



HOUSE PUB ED COMMITTEE 3.30.21

The House Public Education Committee met March 30 for a long, at times heated hearing on 17 bills, including ones pertaining to virtual education beyond the COVID-19 pandemic and one that would reverse recent court findings and permit a state takeover of Houston Independent School District. The committee also voted 11 bills left pending, recommending them for consideration by the full House.

TSTA registered support for six bills this week:

- HB 256 by Cortez (D-San Antonio) would formalize the complaint process for teachers who were being bullied in the workplace, including the bullying of teachers by parents.
- HB 2344 by Zwiener (D-Dripping Springs) would enable school districts to opt in to the use of a writing portfolio method for the state-mandated writing assessment in lieu of the STAAR.
- HB 2230 by Bucy (D-Cedar Park) would call for a study on the impact of incorporating the fine arts into the foundation schools program.
- HB 1068 by Allen (D-Houston) would allow school district employees to use their personal leave for compensation on days designated as school holidays.
- HB 3346 by Meza (D-Irving) would add an indicator to the “student achievement” domain of the accountability system that would rate elementary schools on non-assessment-based aspects, to be determined by the commissioner, in equal weight to the STAAR performance component.
- HB 3643 by K. King (R-Hemphill) would put a hold on the expansion of virtual schools and instead create a “Texas Commission on Virtual Education” to study and make recommendations for virtual education.

TSTA opposed:

- HB 3270 by Dutton (D-Houston), written to undo the court findings in the legal battle between the Texas Education Agency and Houston ISD, would give the commissioner of education increased power to take over school districts and would remove due process and judicial review.
- HB 3731 by Dutton (D-Houston) would make several changes to the state’s A-F accountability system, including treating D campuses as failing, even if they are demonstrating improvement, and fast-track them to charter and/or state takeover.
- HB 538 by Patterson (R-Frisco) would allow new full-time virtual learning programs in the Virtual School Network. Currently, there is a cap on providers.
- HB 3528 by Sanford (R-McKinney) would extend Texas Virtual School Network courses into grades PK-2.
- HB 1468 by K. Bell (R-Forney) would extend the remote learning flexibilities afforded districts due to the COVID-19 pandemic without limit. TSTA submitted testimony alongside three other statewide teacher groups on this bill.
- HB 437 by Goodwin (D-Austin) would add a half-credit in personal financial literacy to the courses required for graduation and would reduce, by a half-credit, other electives such as fine arts. Rep. Goodwin withdrew this bill in response to push back from education groups including TSTA.

Other bills considered in this week's hearing:

- HB 322 by Talarico (D-RoundRock) would allow compensatory education funds to be used for creating new or expanding existing social emotional learning programs in schools.
- HB 1133 by Clardy (R-Nacogdoches) would allow Rusk County to order an election to revoke its county equalization tax.
- HB 2605 by Rosenthal (D-Houston) would codify training and notice requirements that aim to increase awareness among students, families and coaches on the risk of cardiac disease in youth.
- HB 1496 by VanDeaver (R-New Boston) would require districts to document management fees paid by or to the district regarding purchasing contracts or programs.
- HB 3591 by Jetton (R-Richmond) would require TEA to establish a grant program for districts to provide high-speed internet, infrastructure and devices.
- HB 3557 by K. King (R-Hemphill) would codify an option for parents to let their child repeat grades PK-8 or high school grades or credits.
- HB 3204 by Dutton (D-Houston) would add to the definition of career readiness to include students who are employed at a minimum salary level upon graduation. It would also let school districts use the CCMR Outcomes Bonus to pay students to report their employment and salary information to the district.

Eleven bills left pending in previous weeks were voted out of committee, including HB 1525, the "cleanup bill" to last session's omnibus school finance bill, HB 3. All bills except for HB 2557 were approved with a vote of 12-0. HB 2557 was voted through with 9 ayes, 2 nays (Meza and Talarico) and 1 present-not-voting (Bernal).

- HB 1525 by Huberty (R-Kingwood) aims to address several unintended consequences of HB 3 (2019). The substitute version includes an extension of the reading academies deadline to the 2023-24 school year and an exception for teachers who have already passed the Science of Teaching Reading exam, both recommendations that TSTA supports. The substitute also would permit non-certified teachers in charter schools to qualify for TIA designations, a change TSTA does not support.
- HB 2519 by Darby (R-San Angelo) would require rural educators to be on the State Board for Educator Certification, improve laws regarding educator contracts and protect educators against actions being taken against them in contract abandonment cases. TSTA has been instrumental in much of the progress made on the bill.
- HB 2557 by Rogers (R-Graford) would allow school districts to create a volunteer security program that would enable retired law enforcement and military veterans to carry a handgun and provide security services to schools. A committee substitute would limit participating districts to rural counties. TSTA opposed this bill.
- HB 363 by VanDeaver (R-New Boston) would create student data security protocols for vendors working with TEA.
- HB 999 by Bernal (D-San Antonio) would allow Individual Graduation Committees to matriculate seniors without considering End-of-Course exams through the 2022-23 school year, although it is expected that the window of time will be reduced when considered on the floor.
- HB 2120 by K. Bell (R-Forney) would require school boards to adopt a grievance policy.
- HB 2261 by Wu (D-Houston) would include public education facilities in the improvement projects municipal management districts are allowed to provide.
- HB 353 by Dutton (D-Houston) would add gender to the disaggregated accountability data.
- HB 129 by González (D-Clint) would implement digital citizenship curriculum for middle school students.

- HB 2287 by S. Thompson (D-Houston) would create a protocol for data sharing and collection between the Collaborative Task Force on School Mental Health Services, TEA and school districts.
- HB 2954 by S. Thompson (D-Houston) would allow for a suicide prevention, intervention and postvention program to be implemented optionally in elementary schools.