until they drop out. These losses from Texas schools alone number above 100,000 every year and are disproportionately poor, African American, Latino, and/or English language learners.

- The accruing of what University of Texas Professor Angela Valenzuela has termed “cumulative deficits” as test-prep drills and curriculum scripts, often produced by the testing companies themselves, displace the study of substantive curriculum and the development of many ways of knowing.

IMPOVERISHING SCHOOLS WHILE ENRICHING TESTING COMPANIES

The focus on measurable outcomes has turned public attention away from discussion of all it takes to create and sustain good schools. The flaws in this system are evident in its perverse use of resources. The last legislative cycle in Texas left us with cuts of almost \$6 billion from public education, with the governor and Republican-dominated legislature refusing to use any of the state’s ample “rainy day” funds to prevent the layoffs of thousands of teachers.

The one budget item the governor insisted on protecting from cuts? The half-billion-dollar contract to the Pearson testing company. Schools, starved of needed teachers and instructional resources, still had to be rated by their test scores, and the salaries and job security of teachers and administrators remained contingent upon those test scores.

Educators would be “held accountable” in a state whose governor and legislature were not being held accountable for how they provisioned, or deprived, the public’s schools.

Many parents — whose children were suddenly in overcrowded classrooms, whose schools had lost art and music teachers, who were being asked to contribute to classroom supplies — may have known about the big budget cuts but not realized how many of their tax dollars were not reaching the classroom. The chart of Texas payments to Pearson testing company on this page shows the current “educational” priorities.

These dollars are staggering, especially when we consider the harm being done to teaching and learning under this system. But even half a billion dollars

doesn’t begin to cover the actual costs. During the last legislative session, I tried to find out from legislators and school officials what the testing system costs the local school districts. No one seemed to know. The general sense was that if we could total up all the dollars spent by local districts on the testing and accountability system, the amount would equal the state’s payments to Pearson — taking us up to a total of a billion dollars for this flawed system.

Many of the local costs are hidden. They don’t show up in separate lines in the budget because the state does not require schools to differentiate the costs of the testing system when they report their expenditures. So, for example, test-prep materials may be included, innocuously, under “curriculum materials.” Expensive consultants, hired to coach teachers to help their students game the test with a yellow highlighter and “key word search,” are likely to be coded under “teacher professional development.”

I call these the “hidden costs” because they are not honestly, transparently disclosed. Taxpayers see all the money being spent on education and wonder why our schools aren’t improving, why so many students do not graduate. They have no idea how many millions of their tax dollars never make it to the classroom and, in fact, are spent on a system that undermines the quality of teaching and learning, weakening our schools’ capacity to teach our children.

I drew up the lists of the “hidden costs of testing” and the “hidden costs of accountability,” shown in the sidebar on page 15, from conversations with teachers and administrators. One former teacher already let me know my lists are not complete: “You forgot the doors!” She informed me that each school is required to have heavy, lock-

able metal security doors on the rooms where tests and answer sheets are stored. Who knew? (And what science supplies or music program was cut to pay for that door?)

This absurd system is impoverishing our schools and our children while it is enriching the testing companies and their lobbyists and the suppliers of all these things we don’t need.

What’s at stake is the very survival of the public’s schools. Resources are leaving our classrooms, especially in the communities where they are most needed. The not-surprising result of this strategic deprivation is low scores on the tests, which then are used as an excuse to close neighborhood schools, to outsource our poor children to charter chains, or to push them out of school entirely. We now have in Texas 18 years of studies — and the experiences of children and teachers in our schools — showing beyond a doubt that this is a failed system. It’s time to invoke the system’s own logic: if failing schools are to be closed for not making measurable progress, then why haven’t we shut down this visibly, measurably failing system?

The public’s schools are like the public commons — that green space shared for everyone’s use and benefit, a meeting ground for the common good and for sustaining the community. Parents are realizing that their children’s opportunities for a meaningful education are being cheated by the testing system. Communities are becoming aware that as standardized accountability weakens the public’s schools, it threatens the very legitimacy of a public education, making our treasured schools vulnerable to those who would love to capture our tax dollars not just for testing contracts but for commercializing the education of our children. The system is a fraud, and it must be dismantled.

Educators would be “held accountable” in a state whose governor and legislature were not being held accountable for how they provisioned, or deprived, the public’s schools.

TEXAS PAYMENTS TO PEARSON TESTING COMPANY				
2000-2001	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005
\$39,122,054	\$50,208,435	\$47,451,455	\$58,692,430	\$62,641,857
2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010
\$87,427,757	\$100,214,658	\$87,260,970	\$92,103,116	\$85,208,340
2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015
\$90,665,041	\$89,058,910	\$93,369,544	\$96,532,517	\$98,766,605

RELATED LINKS

- What does the resolution about high-stakes testing say? www.tasanet.org/sites/tasa/files/gr/2012/sampleresolution.pdf
- Who has signed the resolution? <http://www.tasanet.org/adopted-board-resolutions>
- “Avoidable Losses: High-Stakes Accountability and the Dropout Crisis” <http://epaa.asu.edu/ojs/article/view/28>
- National Center for Fair & Open Testing www.fairtest.org
- Linda McNeil at the LBJ School www.utexas.edu/lbj/videos/2012/dr-linda-mcneils-remarks-lbj-schools-measuring-forum-9242012

A MOVEMENT TO RESTORE EDUCATIONAL CAPACITIES OF OUR SCHOOLS

We do have cause for optimism. Parents across our state are joining in common cause, not only against this expensive accountability system but for equal and substantial funding for the schools in their own communities and across our state. Eighty-four percent of Texas school districts representing 90 percent of all Texas public school students have signed a resolution (www.tasanet.org/sites/tasa/files/gr/2012/sampleresolution.pdf) urging the legislature to end the dominance of the testing system over Texas schools.

This is a heartening development. It reflects a growing national movement of educators, business leaders, parents, and students advocating to restore the educational capacities of our schools.

Organizing is essential. And the resolution is helping galvanize a consensus that bridges regions and ethnic groups and political divides. My question is why not take action? If all those “whereas...” clauses in the resolution are true (“Whereas, imposing relentless test preparation and boring memorization of facts to enhance test performance is doing little more than stealing the love of learning from our students and assuring that we fall short of our goals”), if they are worthy of the courage it must have taken for the early signers to endorse, then how can Texas public school districts wait for legislative changes while more generations of children are subjected to this system?

It’s time for local school boards to send a letter of conscience to the Texas Education Agency, the governor, the legislature, the state commissioner. I imagine the letter of conscience would begin something like this:

“To the Elected Officials of the State of Texas:

We are writing to let you know that we can no longer afford to participate in your testing system. We need to use those dollars to re-hire teachers, to make sure our curriculum materials are up to date, to make sure the instruction in our schools is supportive of the cultures and languages and aspirations of our children and their families. We have children to educate. If at some future time, we have all the money we need and more, we’ll get back to you about doing some of that testing.”

Such a letter might conclude something like this: “You know, we just re-read that resolution we signed, and we realize we really mean what it says. We can’t keep doing harm to our kids. We have a different vision for our schools. We want our students to touch a new piece of the universe today — and every day they come to school. Feel free to come visit, and we’ll show you what evidence of real learning looks like.”

School boards will have that courage when they hear from the parents, the teachers, the students, the people who elected them, that we believe that they have an important educational mission: to educate our children to the highest and most equitable standards and also to teach the officials who govern our schools that they need to dismantle this harmful system and work with us to make the public’s schools places of extraordinary learning.

Linda McSpadden McNeil is professor of education and director of the Center for Education at Rice University. This essay is adapted from her remarks at the Measuring Up conference at the LBJ School at the University of Texas at Austin, Sept. 24, 2012.



a child has many feelings...



hunger shouldn't be one of them.



Whether it’s expanding School Breakfast, After School Snacks or Summer Feeding Programs, Dairy MAX has solutions. Find out how Dairy MAX can help with grants and expertise at www.dairymax.org/tools-for-schools.



NEW VOTER: A high school student registers in Brownsville, where TSTA members and students headed up a voter registration drive for seniors.

Modeling civic engagement

“We need to get young adults involved and informed about the significant impact they can make in our community and our nation by participating in the voting and election process,” said Association of Brownsville Educators member Rosie Gorena, who spearheaded a voter registration drive at Veterans Memorial High School this year because she believes students are more likely to sign up with friends in a social environment.

“Our school’s first senior class is graduating this year, and many of our students have turned 18,” she said. “Our govern-

ment club and I set up a voter registration table in the library and cafeteria during lunch. We took turns approaching students to explain how important this election was for us all.”

Gorena asked if any students wanted to take it one step further by going to polling places and holding signs for the candidates they supported. “It was an exciting and wonderful experience for all of those who participated. Local candidates and State Sen. Eddie Lucio Jr. stopped by to congratulate the students for participating in their first election ever! It is my



POLITICALLY ENGAGED: Students campaign for local school board candidates in Brownsville.

belief that the more we model to our students that we are involved, the more they will become involved.”

She held a luncheon on Nov. 1 to thank those who registered and to celebrate the right to vote. “We discussed the students’ duties and privileges as voting members in our community. I stressed that only through voicing their ideas and concerns can they bring about the positive changes they want to see as young leaders in our society,” Gorena said.

“My goal is to motivate and get students involved, so that they may one day make their voices heard and help make their community prosper. Hopefully, they will continue to partake in the election process and become more civic oriented,” she said.

LOCALS MAKE PROGRESS IN SCHOOL BOARD ELECTIONS

All politics is local, and nothing is more important to achieving TSTA’s strategic goals than winning local school board elections. This year, TSTA provided support for candidates endorsed by local associations, with a focus on races that could swing the balance of a board

to be more favorable to policies that benefit educators, students, and communities. We utilized direct mail, phone calls, advertising, and political action committee contributions.

Highlights include:

- Austin — Three of four candidates endorsed by Education Austin won, shifting the school board to a pro-educator, pro-community working majority.
- Brownsville — Candidates endorsed by the Association of Brownsville Educators won in three of four races. With these victories, AOB members will have a greater influence on key issues. This year’s effort laid the groundwork for future election victories.
- Conroe — TSTA member and leader Jessica Powell, who was endorsed by TSTA-Conroe, won.
- Cypress-Fairbanks — Both school board candidates endorsed by Cypress-Fair TSTA won.
- Donna — Candidates endorsed by Donna TSTA won in two of four races.

- Laredo — One of three candidates endorsed by Laredo/United TSTA won.

The next round of school board elections will be in May in some districts. The time to start working on those elections is now! Ask your local president how you can help.

INTERGENERATIONAL PROJECT GOES BEYOND MENTORING

A new mentoring program will match TSTA Student Program members with TSTA Retired members. The pilot program begins at the University of Houston at Clear Lake in January.

“This is not your ordinary student mentor program,” Johnetta Williams of Dallas, president of TSTA-Retired, said. “The mentors will start working with students when they are in their junior year of college and stay with them through their first year of teaching.”

Leaders hope the program will be extended to other locations, with training available for both student and retired participants. Watch the TSTA Retired Facebook page at www.facebook.com/TSTAR.NEAR for details.

ANOTHER ‘QUILT GIVEAWAY’

TSTA-Retired kicked off “Quilt Giveaway 2” this fall, featuring a quilt that is 77 inches square and made of vintage TSTA T-shirts surrounded by red, white, and Texas bluebonnet print fabric (pictured in the fall Advocate).

This year’s quilt was pieced by member Gail Dunham and machine quilted by Rhonda Kessler. Chances to win it are \$2 from any TSTA Retired Board of Directors member or by emailing townview@swbell.net or legbrmc@att.net. The drawing will be held at the TSTA House of Delegates on Saturday, April 13, and you do not need to be present to win.



MEETING IN TEXAS AND NEW MEXICO: Above, TSTA-Student Program President Valerie Munz (center) with local and district officers. Right, participants in the 32nd Ruidoso Retreat enjoy the program.



TEAM BUILDING IN RUIDOSO

It's an opportunity to get the latest news about public education and strategize; a chance to reconnect with old friends and make new friends; and a time to grow closer as "TSTA family."

For 32 years, TSTA members in the Panhandle region have held a fall retreat in the mountains of New Mexico. Sponsored by Region 2F and Lubbock Educators Association, the Ruidoso Retreat is organized and planned by James Harris and Russell Teeter, president and vice president of Region 2F respectively, but, as Harris says, "All the officers work together to make it happen for the members of the TSTA family." This year's participants came from Lubbock, Amarillo, San Antonio, El Paso, Aspermont, Houston, Abilene, and Austin.

The agenda included addresses by TSTA President Rita Haecker and Vice President Noel Candelaria; a legislative and election update by Executive Director Richard Kouri; an auction that raised \$1,400 for scholarships for members pursuing advanced degrees; and presentations by local artists on the history and art of Ruidoso.

"The real purpose of the retreat is to make connections," Harris said. "We have to work together throughout the year, in some very intense situations, to make a difference for our members and public education. We leave here knowing that we're ready to do a good job for public education, to face whatever comes our way, and be victorious."

NEWS FROM TSTA STUDENT PROGRAM

- Students from across the country met in San Diego, California, for the NEA Student Program's Connections Conference Nov. 9-11. Among those attending were TSTA-SP President Danielle Thorp and Staff Liaison Clinton Gill, who said the agenda focused on NEA's Bully Prevention Campaign.
- The TSTA-SP Executive Committee met Oct. 6 in Houston to plan for the annual state convention, which will be Feb. 15-17 in Austin.
- District 2's convention drew 82 participants from Texas A&M University,

Sam Houston State University, and the University of Texas. Held at Texas A&M's College Station campus on a Saturday, the convention included several work sessions, including a "principal panel."

TSTA-RETIRED: EVENTS AND ELECTIONS

The TSTA Retired officers meet Nov. 28-30 and the Board of Directors on Jan. 30-Feb. 1 at TSTA Headquarters in Austin. You are invited to attend.

Senior Lobby Day at the State Capitol is Feb. 12. Meet at the TSTA Building for a brief overview at 10 a.m., followed by a day of lobbying and senior networking. Buses are coming from all parts of Texas. We urge you to be part of this history-making event; there is plenty to talk about with your legislator. They must hear from all of us.

The TSTA-R Annual Meeting is April 10-11 at the Hyatt Hotel in downtown Houston. All members are eligible to attend and vote. The host committee is working to make it an informative and entertaining event. Come and

take part in the business and fun. Details to come.

It is followed by the TSTA House of Delegates April 12-13 at the same hotel. Watch for more details in the spring Advocate.

The NEA Retired 2013 Leadership Development and Organizing Conference is tentatively set for the third week in March. Watch www.nea.org/retired and This Active Life magazine for registration information. NEA offers each state free housing for one newly involved retired member who has never attended the conference. Nominations must be submitted to the TSTA Retired office at 316 West 12th Street, Austin, TX 78701 by Jan. 16.

The NEA Retired Annual Meeting is June 28-30 in Atlanta. Registration information will be on www.nea.org/retired and in This Active Life magazine.

ELECTIONS: We must elect a TSTA Retired president, vice president, secretary, and TSTA Retired delegates to the TSTA House of Delegates and NEA Representative Assembly. (As an elected TSTA Retired delegate to the NEA Representative Assembly, you also hold voting privileges as a delegate to the NEA-Retired Annual Meeting. The NEA Retired Annual Meeting is June 28-30, and the RA is July 1-6. Both will be in Atlanta.)

Filing forms for all elections are due at the TSTA Retired office by 5 p.m. Jan. 16. All elections will take place by mail ballot between Feb. 1 and March 7. As a member, you may file for a position or nominate another member, but written permission must be obtained from the nominee and submitted with the filing form.

Filing forms for TSTA Retired delegates to the TSTA House of Delegates and the NEA Representative Assembly were in the fall issue of the Advocate.

The form for nominations for TSTA

Retired president, vice president, and secretary is on this page. The officers' terms will begin July 15, 2013, and end July 14, 2015, with the exception of the position of secretary which is open to fill an unexpired term ending July 14, 2014. For a description of the duties and responsibilities, please contact Sarah Kang at sarahk@tsta.org or 877-ASK-TSTA; she can provide the bylaws and other documents.

REGIONAL MEETINGS: Regions set their own meeting schedules; some hold monthly meetings from September to May while others have quarterly meetings.

- At a reorganizing meeting, the Midland/Odessa area, Region 2C, elected Chuck Isner and Bobbie Duncan as president and vice president, respectively.

- The Fort Worth area, Region 4C, held its first meeting of the year at the Fort Worth Education Association Building. President Jack Davis held an informative discussion of the changes in the TRS Aetna Insurance plan. State President Johnetta Williams, Region 4D President Geraldine Palmer, and TSTA staff member Sandra Hudson were guests.

- The Capital Area Retired Educators,

Region 2D/E, met at the TSTA Building in Austin. Susan McLinn is president. TSTA governmental relations staff person John Grey spoke.

- Region 3C, where Betty Jo Brown is president, had a speaker from Medicare to give pros and cons of changes coming in Medicare and the retired medical insurance. This group uses the free Harris County precinct buses for field trips.

- Region 3D, where JoAnn Peschel is president, had a well-attended organizational breakfast meeting. President Williams attended. The group travelled to LaGrange to visit the Quilting Museum and plans to travel to the Maritime Museum.

- Region 4D President Geraldine Palmer held a meeting to plan the year and showed a PowerPoint presentation on NEA Member Benefits. At another meeting, the speakers were from Senior Source, an agency with a variety of resources for seniors. Plans include a bus and rail trip to Carrollton for lunch and the annual holiday meal and fun event.

Visit the TSTA Retired web page at <http://tsta.org/for-members/affiliates/tsta-retired>, and our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/TSTAR.NEAR.

TSTA-R NOMINATION FORM

Check box beside office this nomination is for: ☐ TSTA-Retired President
☐ TSTA-Retired Vice President ☐ TSTA-Retired Secretary

QUALIFICATIONS: Must be an active member of TSTA-Retired and NEA-Retired

Nominee's name _____

Address _____ City/State _____ Zip _____

Home phone _____ Day phone _____

I, the undersigned, hereby certify that the above information is true and correct.

Nominee's signature _____

Nominator's name _____

Address _____ City/State _____ Zip _____

Home phone _____ Day phone _____

I, the undersigned, hereby certify that the above information is true and correct.

Nominator's signature _____

Send by U.S. Mail (or FAX to 512-486-7043) by 5 p.m., Jan. 16, 2013,
to TSTA-R, 316 W. 12th St., Austin, TX 78701.

Teaching in an interconnected world



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www.neafoundation.org



Beth Huckabee spent 10 days this summer on an educational and cultural tour of Beijing and Shanghai as an NEA Foundation Global Learning Fellow.

She was one of 26 recipients of the NEA Foundation Award for Teaching Excellence to travel to China with the goal of “embracing global competency to better prepare students for success in an increasingly interconnected world.”

They observed classes and talked with students and teachers, and also visited landmarks such as the Great Wall on a journey Huckabee described as “unbelievable.”

A high school science teacher in Flour Bluff, Huckabee was Texas’ Secondary Teacher of the Year in 2010 and TSTA’s Ermalee Boice Instructional Advocacy Award winner in 2011.

HAS THE CHINA EXPERIENCE CHANGED THE WAY YOU TEACH?

The trip showed me the importance of developing innovative thinkers. Seeing the structured learning in some of the classes and talking to the teachers made me realize that teaching our students to think and question is one of the unique characteristics of our education system.

I also encourage my students to think globally when looking at various ecological problems. It is important for them to realize what they do, what they buy, and how they live their lives has an impact on the resources of the world.



I have taken every opportunity to talk to my students about China this year. We have discussed their environmental and educational issues; my students are fascinated with the stories. Later in the year I will present programs on Chinese culture and education for our foreign language classes.

WHAT SURPRISED YOU MOST ABOUT CHINESE SCHOOLS?

I was expecting the students to respect their teachers, but I was surprised at their hesitation when answering questions. It was almost as if they were afraid of making a mistake.

At the vocational school, we saw a demo of the culinary cooking classes. I was surprised to see that the students and teachers interacted very little.

At the middle school, the students knew English, and we spent a long time watching a class. They asked us questions, and we asked them questions. I was surprised to see how hesitant they were to give answers that might be wrong. They really wanted to please their teachers and us.

WHAT WAS YOUR MOST AMAZING EXPERIENCE?

I had many great experiences, but two stick out in my mind.

The trip to the Great Wall was one of my favorite experiences. Being on the wall on a cloudy, overcast day was an eerie experience that is hard to describe. I felt like I had been transported back in time, and I expected guards to jump out of the guard houses. You could look down the wall in either direction, as far as the eye could see, and see it snake around the mountains.

The second was the trip on the bullet train between Beijing and Shanghai. The train traveled at 200 mph for most of the trip through a variety of habitats. I was sitting with another science teacher, and we had great discussions about China and the environment.

HAVE YOU KEPT IN TOUCH WITH YOUR FELLOW TRAVELERS?

We do keep in touch through a Facebook group, and that has been fun. It was so inspiring to be around the other teachers, comparing notes and discussing issues.



ERMALEE BOICE INSTRUCTIONAL ADVOCACY AWARD

This TSTA award recognizes and promotes teaching excellence based on professional practice, advocacy for the profession, community engagement, leadership in professional development, and attention to diversity. The winner automatically becomes Texas’ nominee for the NEA Foundation Award for Teaching Excellence. <http://www.tsta.org/news-center/awards-grants>



How much are you worth?

A lot of people talk about the high salaries public sector employees make, and this may be true in some sectors — or even some states. However, in Texas, nothing could be further from the truth. **By Bryan Weatherford**

According to data obtained from the Texas Education Agency's Public Education Information Management System, on average, teachers in Texas make just \$0.40 for every dollar a superintendent makes; education support professionals (ESPs) fare even worse — they make as low as \$0.16 for every dollar a superintendent makes.

According to the Organization for Economic Co-Development (OECD), teachers in the United States make just \$0.67 per dollar when compared to the average salary for professions requiring a professional degree. In fact, of the nations compared in the OECD report, teacher salaries in the United States have had among the lowest salary increases in the world — that's right, in the world — for teachers with 15 years of experience. To compound things, the average teacher salary in Texas is approximately \$7,000 less than the national average.

Of course, it doesn't get better from here. Contractual language promoted by the Texas Association of School Boards and adopted by many school districts changes the teaching contract from 187 days to 10 months. Not much of a difference, you might say, but it opens the door for teachers to work many more days (in the 10 months) without additional pay.

People who have wanted to "stick it" to teachers for years may have gotten their wish; however, in doing so, they have "stuck it" to children, parents, other educational employees, and many other stakeholders.

The value of a teacher today is measured in more than just dollars and cents. At a time when Texas is exploring ways to increase and assess teacher effectiveness, current policy dic-

tates just the opposite. Salaries are being compressed, work hours increased, class sizes are getting larger, and accountability standards are doubling down on everyone but those who hold the purse strings. This is not the environment that will elevate teaching as a profession, nor is it one that will create graduates who are college and career ready.

Add-ons such as professional development time at the end of the day or the week impact teachers' time with their families, and the loss of planning time (which is much less than that of teachers around the world) is interfering with actual instruction in the classroom. Every profession recognizes the value of planning and preparation on the part of practitioners. Surgeons plan and practice major surgeries prior to

doing them; lawyers prep witnesses before they give testimony; architects complete scale models of structures under design; and engineers create mathematical models to test designs and possible outcomes. Yet those who are increasingly being entrusted with the future of this nation are denied this opportunity.

Poor salaries are a tangible manifestation of the limited value given to teachers. They also denote a lack of respect — respect for what it takes to step into a classroom every day; of the planning and preparation teachers deserve to be successful; and for a good working environment.

In our classrooms today are future Academy Award winners, professional athletes, surgeons, architects, lawyers,

policymakers, perhaps even a president of the United States. If we value their futures, we must extend the same respect to teachers, who work more closely with them than any other profession in this country.

ANNOUNCING THE 2012 BRAIN QUEST TEACHER AWARDS!

CALLING ALL TEACHERS! Win Cash for Yourself and Your School!

In a partnership dedicated to making America smarter, **BRAIN QUEST** and **Chrysler** invite teachers of Preschool through Seventh Grade to enter the new BRAIN QUEST Teacher Awards Contest.

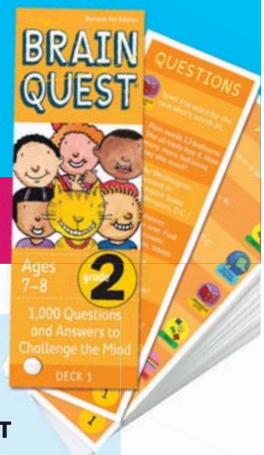
Timed to coincide with the 20th Anniversary of BRAIN QUEST, America's #1 educational bestseller with over 37 million copies in print, the Teacher Awards are designed to recognize those creative teachers who make learning an adventure in the classroom—with or without BRAIN QUEST. To enter, please submit a 500-word-or-less essay on how you make a difference in the classroom.

For complete official rules and to enter, go to brainquest.com/teacher or chrysler.com/brainquest.

NO PURCHASE NECESSARY. Open to teachers of Preschool through Seventh Grade who are legal U.S. residents. Entries will be accepted beginning May 1, 2012. All entries must be received by April 30, 2013. Void where prohibited. A panel of distinguished judges will choose the winners based on creativity of ideas and quality of writing. Judges' decisions are final. WORKMAN is a registered trademark of Workman Publishing Co., Inc. BRAIN QUEST is a registered trademark of Workman Publishing Co., Inc., and Groupe Play Bac, S.A. CHRYSLER is a registered trademark of Chrysler Group LLC.

PRIZES

- GRAND PRIZE**
- \$5,000 cash prize**
- \$1,000 worth of BRAIN QUEST products for your school**
- A BRAIN QUEST Challenge Event for your school**
- 12 FIRST PRIZES**
- One prize given each month for 12 months**
- \$500 cash prize**
- \$500 worth of BRAIN QUEST products for your school**



workman

CHRYSLER



Houston hosts 134th annual TSTA Convention

The annual TSTA Convention will be in Houston on April 12-13. All convention events will take place at the Hyatt Regency Houston. The hotel is in the heart of downtown and connects to premium shopping, restaurants, and services via Houston's Seven Mile Tunnel System. Houston Metrorail is two blocks away from the hotel.

To access periodic updates about convention schedules and events, be sure to visit the members only area of the TSTA website and enter your "Leaders Login" information (first-time users may need to register for access to this area of the site).

BECOME A DELEGATE

The House of Delegates (HoD) serves a vital role in the governance of TSTA and helps to shape the future of our organization. The HoD may establish objectives for TSTA, amend its bylaws, and act on recommendations from the TSTA officers, board, or committees. This year delegates will elect the NEA Director for Texas, Place 1, and if necessary, at-large members of the TSTA Board of Directors.

Please contact your local president for details on how to become an elected delegate in your local. Delegate allocations

are based on membership totals as of Jan. 15, and local delegate election results must be reported to TSTA by March 15.

If you do not have a local in your area or your local is not eligible to elect a delegate, you may request to become a cluster delegate. The deadline to seek nomination as a cluster delegate is February 22. Complete and return the form printed in the Fall 2012 issue of the Advocate or contact TSTA's Center for Executive and Governance (CEG).

REGISTRATION

Registration and certification of delegates, non-delegates/alternates, and guests will be on the Imperial Balcony, beginning at 7:00 a.m. on Friday, April 12, continuing to Saturday, April 13. All TSTA members and guests are welcome to attend the convention, but only delegates with proper delegate badges are allowed in the designated delegate section and voting area. Non-delegates/alternates and guests are encouraged to register.

HEARINGS AND WORKSHOPS

Open hearings will be held Friday morning on the proposed 2013-14 TSTA budget and any proposed bylaws amendments or NEA Resolutions. Additional topics may be added. Professional development workshops eligible for continuing education credit also will be offered on Friday.

HOUSING AND TRANSPORTATION

The Hyatt Regency Houston is holding a room block for TSTA convention attendees. Reserve your room directly with the hotel by March 11, 2013, to ensure your room at the group rate of \$155.00 (plus applicable taxes currently at 17 percent). Valet

parking is \$15/day. Self-parking is also available.

The hotel is approximately 22 miles from Houston Hobby Airport and 20 miles from George Bush Intercontinental Airport. You must make your own arrangements for transportation. One-way transportation from Hobby averages \$20 on SuperShuttle and \$23 by taxi. One-way transportation to the hotel from Intercontinental costs average \$25 on SuperShuttle and \$48 by cab. Groups traveling together should also check with SuperShuttle for available discounts.

Make your reservation online at <https://resweb.passkey.com/go/texas-teachers> or call 888-421-1442. Identify yourself as a participant of the "Texas State Teachers Annual Convention" at the time you make your reservation to obtain the group rate. Please note: A first night room deposit secured with a major credit card is required for all reservations. (TSTA

warns against using a debit card or card that can be used as a debit card to secure your reservation.)

If you have any questions about reservations, please contact Jan Parks in the CEG at 877-ASK-TSTA or email Jan at janp@tsta.org.

SPECIAL ASSISTANCE

Physically challenged or special needs delegates should contact TSTA's CEG no later than March 29, 2013, to arrange assistance during the convention. Payment for special needs requests such as wheelchairs or transportation is the responsibility of the delegate, but TSTA will help make arrangements for services. Members who do not have a roommate but would like to share accommodations should contact the CEG before making their hotel reservation. We will attempt to match members who want to share expenses, but we cannot guarantee a roommate for everyone.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE	
Thursday, April 11	
8:00 a.m.	Advisory Committee Meeting
1:30 p.m.	Board of Directors Meeting
6:00 p.m.	Candidates Meeting
Friday, April 12	
7:00 a.m.	Registration
8:00 a.m.	Special Interest Exhibits
8:00 a.m.	Open Hearings
9:15 a.m.	Professional Development Workshops (CPE Credit)
10:30 a.m.	Professional Development Workshops (CPE Credit)
1:00 p.m.	Parliamentary Procedures Workshop for New Delegates
1:00 p.m.	Recognized Caucus Meetings
2:30 p.m.	House of Delegates Opening Ceremony and Meeting
Saturday, April 13	
6:30 a.m.	Registration
7:00 a.m.	Regional/TSTA-Student Program/TSTA-Retired Meetings
8:00 a.m.	Special Interest Exhibits
8:30 a.m.	Voting/Elections
10:00 a.m.	House of Delegates Meeting
12:30 p.m.	Lunch and Recognized Caucus Meetings
2:00 p.m.	House of Delegates Meeting

Election of TSTA at-large Board of Directors members

ISTA bylaws, policies, and procedures guarantee that specific groups — i.e., ethnic minorities and education support professionals (ESPs) — have a meaningful voice in the organization, while other groups, such as administrators, are prevented from having influence beyond their numbers.

Each Jan. 15, TSTA calculates the proportion of our membership in these three categories to help determine the need for at-large elections to the TSTA Board of Directors. The board has 29 members that count for this purpose — officers, regional presidents, Texas Faculty Association president, TSTA-Retired president, TSTA-Student Program president, and NEA directors for Texas. Both the Jan. 15 calculations and the results of regional elections held at the regional houses of delegates determine whether at-large elections are necessary.

Although it is possible elections will not be held, TSTA is seeking nominations for these positions now in case elections are required. Elections will take place at the 2013 TSTA House of Delegates on April 13. Indi-

viduals elected would serve from July 15, 2013, through July 14, 2015.

Recent TSTA membership numbers show 42.6 percent of our members are ethnic minorities, 22.1 percent are ESPs, and 3.3 percent are supervisory. If the recent percentages hold true on Jan. 15, TSTA would need at least 12 minorities, six ESPs, and one supervisor on the board.

Minority: If current membership percentages hold on Jan. 15, it is possible but unlikely we will need to elect minority at-large board members due to the present number of minority board members whose terms will continue.

ESP: TSTA currently has five ESP board members: four whose terms expire July 14, 2013, and who are eligible to run again, and one whose term will continue. Based on all of the above calculations, we have included a nomination form for the ESP position. If required, that election will be held at the 2012 House of Delegates on April 13, and individuals elected will serve from July 15,

2013, through July 14, 2015. If you are interested in running, please complete the form below.

Supervisory: The term of the current supervisory at-large board member expires on July 14, 2014.

All nomination forms must be submitted by the deadline established annually by the TSTA Board (see below). TSTA will send each nominee information detailing board members' responsibilities, along with a form stating the candidate has read the information and will accept the responsibilities if elected. The candidate must sign and return this form within the timeline adopted by the board for the candidate's name to appear on the ballot. Candidates who fail to return this form are ineligible for election.

The nomination form must be COMPLETELY filled out and SIGNED by the nominee. Candidates must comply with the board-approved election timeline as follows:

Thursday, March 21: Deadline for receipt of nomination form

Friday, April 5: Deadline for

receipt of candidate flier (for inclusion in delegate packets)

Friday, April 5 at 4:45 p.m.
CDT: Deadline for receipt of candidate statement/late nomination (for candidate's name to appear on ballot)

Saturday, April 13: Election at the TSTA State House of Delegates

Saturday, April 13: Runoff Election (if necessary) at the TSTA State House of Delegates

QUALIFICATIONS

- Be actively engaged in the education profession within the state at the time of election
- Have held Active, ESP, or TFA, or any combination of Active, ESP, TFA, or life membership in TSTA for at least three consecutive years preceding the election
- Be actively employed as a non-supervisory member, unless seeking the supervisory at-large position
- Maintain membership status and educational position in TSTA during term of office
- Sign and return the form accepting the responsibilities of a board member

The nomination form may be submitted by any means providing verifiable evidence that it was timely filed and includes the nominee's signature. **Nominations received through regular mail will not be accepted.** Deliver forms to TSTA's Center for Executive and Governance (CEG), 316 West 12th Street, Austin, Texas 78701. If hand delivered, be sure to get a handwritten receipt from the CEG. Fax forms to 512-486-7053 or email a PDF version to adriennen@tsta.org. For questions regarding the election, call 877- ASK-TSTA, ext. 1514, or email adriennen@tsta.org.

TSTA / NEA

TSTA/NEA

TEXAS STATE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION/NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

877-ASK-TSTA • www.tsta.org

2012-13 ENROLLMENT FORM

Please return this completed form to your Association Representative or mail to TSTA Membership Department,
316 West 12th Street, Austin, Texas 78701-1892. If you have questions, call **877-ASK-TSTA.**

NAME

SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER

DATE OF BIRTH (M/D/Y)

ADDRESS

LOCAL ASSOCIATION

HIRE DATE (M/D/Y)

CITY

STATE

ZIP

NAME OF ISD

EMAIL AT HOME

CAMPUS/WORKSITE

EMAIL AT WORK

POSITION (I.E. CLASSROOM TEACHER, LIBRARIAN, BUS DRIVER, ETC.)

AREA CODE

HOME PHONE

AREA CODE

CELL PHONE

✓

ANNUAL DUES AND CONTRIBUTIONS

AMOUNT

1. Professional Dues—TSTA/NEA (Active)
Professional Dues—New to the profession

\$470.00
\$325.00

2. Educational Support Dues—Full-time
Educational Support Dues—Part-time

\$252.50
\$136.50

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 DUES AND CONTRIBUTIONS

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

Ethnicity/Gender

☐ American Indian/Alaska Native

☐ Black

☐ Hispanic

☐ Caucasian (not of Spanish Origin)

☐ Asian

☐ Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander

☐ Unknown

☐ Multi-ethnic

☐ Other

Gender:

☐ Male

☐ Female

This information is optional and failure to provide it will in no way affect your membership status, rights or benefits in NEA, TSTA or any of their affiliates. This information will be kept confidential.

METHOD OF PAYMENT/PAYROLL DEDUCTION AUTHORIZATION (BELOW)

I hereby authorize the _____ School District to deduct the total amount of the annual obligation as set by the appropriate Association governance bodies in _____ equal payments in order to pay my dues to the professional associations and organizations listed and for political action contributions indicated. The authorization will continue in effect for this school year and future years, including any increase that may occur, until I give written notice to the local by September 15 to revoke. I further authorize any unpaid annual balance to be deducted from my final check. The Local Association or TSTA/NEA will notify School District officials of the annual dues amounts for all levels of the Association each year.

FOR STAFF/LOCAL USE ONLY

ISSUE CAMPAIGNS

CAMPAIGN ISSUE _____ ACTION REQUESTED _____

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. Only U.S. citizens or lawful permanent residents may contribute to the NEA Fund. Contributions to the NEA Fund 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.
Contributions or gifts to The NEA Fund for Children and Public Education, TSTA-PAC and local PACs are not deductible as charitable contributions for federal income tax purposes.
Federal law requires political committees to report the name, mailing address, occupation, and name of employer for each individual whose contributions aggregate in excess of \$200 in a calendar year.
Federal law prohibits The NEA Fund for Children and Public Education from receiving donations from persons other than members of NEA and its affiliates, and their immediate families. All donations from persons other than members of NEA and its affiliates, and their immediate families, will be returned forthwith.
"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?
☐ YES ☐ NO

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.

Dues payments are not deductible as charitable contributions for federal income tax purposes. Dues payments (or a portion) may be deductible as a miscellaneous itemized deduction.

Legal Liability Coverage: Professional liability insurance is underwritten by the AIG Companies or successor provider selected by Nautilus Insurance Company, a subsidiary of W.R. Berkley Corporation (Berkley), or successor provider selected by NEA. 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. These insurers can 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.

Employment Defense: To be considered for legal services for job protection, membership is required for at least 30 days before the member knew or should have known of the events or occurrences leading up to the action complained about. Pre-existing conditions will not be pursued, except by discretion of TSTA.

MEMBER SIGNATURE

DATE

LOCAL ASSOCIATION REPRESENTATIVE