

Weekly Report
March 12, 2021

SENATE: The Texas Senate was in session on Tuesday of this week and recessed to refer bills to committee later in the week.

Next Week: The Senate will reconvene on Tuesday, March 16, 2021 at 3:00 p.m.

HOUSE: The House was in session on Tuesday and Wednesday this week. On Wednesday, the House adopted its first Congratulatory and Memorial Resolutions Calendar.

Next Week: The House will reconvene on Monday, March 15, 2021 at 4:00 p.m. Speaker Dade Phelan announced that the House will be in Session Monday through Thursday of next week.

BUDGET:

Senate Finance Committee – On Monday, the Senate Finance Committee took up Article IX (General Provisions) of **SB 1**, the Senate version of the **appropriations bill**. At the conclusion of the meeting, Chair Jane Nelson appointed work groups. And, she told the committee that she would like for their work on SB 1 to be completed and the bill voted out before the Easter holiday weekend.

Senate Finance Committee Work Groups – On March 8th Senate Finance Committee Chair Jane Nelson (R-Flower Mound) announced the following Senate Budget Work Groups:

Work Group on Articles I, IV & V (General Government, Judiciary, and Public Safety & Criminal Justice):

Senator Joan Huffman (R-Houston), Chair
Senator Donna Campbell (R-New Braunfels)
Senator Charles Schwertner (R-Georgetown)
Senator John Whitmire (D-Houston)

Work Group on Article II (Health & Human Services)

Senator Lois Kolkhorst (R-Brenham), Chair
Senator Dawn Buckingham (R-Lakeway)
Senator Charles Schwertner (R-Georgetown)
Senator Eddie Lucio, Jr. (D-Brownsville)

Work Group on Article III (for Public Education)

Senator Larry Taylor (R-Friendswood), Chair
Senator Paul Bettencourt (R-Houston)
Senator Eddie Lucio, Jr. (D-Brownsville)
Senator Charles Perry (R-Lubbock)

Work Group on Article III (for Higher Education)

Senator Brandon Creighton (R-Conroe), Chair

Senator Paul Bettencourt (R-Houston)

Senator Dawn Buckingham (R-Lakeway)

Senator Royce West (D-Dallas)

Work Group on Articles Vi, VII & VIII (Natural Resources, Business & Economic Development, and Regulatory)

Senator Robert Nichols (R-Jacksonville), Chair

Senator Kelly Hancock (R-North Richland Hills)

Senator Charles Perry (R-Lubbock)

Senator John Whitmire (D-Houston)

House Appropriations Committee – The House Appropriations Committee and its subcommittees did not meet this week. Chair Greg Bonnen (R-Friendswood) announced to the House on Wednesday that budget riders must be submitted next week and must be filed through electronic submissions.

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Governor Greg Abbott has reappointed eight members to the Early Childhood Intervention Advisory Committee for terms ending February 1, 2027. The committee advises the Texas Health and Human Services Commission Division for Early Childhood Intervention Services on development and implementation of policies that constitute the statewide ECI system.

Sarah E. Abrahams of Austin is the Deputy Associate Commissioner for the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services. She received a Bachelor of Arts in English from Brandeis University and a Master of Public Affairs from The University of Texas in Austin.

Catherine K. Carlton of Arlington is Chief of Staff for My Health My Resources of Tarrant County. She received a Bachelor of Science in Journalism and a Master of Science in Journalism from Northwestern University.

Cynthia A. “Cal” Lopez of Austin is the McKinney-Vento State Coordinator for the Texas Education Agency. She received a Bachelor of Arts in Government from The University of Texas in Austin.

Patricia K. Reedy of Texarkana is the Regional Coordinator-Region 8 for the Partners Resource Network. She received an Associates of Science in Business and General Studies from Texarkana Community College.

Patricia “Pattie” Rosenlund of Mission is the Executive Director of Easter Seals Rio Grande Valley. She received a Bachelor of Science from The University of Florida and a Master of Science from The University of Texas Pan American.

Lizzeth Saldana of San Antonio is Project Scheduler for W.G. Yates Construction. She received a Bachelor of Science from The University of Texas San Antonio and a Master of Science from Colorado Technical University.

Jeremy Triplett of Austin is the Maternal and Child Health Section Director of the Department of State Health Services. He received a Bachelor of Arts from St. Mary’s University.

Ryan D. Van Ramshorst, M.D. of San Antonio is Chief Medical Director, Medicaid/CHIP Services for Texas Health and Human Services Commission. He received a Bachelor of Science in Biology and a Bachelor of Arts in Spanish from Chapman University, a Master of Public Health from The University of Texas Health Science Center Houston, and a Doctor of Medicine from Baylor College of Medicine.

PUBLIC EDUCATION:

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

HB 434 by Keith Bell (R-Forney) would allow a **career and technology credit** to be substituted for the fine arts credit in the curriculum requirements for the foundation high school program. In support were representatives of Del Valle ISD, Texas Association of Manufacturers, Agriculture Teachers Association of Texas, Texas Public Charter Schools Association, Texas association of Community Schools, Texas Association of Builders, Texas Farm Bureau, Independent Electrical Contractors of Texas, Dow, Inc., and Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce. In opposition were representatives of Texas Cultural Trust, Texas Art Education Association, Texas Arts Educators Campaign, Texas Educational Theatre Association, Texas Music Educators Association, Texans for the Arts, Texas Dance Educators Association, Parents for Arts Education, and Hearts Need Art. *It was left pending.*

HB 547 by James Frank (R-Wichita Falls) would allow **home-schooled students** to participate in activities sponsored by the University Interscholastic League (**UIL**). In support were Texas Home School Coalition, and Texas Catholic Conference of Bishops and five individuals. In opposition were Texans for Homeschool Freedom, Texas High School Coaches Association, Olton ISD, Texas Association of School Administrators, Texas Association of School Boards, Texas School Alliance, Association of Texas Professional Educators, Texas Association of Community Schools, Texas PTA, Coalition for Education Funding, and Texas Elementary Principals and Supervisors Association. *It was left pending.*

HB 690 by Will Metcalf (R-Conroe) would require the State Board of Education to require a **trustee** to complete **training on school safety** on curriculum and materials developed by the board. In support were Texas Association of School Boards and Texas Classroom Teachers Association. One individual registered opposition. *It was left pending.*

HB 691 by Will Metcalf (R-Conroe) would require the Texas School Safety Center to report to the Texas Education Agency (TEA) any school district that fails to require with **school safety and security audits, procedures and requirements**; and would allow TEA to impose an administrative penalty against the district in an amount up to the annual salary of the superintendent. *It was withdrawn at the request of the author.*

HB 699 by Jon Rosenthal (D-Houston) would require school districts to excuse a student from attending school for an **absence** resulting from a **serious or life-threatening illness** or treatment that makes the student's attendance infeasible.

In support were Texas State Teachers Association, Texas Public Charter Schools Association, Texas AFT, Texas PTA and Texas Elementary Principals and Supervisors Association. There was no opposition. *It was left pending.*

HB 759 by Sam Harless (R-Spring) would require Texas Education Agency to establish a **database of student threat assessments** in which there was a determination that a student poses a serious risk of violence to self or others; and allow access to the database to peace officers, school resource officers, principals and superintendents. *It was withdrawn at the request of the author.*

HB 773 by Gary VanDeaver (R-New Boston) would to add "students who successfully completed a program of study in **career and technical education**" as a student **success indicator**. In support were representatives of Del Valle ISD, Texas Association of Manufacturers, Texas Association of School Administrators, Texas Association of School Boards, Texas School Alliance, Texas Public Charter Schools Association, Association of Texas Professional Educators, Texas Association of Community Schools, Texas PTA, Texas Farm Bureau, Career and Technical Association of Texas, Project Lead the Way, Texas Nursery & Landscape Association, Raise Your Hand Texas, Texas Elementary Principals and Supervisors Association, and Texas Classroom Teachers Association. There was no opposition. *It was left pending.*

HB 1147 by Dan Huberty (R-Humble) would count enlistment in the Texas National Guard as **military readiness**. In support were Del Valle ISD, Texas Association of School Administrators, Texas Association of School Boards, Texas School Alliance, Texas Public Charter Schools Association, Association of Texas Professional Educators, Texas Association of Community Schools, Texas Elementary Principals and Supervisors Association, Texas Classroom Teachers Association, and Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce. There was no opposition. *It was left pending.*

Proposal on Pandemic Preparation for Schools - On March 6th, Senator Juan "Chuy" Hinojosa (D-McAllen) announced the filing **SB 1011** to ensure students, teachers, and schools are able to safely provide instruction for children during future pandemics. The bill includes some measures that were implemented on a temporary basis by the governor, Texas Education Agency, and congress aimed at ensuring the safety of teachers and students while also not penalizing schools for the disruption that occurred during the pandemic. SB 1011 would provide that a teacher or other district employee who tests positive for COVID-19, or a similar disease in the future, would be guaranteed 14 days of paid leave. It would guarantee that school staff are not penalized or otherwise motivated to stay at schools and expose students and other staff to the disease. It would also remove the high-stakes nature of tests like the STAAR test if school instruction was disrupted by a disaster like the pandemic or a hurricane. Senator Hinojosa said, "It is important to measure student progress, but not penalize a student or school when a disaster occurs. A school's number one priority is student achievement, and worrying about how its students are going to perform on the STAAR test should not be an added burden to schools dealing with a disaster like this pandemic." Additionally, SB 1011 would place in statute the recent "hold

harmless" decision announced by the governor, which preserves school funding for the 2020-21 school year. Lastly, the bill would create a truancy task force to study this important issue and make recommendations about how to better keep children in the classroom. Senator Hinojosa concluded, "These common-sense policies ensure schools are able to focus on educating students during disaster situations that are out of their control. It is paramount that schools are a safe place to learn, and that they have the tools and resources to adapt during these times like we are currently experiencing."

Next Week:

Tuesday, March 16, 2021

8:00 a.m. – House Public Education Committee will meet in E1.004 to take up: **HB 129** by Mary Gonzalez (D-El Paso) would require **digital citizenship** and media literacy education for K-12 students. It would add to the definition of "digital citizenship":

- cyberbullying prevention and response;
- digital ethics, etiquette, safety, and security, including the identification of hate speech, racism and discrimination; and
- media literacy including the ability to identify credible sources of information.

HB 159 by Mary Gonzalez (D-El Paso) would require the State Board of Educator Certification to specify what each **educator seeking certification** is expected to know and be able to do, particularly with regard to **students with disabilities**. It would also add a requirement for teacher certification for the person to demonstrate a basic knowledge of each disability category and competence in the use of proactive instructional techniques that provide appropriate accommodations and supports to students with disabilities and limited English proficiency.

HB 353 by Harold Dutton (D-Houston) would require the closing the gaps domain **indicators for effectiveness** in promoting student learning to include the use of disaggregated data to demonstrate the differentials among students from different racial and ethnic groups, including African American and Hispanic students considered as a whole and disaggregated by sex.

HB 445 by Steve Allison (R-San Antonio) would require the State Board of Education to include the importance of **diversity, equity and inclusion** in the curriculum related to positive character traits.

HB 725 by Jared Patterson (R-Frisco) would grant eligibility for free **pre-kindergarten** programs to children who have been in **foster care** in another state or territory if the child now resides in Texas.

HB 759 by Sam Harless (R-Spring) would require Texas Education Agency to establish a **database of student threat assessments** in which there was a determination that a student poses a serious risk of violence to self or others; and allow access to the database to peace officers, school resource officers, principals and superintendents.

HB 1080 by Jared Patterson (R-Frisco) would allow **students who receive outpatient mental health services** to participate in University Interscholastic League activities.

HB 1114 by Shawn Thierry (D-Houston) would allow school health care programs to provide **mental health services**.

HB 1603 by Dan Huberty (R-Humble) would remove the sunset date authorizing **individual graduation committees** to satisfy high school graduation requirements for charter schools.

STATEWIDE – COVID-19 RESPONSE:

DSHS Weekly Vaccine Distribution Update – On March 5th the Department of State Health Services issued its weekly update on Vaccine distribution in Texas for the week of March 8th. It said, “More than 1 million first doses of COVID-19 vaccine will be shipped to providers across Texas next week. The state is allocating 929,320 doses (*compared to 676,280 first doses last week*) to 1,651 providers (*compared to 522 providers last week*) in 234 counties (*compared to 199 counties last week*). More than 200,000 additional doses will be available to pharmacy locations and federally-qualified health centers directly from the federal government. The significant increase is largely due to a supply of 245,200 doses of the new Johnson & Johnson vaccine coming to the state. The single-dose vaccine was authorized last weekend by the FDA and began shipping this week with 24,000 doses delivered to providers participating in the federally-supported vaccination sites in Arlington, Dallas and Houston.” The following statistics were provided:

- Texas has now administered nearly 6.3 million doses.
- More than 4 million people have received at least one dose, and more than 2.2 million are fully vaccinated.
- Progress continues in vaccinating adults 65 years old and older with 48 percent having received at least one dose and more than 1 million seniors – more than one-quarter of the Texans in that age group – now fully vaccinated.

“In addition to the first doses mentioned above, the state is ordering 457,000 doses (*compared to 429,600 doses last week*) intended as the second dose for people first vaccinated a few weeks ago. DSHS automatically orders second doses to arrive at providers in the week they can be begin to be administered, so they will be available when needed. People should be able to return to the same provider to receive their second dose within six weeks of getting the first. Texas continues to vaccinate health care workers, residents of long-term care facilities, people 65 and older and those with medical conditions that put them at greater risk of hospitalization and death from COVID-19. This week, the state added school and child care workers to the list of people eligible to be vaccinated. According to a federal directive, the action means that ‘those who work in pre-primary, primary, and secondary schools...and those who work as or for licensed child care providers’ may now be vaccinated by any vaccine provider in Texas.”

COVID-19 Disaster Declaration Extended – On March 6th, Governor Greg Abbott renewed the COVID-19 Disaster Declaration for all counties and political subdivisions to receive resources necessary to cope with the disaster. The disaster proclamation has to be renewed every 30 days.

Vaccine Eligibility Expanded to People Age 50 – On March 10th, Texas Department of State Health Services announced that Texas will expand vaccination to people 50 to 64 years of age on March 15th. More than 93 percent of the Texas fatalities directly caused by the coronavirus have been in people 50 and older, with those ages 50 to 64 accounting for 20 percent of all fatalities. By including this next most vulnerable group, Texas will continue to reduce the number of people who are hospitalized and die from the disease across all races, ethnicities and occupations. Imelda Garcia, DSHS associate commissioner for laboratory and infectious disease services and chair of the Expert Vaccine Allocation Panel said, “We’ve seen a remarkable decrease in the number of hospitalizations and deaths since people 65 and older started becoming fully vaccinated in January. Expanding to ages 50 to 64 will continue the state’s priorities of protecting those at the greatest risk of severe outcomes and preserving the state’s health care system.” More than half of all Texas seniors have gotten at least one dose of vaccine, and 30 percent are now fully vaccinated. The number of COVID-19 positive patients in Texas hospitals has fallen by two-thirds from its peak in mid-January. There are about 5 million Texans between the ages of 50 and 64; more than 1 million of them are already vaccinated. The state’s COVID-19 vaccination program began with Phase 1A in December with health care workers and long-term care facility residents and staff. Later that month, Phase 1B began to vaccinate people 65 and older and others with medical conditions that put them at a greater hospitalization and death from COVID-19. Last week, Texas added school and child care workers to the eligible population. The Expert Vaccine Allocation Panel will continue to meet and make recommendations about the further allocation and distribution of COVID-19 vaccine. Overall, more than 7 million doses have been administered in Texas. About 4.7 million people have received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine, and 2.5 million are fully vaccinated.

[Here](#) is the DSHS advisory on this expansion of 1C eligibility. Further 1C announcements are expected in the future.