



House Public Education Committee meeting, January 30, 2019

The House Public Education Committee held its first meeting of the 86th Legislative session on Wednesday, January 30, 2019. The Committee heard invited testimony from the Commissioner and staff of the Texas Education Agency. Commissioner Mike Morath opened the hearing with an overview of the state of education in Texas. He reported that less than half of kindergarteners start school ready to learn and only 16% of graduating seniors meet college readiness as measured by SAT and ACT scores. The agency's Legislative Appropriations Request included requests for money for school safety initiatives, including increased mental health supports and the implementation of other best practices for school safety.

Morath also indicated that the agency is engaged in what is likely to be a five-year plan to overhaul the special education system in the state. This is response to an investigation that revealed that the agency had implemented a monitoring system that penalized school districts for special education participation rates in excess of 8.5% of their population. As a result, districts inappropriately denied services to eligible students, and the agency has been directed by the U.S. Department of Education to make significant changes to their administration of the state's special education program.

The committee also heard testimony from Leo Lopez, Chief School Finance Officer, on the financial impact of Hurricane Harvey, which he currently estimated to be between \$500 million and \$1 billion. Final costs will not be known until later in the current fiscal year.

Joe Siedlecki, Associate Commissioner for System Support and Innovation, reported that the implementation of Senate Bill 1882 has resulted in the formation of partnerships between school district with campuses that need improvement and other entities. Most of the initial partnerships have been with charter school operators. The partnership typically results in additional funds for the campuses involved because the campus is funded on the same basis as the charter school.

After a recess to the House Floor, the Committee reconvened to hear an overview of the charter school landscape from Heather Mauze, director of the Charter School Division. Leo Lopez provided testimony related to charter school funding.

Ryan Franklin, Associate Commissioner for Educator Leadership and Quality, briefly described educator preparation programs and certification. Committee members asked about alternative paths to certification and discussed their concerns about the tendency for the least experienced teachers to be assigned to campuses with students who are the most disadvantaged.

Lily Laux, Deputy Commissioner for School Programs, described the work that the agency has been doing to improve college and career readiness. The implementation of House Bill 22 has led to the identification of 221 certifications that are recognized and valued by industry.

Justin Porter, Director of Special Education, provided additional detail about the agency's response to the special education investigation and findings. He described a five-step plan that will involve more training, support, and community engagement than the previous approach that was solely focused on monitoring compliance. Committee member discussed concerns related to shortages of teachers who are qualified to teach students with disabilities given that the agency's efforts to better serve this student population is intended to result in identifying more students who are in need of special education services. Leo Lopez reported that the state anticipates a \$40 million shortfall in special

education funding. Chairman Huberty indicated a strong interest in passing a supplemental appropriation early in the session to address the shortfall.

The committee adjourned until next Tuesday, February 5, when staff from the Legislative Budget Board and TEA will provide a Finance 101 tutorial. The committee will receive an overview on the work of the Texas Public School Finance Commission the following day, Wednesday, February 6. On February 12 and 13, the committee will hear invited testimony in response to the Texas Public School Finance Commission final report and recommendations.