



TSTA Legislative Session Update, February 12, 2013

Senate Education Committee Hearing

Today, the Senate Education Committee met to discuss Senate Bill 3 by Sen. Patrick and Senate Bill 172 by Sen. Carona.

SB 172 would create an optional multidimensional assessment tool for use in diagnosing the reading development and comprehension of kindergarten students.

SB 3 would replace the minimum, recommended, and advanced high school diplomas with the foundation high school program diploma (FSHP). The FHSP diploma would require a student to accumulate the following credits: 4 in ELA; 3 in math; 2 in science; 3 in social studies; 1/2 in speech; 1 in FA or C&T; and 1 in PE. Students would be able to earn the following endorsements on their diplomas: Business & Industry; Academic Achievement in Arts & Humanities; STEM; and Distinguished Achievement.

Senator Van de Putte pointed out that the bill does nothing to address the 15 EOC exams currently mandated by STAAR. Sen. Patrick said he left that subject out of SB3 on purpose, and that he would address EOC requirements in another bill.

Senator Patrick offered two amendments to his bill. The first amendment deleted the cumulative score requirement from current law. The second amendment added a requirement that all students must take at least two years of a foreign language to receive a high school diploma. The second amendment would make every high school graduate eligible to attend a four-year university or college.

Senator Van de Putte offered an amendment, striking the requirement that EOC exams account for 15% of a student's final grade.

Both bills and all proposed amendments were left pending.

TSTA appeared and offered the following testimony on SB3:

Senate Bill 3 does not address the areas of accountability that need to be addressed immediately. Senate Bill 3 does nothing to address the onerous burden of 15 EOC exams – nearly four times the number of EOC exams of any other state in the union. The bill also does not address the fact that school districts will spend 34 days preparing for and conducting state required assessments – that accounts for 20% of the instructional days

in a school year. TSTA also believes that teacher evaluations should give constructive feedback, have multiple measures, and not be driven by standardized tests. We hope the Committee will work to address these more pressing matters as opposed to merely renaming the high school diploma.

House Public Education Committee Holds First Meeting

The House Public Education Committee met today with special invited testimony from the Governor's TEA Commissioner, Michael Williams, who mounted a strong defense of STAAR testing system. Williams said that in time, STAAR would work out if we simply taught the curriculum.

Williams testified that we need to maintain high expectations for our students. He also acknowledged teachers need professional development to bring students up to the increased rigor set by prior legislature, although TEA did not request the necessary resources to do this.

Finally, in light of all the outrage regarding our testing and accountability system, when asked if Texas are over testing our students, Williams responded with a resounding “no.”

Committee members even inquired as to whether the “culture at TEA” is conducive to addressing the problems in providing our student population with “the floor” (foundation) they need to succeed because they too busy addressing the “ceiling.” Committee members also noted that staffing and resources have diminished considerably but TEA responsibility of the agency has grown.

The committee also heard from TEA regarding ruling on school finance lawsuit and an update on student assessment and school accountability.

The committee will take up House bills next Tuesday.

Cargill Questioned by Senators regarding Appointment as SBOE Chair

The Governor's appointee as SBOE Chair, creationist Barbara Cargill, led to some tough questions and promises from Ms. Cargill, as reported by the Texas Freedom Network: <http://tfninsider.org/2013/02/12/hard-questions-some-promises-at-cargill-senate-hearing/>