

MCALLEN AFT NEWS

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NEW COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION

Gov. Rick Perry named Michael L. Williams of Arlington the Commissioner of Education, effective September 1, 2012. As the head of the Texas Education Agency (TEA), he oversees the state's 1,200 school districts and charter schools. Williams, the child of two educators, is the first African-American commissioner of education in the state's history.

Williams is the former chairman of the Railroad Commission of Texas, the state's oldest regulatory agency. He was first appointed a Railroad Commissioner by then Gov. George W. Bush in 1998 and later the people of Texas re-elected him to this post, which regulates the oil and gas industry, in 2002 and 2008. Williams served on this three-member Commission until April 2011.

Prior to his service on the Railroad Commission, Williams was the Assistant Secretary of Education for Civil Rights at the U.S. Department of Education and Deputy Assistant Secretary for Law Enforcement at the U.S. Department of Treasury under President George H.W. Bush. Williams is a former adjunct professor at the Texas Southern University School of Public

Affairs and Texas Wesleyan University School of Law. Williams is a past chairman of the Governor's Competitiveness Council and Governor's Clean Coal Technology Council, and past member of the Southern State Energy Board, National Coal Council and Interstate Mining Compact Commission.

He is also past chairman of the Texas Juvenile Probation Commission, former honorary chairman of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Texas, and a past board member of the Arlington Chamber of Commerce, Texas Public Policy Foundation and Our Mother of Mercy Catholic School.

Williams received a bachelor's degree, a master's degree in Public Administration, and a law degree from the University of Southern California.

Williams has a history of support for private-school vouchers. Williams is on the rebound from a failed U.S. congressional candidacy in the May 29 Republican primary. Gov. Perry now has put him in charge of an education agency damaged by severe budget cuts last session. The Williams-led Texas Education Agency will have

In this issue:

**Williams, new
Commissioner** 1

**Williams, an
Attorney** 1

**Williams
Background** 2

**Williams
Friend to
Charter
Schools** 2



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COMMISSIONER (continued)

its hands full dealing with the much broader damage done to public education by the budget cuts pushed through the legislature by Gov. Perry and his allies last year. (Williams' appointment is subject to confirmation by the Texas Senate when it reconvenes in 2013.)

One of the basic duties that TEA has lacked the capacity to carry out, even before the latest budget cuts, is proper oversight of charter schools—particularly the kind of charter schools created by the State Board of Education. The state senator in charge of running the August 24

hearing, Republican Dan Patrick of Houston, has tried and failed repeatedly to lift the state cap that limits the number of these privately operated, publicly funded, and largely deregulated schools.

The charter portion of the August 24 hearing featured a raft of witnesses primed to promote the charter option. But the evidence of problems with charter schools is so strong that even the pro-charter forces acknowledged a large number of Texas charter schools are of low quality and ought to be closed.

Texas AFT legislative counsel Patty Quinzi also cited evidence from a recent study that showed some of the highest-rated charter schools in Texas can trace their success to advantages not enjoyed by the take-all-comers neighborhood public schools. [New research by education researcher Ed Fuller](#), commissioned by the Texas Business and Education Coalition, reveals that these top-rated charters tend to draw already higher-achieving students from nearby neighborhood schools. Dr. Fuller's report concludes: "Contrary to the profile often portrayed in the media, by some policymakers, and by some charter school proponents... rather than serving more disadvantaged students, the findings of this study suggest that the high-

profile/high-enrollment CMOs [charter management organizations] actually served a more advantaged clientele relative to comparison schools...."

Quinzi's testimony also noted that a supposed funding disadvantage claimed by charter proponents is nonexistent for some of the most highly regarded, high-profile charter schools. On the contrary, according to a recent study published by the National Education Policy Center, "schools operated by major charter management organizations generally spend more than surrounding public schools."

The study looked closely at the Texas operations of KIPP, one of the most well-regarded charter chains. It found "some charter chains such as KIPP spend substantially more per pupil than district schools in the same city and serving similar populations, around 30 to 50 percent more in some cities (and at the middle school level) based on state-reported current expenditures, and 50 to 100 percent more based on IRS filings."



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