The House Committee on Public Education met on Tuesday, March 23rd to consider new bills and vote on some of the bills already presented to the committee in previous weeks.


To begin, former Chairman of the Public Education Committee, Representative Dan Huberty, presented House Bill 1525, an omnibus “cleanup” bill that addresses several outstanding items from last session’s House Bill 3, the landmark school finance legislation passed in 2019.

Among other items, the bill as presented includes the following provisions:

- Brings charter school special education funding back to pre-House Bill 3 levels
- Repeals the tuition allotment
- Ensures that the Career and Technology Allotment is applied on top of the small & midsized allotment for applicable districts
- Clarifies that homeless students receive the highest level of compensatory education funding available.
- $50 per P-Tech student
- Includes associates degree and the Texas National Guard in College, Career and Military Readiness Outcomes Bonus
- Clarifies that Teacher Incentive Allotment Funds count towards creditable service years for teacher retirement purposes at a cost of $61 million to the state

Rep. Huberty also noted that he expects to extend the current deadline for completion of reading academies from the end of the 2021-2022 school year to the end of the 2023-24 school year, specifically because of COVID-19.

TSTA TESTIMONY REGARDING TEACHER CONTRACTS

TSTA Government Relations Specialist Laura Atlas Kravitz provided virtual testimony as an invited witness for House Bill 2519 by Rep. Darby. The bill would make several changes to the laws surrounding educator contracts and the State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC). Primarily, the bill would make a number of favorable changes to address the harsh sanctions surrounding educator resignations and contract abandonment. The legislation would increase educators’ awareness of disciplinary actions that may be taken against them as a result of contract abandonment. Importantly, it would also require SBEC to consider the circumstances that surround an individual educator’s case before automatically applying a mandatory minimum sanction of one year suspension for a contract abandonment case. TSTA will continue to work with the legislation’s author as it moves through the legislative process.
TSTA supported several bills considered by the Committee:

- **HB 144** by González: would provide temporary measures to account for special education services that were interrupted because of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **HB 363** by VanDeaver: would create a system to restrict the use of identifying student information for operators and contractors and protect student privacy.
- **HB 999** by Bernal: would expand the use of Individual Graduation Committees (IGCs) for students who were in 12th grade during the 2020-21, 2021-22, 2022-23 school years by allowing these students to graduate without consideration of their performance on required end-of-course exams.
- **HB 2287** by S. Thompson: creates a protocol for data sharing and gathering between the Collaborative Task Force on Public School Mental Health Services (created last session), TEA, and school districts.
- **HB 2954** by S. Thompson: would require the Texas Education Agency to establish a suicide prevention, intervention and postvention program that elementary schools may implement.

TSTA opposed **HB 2557** by Rogers: would allow retired law enforcement and military veterans to provide security services at schools and carry handguns on campuses.

The Committee also considered:

- **HB 2120** by Bell: would require school boards to adopt a grievance policy for employees, parents and students and the public and a method for resolution.
- **HB 2261** by Wu: would let municipal management districts include public education facilities as part of improvement projects or services.

Finally, the committee voted to approve six bills to be recommended for consideration by the full house:

- **HB 159** by González: would require educator preparation programs to incorporate instruction about how to best serve students with special needs into their curriculum.
- **HB 699** by Rosenthal: would allow an excused absence for students experiencing a severe or life-threatening illness and allow for these types of excused absences to be excluded from the 90% attendance rule.
- **HB 725** by Patterson: a TSTA-supported bill that would allow any child who has been in foster care in any state or territory to be eligible to attend tuition-free prekindergarten in Texas public schools. Current law limits eligibility to children who have been in the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services.
- **HB 785** by Allen: would codify how admission, review and dismissal committees would incorporate and review student behavior intervention plans (BIP). The bill would also increase notification requirements to parents regarding BIPs and the use of student restraint. In response to feedback from TSTA and other education groups, Rep. Allen presented a committee substitute that includes clarifications and removes section two of the original bill.
- **HB 1114** by Thierry: a TSTA-supported bill that would offer school districts increased options to prove mental health to students through school-based health centers.
- **HB 1603** by Huberty: a TSTA-supported bill that would remove the expiration date from the law that allows for individual graduation committees. A student who has failed an end-of-course STAAR assessment required for graduation may still receive a high school diploma if an individual graduation committee determines that the student has qualified to graduate based on other evidence.