

**SENATE:**

The Senate was in session Tuesday and Wednesday of this week conducting routine business. On Wednesday, they recessed until Thursday for first reading and referral of bills to committees.

**Next Week:** The Senate will reconvene at 3:00 p.m. on Monday, February 25, 2019.

**HOUSE:**

The House was in session on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday of this week conducting routine business.

**House Freedom Caucus** – On Tuesday, the Tea Party-affiliated Texas House Freedom Caucus held a press conference to announce their agenda for the session. Caucus Chair Mike Lang (R-Granbury) said, “During the interim over 1000 people at the grassroots sent us their priorities. We went through the priorities and condensed them to about 7 or 8 priorities. It’s time for conservatives to get with our colleagues and start governing.”

**Representative Matt Shaheen** (R-Plano) discussed property tax reform and public school finance reform saying, “Many of us personally know constituents who have had to move out of their homes and into apartments.” He then aligned the caucus with school finance reform and merit-based teacher pay. He further restated the caucus’ pro-life stance.

**Representative Mayes Middleton** (R-Wallisville) spoke in favor of open carry legislation and “stopping illegal voting,” urging paper trails in the election booth. He also committed the caucus to defending “religious freedoms,” and opposing “taxpayer-funded lobbying,” claiming it was being used to quash property tax reform.

**Representative Matt Schaefer** (R-Tyler) discussed border security characterizing it as a “federal responsibility but a Texas problem.” He cited statistics indicating that 10,000 illegal immigrants were detained at the Texas/Mexico border last week, and he threw the caucus’ support behind both state funding on the issue as well as President Donald Trump’s initiatives to build a border wall.

**Other House Members** in the House Freedom Caucus are Kyle Biedermann (R-Fredericksburg), Briscoe Cain (R-Deer Park), Matt Krause (R-Fort Worth), Jonathan Stickland (R-Bedford), Valoree Swanson (R-Spring), Tony Tinderholt (R-Arlington), and Bill Zedler (R-Arlington).

**House Democratic Caucus’ Texas Kids First Plan** - On Thursday, the Texas House Democratic Caucus announced its “Texas Kids First Plan” linking school finance reform and property tax reform. House Democratic Caucus Chair Chris

Turner (D-Grand Prairie) said, “This plan will provide as much as \$14.5 billion more in state dollars for public schools, lower property taxes for homeowners, expand mental health care access for students seeking help, and give a meaningful pay raise to Texas teachers and support staff. This substantial increase in state spending should reduce the pressure to increase property taxes at the local level. Our vision for public education is a vision we share with parents across the state. We want our children to have the best education possible. We want teachers and support staff to be paid a fair wage. We want a system that puts Texas kids first.” The plan includes funding recommendations and proposed policy changes.

**Texas Kids First Plan – Funding Recommendations:**

**Classroom Improvements:** \$8.75 billion in GR (Two-Years)

- Full day pre-K (\$1.6 billion)
  - Increase basic allotment to \$5,400 (\$2.8 billion)
  - More money for economically disadvantaged students (\$2.2 billion)
  - Investment in special education students (\$1.8 billion)
  - Increase investment in English language learners (\$200 million)
  - More money for school facilities, prioritizing pre-K facilities (\$150 million)
- Note: the increased investments should reduce the impact of recapture*

**Teacher Compensation:** \$3.78 billion in GR, \$1.75 billion in ESF (Two-Years)

- Payraises for all teachers and support staff (\$2.56 billion)
- \$100/month increase for health care premiums (\$1.05 billion)
- Hold districts harmless for health costs related to pay raises (\$174 million)
- Fully stabilize the Teacher Retirement System (\$1.57 billion from ESF)
- \$500 check to teachers for classroom supplies (\$180 million from ESF)

**Ending Gun Violence in our Schools:** \$212 million in GR

- Hire behavioral health professional for every school campus (\$212 million)

**Double Homestead Exemption to \$50,000:** \$1.7 billion in GR (One-Year)

- Provides average tax cut of \$325 to every Texas homeowner

**Texas Kids First Plan: Proposed Policy Changes**

**Classroom Improvements:**

- Strict review of the state’s testing accountability system, and fight outcomes-based funding that is directly tied to more money based on student to test scores
- Direct increased funds to assist with transportation and technology needs
- Limited purpose sunset review (not abolishment) of Texas’ special education programs
- Ensure disciplinary policies and codes of conduct are not subjective or lead to discrimination or prejudice

**Teacher Compensation:**

- Creation of a “Legacy Fund” that redirects extra money in the Rainy Day Fund into an account that can be invested in the Teachers Retirement System

### **School Safety:**

- Support facilities improvements such as secure doors and better lighting in schools
- Provide on-campus mental health and reimbursement under Medicaid for eligible kids
- Allow social workers to collaborate with school administrators and other school professionals in order to enhance students' learning environments

**Doubling the Homestead Exemption** - Implemented in Fiscal Year 2021, this proposal would be an additional \$1.7 billion cost to the state for the coming two-year budget cycle, and provide Texas homeowners with an average annual tax cut of \$325. The proposal to double the homestead exemption would be in addition to the expectation that if the state increases its share of public education investment, there would be reduced pressure by local governments to raise property taxes.

**Next Week:** The House will reconvene at 4:00 p.m. on Monday, February 25, 2019.

### **PUBLIC EDUCATION:**

On Tuesday, the **House Public Education Committee** took up:

**HB 55** by Mary Gonzalez (D-El Paso) would limit the **pre-kindergarten instructor/student ratio** to 11-1 for classes of 16 students or more or at least one certified teacher or teacher's aide per class for smaller classes. *It was left pending.*

**HB 102** by Diego Bernal (D-San Antonio) would make several changes to **teacher mentoring** statutes including:

- requiring mentor teachers to demonstrate interpersonal skills, instructional effectiveness, and leadership ability;
- requiring school districts to provide training that includes content related to best mentorship practices to mentor teachers and other district and campus employees that work with classroom teachers;
- requiring mentor teachers to meet with each classroom teacher assigned to the mentor at least once a week for at least 45 minutes;
- requiring school districts to schedule release time or a reduced teaching load for mentor teachers to facilitate mentoring activities;
- instituting a mentor program allotment for school districts that have implemented a mentoring program for classroom teachers who have less than two years of teaching experience to fund the mentoring program and provide stipends for mentor teachers with the amount of the formula determined by the commissioner; and
- requiring teachers that are assigned as a mentor to agree to serve as a mentor teacher for at least two school years.

*It was left pending.*

**HB 108** by Mary Gonzalez (D-El Paso) would require the Commissioner of Education to establish a **pilot program** for participating school districts to implement a **digital portfolio method** to assess students in grades three

through eight and use student performance under that method as a percentage (50 percent) of a student's overall performance on assessment instruments for accountability purposes. It would require the Texas Education Agency to contract with a single entity to facilitate the use of the digital portfolio method of assessment by school district participating in the pilot program. *It was left pending.*

**HB 109** by Armando "Mando" Martinez (D-Weslaco) would apply the statute **prohibiting classes on Memorial Day** to open-enrollment charter schools. *It was left pending.*

**HB 111** by Mary Gonzalez (D-EI Paso) would require **training for school employees** to include **prevention of sexual abuse**, sex trafficking, and other maltreatment of children with significant cognitive disabilities in both educational and non-educational settings. *It was left pending.*

**HB 116** by Mary Gonzalez (D-EI Paso) would require the State Board of Educator Certification to adopt rules specifying what each educator is expected to know and be able to do, particularly regarding **students with disabilities**. *It was left pending.*

**HB 120** by Mary Gonzalez (D-EI Paso) would exempt **students with limited English proficiency** from state-administered assessment instruments for up to two years (instead of one year) after initial enrollment in a school in the United States. *It was left pending.*

**HB 128** by Gina Hinojosa (D-Austin) would require school districts to provide parents with a copy of the results of the **physical fitness assessment** of the parent's child by the last day of the school year. *It was left pending.*

**HB 134** by Valoree Swanson (R-Spring) would require **ballot propositions authorizing the issuance of bonds** to contain only one project or category of expenditure. *It was left pending.*

**HB 165** by Diego Bernal (D-San Antonio) would allow **special education students** to earn an **endorsement** on the student's transcript by successfully completing curriculum and endorsement requirements identified by the State Board of Education, with or without modification by the student's admission, review, and dismissal committee. *It was left pending.*

**TEA Office of Inspector General** – On Thursday, Senator Bettencourt (R-Houston) filed **SB 933** to create an office of Inspector General in the Texas Education Agency. Senator Bettencourt said, "Nearly twenty-five percent of the current state budget goes toward public education. The Texas Education Agency is one of the few major agencies that does not already have authority for an Office of Inspector General. This bill will ensure that taxpayer money is not being wasted and will give the agency the ability to root out fraud and abuse."

**Next Week:**

The **Senate Finance Committee** will meet on Monday, February 25, 2019 at 10:00 a.m. in E1.036 of the capitol extension to take up:

**SB 3** by Jane Nelson (R-Flower Mound) would:

- provide a permanent \$5,000 annual **salary increase** to approximately 350,000 classroom **teachers**;
- direct that the pay increase is paid for by the state with funding flowing through a new Classroom Teacher Salary Allotment;
- stipulate that the additional state funding must pass through districts for the sole purpose of raising each classroom teacher's pay by \$5,000 over their salary for the 2018-19 school year; and
- have an estimated cost of \$3.7 billion in the FY 20-21 budget.

The **House Public Education Committee** will meet on Tuesday, February 26, 2019 at 10:30 a.m. or upon adjournment in E2.036 of the capitol extension to take up:

**HB 76** by Dan Huberty (R-Katy) would require high school **student athletes** to receive a physical exam that includes an **electrocardiogram** before being allowed to participate in a sports activity.

**HB 92** by Eddie Rodriguez (D- Austin) would allow a **campus turnaround plan** to operate as a **community school** that provides strategies and programs to coordinate academic, social, and health services that reduce barriers to learning including:

- early childhood education;
- after-school and summer school academic and enrichment programs;
- college and career preparation;
- service learning opportunities including internships and community service programs;
- leadership and mentoring programs;
- activities to encourage community and parent engagement in students' education;
- health and social services for students and their families; and
- parenting classes.

It would prohibit the commissioner from ordering the closure of a campus without giving the campus the opportunity to operate as a community school.

**HB 129** by Diego Bernal (D-Sab Antonio) would require campuses in which 90 percent of the **students are educationally disadvantaged**, homeless, or in foster care to have at least one licensed counselor, audiologist, occupational therapist, physical therapist, physician, nurse, social worker or speech language pathologist assigned to the campus; and would provide state aid to assist the district in employing the required licensed professionals.

**HB 198** by Shawn Thierry (D-Houston) would add **mental health services** to the list of services that a school district provides through a cooperative health care program and school-based health centers.

**HB 199** by Diego Bernal (D-San Antonio) would expand the permissible uses of the **instructional materials and technology fund** to include the salary and other expenses of an employee who is directly involved in student learning or addressing the social and emotional health of students.

**HB 204** by Shawn Thierry (D-Houston) would **add mental health** and the relationship between physical and mental health in the **health curriculum** in public schools.

**HB 239** by Jessica Farrar (D-Houston) would authorize a social worker to provide **social work services** to students and families in a school district.

**HB 314** by Donna Howard (D-Austin) would allow **compensatory education allotment** funding to be used to provide **child-care services** or assistance with child-care expenses for **students at risk of dropping out** of school or pay the costs associated with services provided through a life skills program; and would require the Commissioner of Education to adopt rules including pregnancy as a reason a student withdraws from or otherwise no longer attends public school in the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS).

**HB 330** by Gary VanDeaver (R-New Boston) would exclude students who have suffered a condition, injury or illness that requires substantial medical care and leaves the student unable to attend school from the **dropout and completion rate calculations**.

**HB 391** by Cesar Blanco (D-El Paso) would require school districts to provide **instructional materials** to a student in printed book format if the student does not have reliable access to technology at the student's home. It would also require school districts to report to the Texas Education Agency the number of requests by parents to allow a student to take home instructional materials that were denied by the school district; and require TEA to aggregate that information annually to report to the legislature.

**HB 396** by Gary VanDeaver (R-New Boston) would prohibit money in the **instructional materials and technology fund** to be used to pay the expenses associated with intrastate freight and shipping; and would allow funding to be used to pay for inventory of software or systems for storing and accessing instructional materials.

**HB 397** by Gary VanDeaver (R-New Boston) would allow money in the **instructional materials and technology fund** to be used to for inventory of software or systems for storing and accessing instructional materials.

**HB 403** by Senfronia Thompson (D-Houston) would require **training** for school **superintendents and trustees** regarding **sexual abuse**, human trafficking, and other maltreatment of children.

**HB 422** by Alma Allen (D-Houston) would require school boards to annually certify to the Texas Education Agency that the board has established the required district- and campus-level **planning and decision-making committees**.

**HB 455** by Alma Allen (D-Houston) would require Texas Education Agency to develop **model policies on the recess period** during the school day that encourages constructive, age-appropriate outdoor playtime that maximizes the effectiveness of outdoor physical activity; and would require school districts to adopt a recess policy based on the model policies.

**HB 638** by Giovanni Capriglione (R-Keller) would establish procedures for a high school **diploma to be issued posthumously** to a student that dies while enrolled in the school district.

**HB 663** by Ken King (R-Canadian) would require the State Board of Education (SBOE) to **review and revise the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills** (TEKS) to narrow the number and scope of student expectations for each subject and grade level and require less time for a demonstration of mastery. The SBOE would be required to ensure that a revision of the TEKS does not result in a need for the adoption of new instructional materials.

**HB 674** by Jared Patterson (R-Frisco) would require school districts to report to the Commissioner of Education information on the district's **reliance on education service centers in complying with federal and state education laws** and rules and indicate the specific federal or state education laws or rules for which compliance is the most burdensome and expensive.

**HB 678** by Ryan Guillen (D-Rio Grande City) would add a course in **American Sign Language** completed at an elementary school to count for one credit toward an **elective course** for graduation.