

# TFA Texas Faculty Association Higher Ed Legislative Report

March 1, 2023

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## Committee Season Begins, Bill Filing Deadline Looms

March is committee season in the Texas Capitol. With appointments made and organizational meetings underway, we will now accelerate into the intensive meeting schedule that will dominate the legislative agenda for the next 10 weeks or so. Bill filing is also accelerating ahead of the March 10th deadline, with an average of almost 200 bills filed per day. This week's highlights included:

- The Senate Education Subcommittee on Higher Education held its organizational meeting on March 1. The meeting lasted just under an hour, and was dominated by an invited briefing from Dr. Harrison Keller, Commissioner of Higher Education. The commissioner's presentation was more or less a straightforward "state of the state" of higher education. He did not engage the policy issues we know are coming, including our expected issues related to critical race theory, diversity, equity, inclusion, tenure, and related academic freedom issues. Those issues will be discussed as the bills related to them are filed and heard. We expect a similar hearing in the House next week.
- Chairman Van Deaver of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Article III (education) filed House Bill 8, the long-awaited community college funding reform bill. The bill is the statutory product of the Commission on Community College Finance, established in 2021 to study community college funding and make recommendations for reform. The bill establishes two distinct layers of funding, one a "basic tier" style distribution for basic operations, and the other a "performance tier" awarded to colleges on the basis of measurable outcomes aligned with regional and state workforce needs and state goals aligned to the state's long-range master plan for higher education. Interestingly, the bill at this point has very few specifics about the formulation and amounts of the two tiers, and instead invests the commissioner with broad rulemaking authority to accomplish the purposes of the Legislature. In addition, legislators, the Coordinating Board, and most stakeholders immediately stipulated that the bill as filed needs work before advancing in the legislative process. The bottom line is that, though the bill is more substantive than a place-holding "shell bill," it is still a work in progress both in terms of statutory language and major rulemaking.

We still await the filing of Lieutenant Governor Patrick's higher education priority bills related to higher education. Governor Patrick has been absent from the Capitol for a medical procedure, which may have delayed some of the filings. In any case, we can expect those bills to be filed by March 10.

## What You Can Do

[Read House Bill 8](#) by Van Deaver. Even though aimed at two-year colleges, the language of the bill, including the sections related to the findings of the Legislature and the rationale for the reform, is instructive in understanding the general sense of the legislation related to higher education and its relationship to the strategic goals. A reading of HB 8 will inform understanding and critiques of other bills heading to committee hearings.