



SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE 3.30.21

The Senate Finance Committee met this week to take votes on some of the bills pending in Committee.

One of those bills, SB 28 by Bettencourt, saw a lot of push back at last week's hearing by public education advocates. The bill that was filed and presented to the committee last week would create an appeals process by which charter applicants who are turned down by the commissioner can appeal to the state board for approval in addition to eliminating the role of elected local officials in determining where a charter school in any community. In doing so, it would have put the approval of all new charter schools into the hands of one unelected state official, the commissioner of education, and remove the veto authority of the elected State Board of Education over these approvals.

This week, in a vote of 8-3, the committee voted favorably for a committee substitute of the bill, which would maintain the state board's veto power over the commissioner's decisions, but with a supermajority vote threshold, rather than the current majority requirement. Before the vote, Senator Royce West of Dallas, noted that the State Board of Education did not support this change and had distributed a letter to committee members outlining their concerns with the bill. While Senator Bettencourt, the bill's author, admitted that he had seen the letter, he defended the action by noting that the State Board had not voted on this position as a whole. The three Senators who voted against the bill were Royce West, Beverly Powell, and Jose Menendez. TSTA will continue to monitor the bill as it moves to the Senate Floor.

Aside from SB 28, the following five bills were unanimously voted out of committee and sent to the Local & Consent Calendar:

- SB 89 by Menendez would improve written supplemental education plans for individualized education programs for students who received special education services during the 2019-20 or 2020-21 school year. <https://capitol.texas.gov/tlodocs/87R/billtext/pdf/SB00089I.pdf#navpanes=0>
- SB 203 by Schwertner would create a request for proposal process for the UIL to use when selecting locations for statewide competitions. <https://capitol.texas.gov/BillLookup/History.aspx?LegSess=87R&Bill=SB203>
- SB 226 by Paxton would add training in virtual learning and virtual instruction to existing requirements for teaching certificates for teachers. <https://capitol.texas.gov/tlodocs/87R/billtext/pdf/SB00226I.pdf#navpanes=0>
- SB 289 by Seliger allows students to have excused absences to get drivers licenses (we support) <https://capitol.texas.gov/tlodocs/87R/billtext/pdf/SB00289I.pdf#navpanes=0>
- SB 481 by Kolkhorst would allow a student who is enrolled in a district that only offers virtual instruction for any part of the school year to transfer to another school district that offers in-person instruction. <https://capitol.texas.gov/tlodocs/87R/billtext/pdf/SB00481I.pdf#navpanes=0>