

MCALLEN AFT NEWS

1500 Dove, McAllen, TX 78504

August 2014

Volume 22 Issue 1

OUR JOBS AT RISK

As members of McAllen AFT, it is your local's (Local 6329) job to keep you informed regarding the upcoming legislative session in January, 2015. **The information below can affect your job.**

TAX CREDIT VOUCHERS AND MORE

Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst issued new Interim charges for the Senate Committee on Education last week signaling that tax credit vouchers and other school choice issues will top the Senate agenda in the 2015 legislative session. These charges will be the topic of hearings and study assignments in the coming months. Three school choice issues that failed in the last legislative session are included in the new interim charges, as follows:

Review of school choice programs in other states. This charge will likely include a review of recovery school districts modeled on legislation in Louisiana and Tennessee. In these districts, the state takes control of low-performing public schools away from local districts and may contract with charter organizations to operate the schools. A bill filed in the last session called these districts "achievement districts."

Examine the impact of tax credits and taxpayer savings grants on the state budget. Tax credits and taxpayer savings grants are both voucher programs that divert public funds to

to private and religious schools. They reduce the state funds available to support public schools and make state dollars less accountable to the public. Tax credits allow corporations to pay a percentage of their state tax payments to third-party, nonprofit organizations, created for just this purpose. These organizations funnel funds to private and religious schools and take a designated percent off the top to pay for operations and in some states, for lobbying expenses as well. The Taxpayer Savings Grant Program allows parents of school-age children to apply for a voucher equal to tuition at a private school or a designated percent of the state average per-pupil spending. These voucher proposals may be presented with titles intended to disguise their true intent, such as Sen. Dan Patrick's bill for tax credits in the last legislative sessions called "Equal Opportunity 2 Scholarships", but they are still vouchers that subsidize private education at public expense. For more information, see the full report on tax credit "neo-vouchers" in the EdAlert archives: *Tax Credits - A New Voucher Program Proposed in Texas: Shifting Public Dollars to Private Schools* and highlights from the report in EdAlert Volume 16 (4.1.13). Link: <http://tinyurl.com/burnam-edalerts>

Review the state's parent trigger and Public Education Grant statutes and identify any potential improvements. Parent trigger laws have passed in seven states, allowing a majority of



McAllen AFT
1500 Dove
McAllen, TX 78504
956-682-1143

mcallenaft2@yahoo.com
<http://tx.aft.org/mcallen>

of parents at a low performing school to oust the principal and teachers and convert the school to a charter school, close it, or replace the administration. Many education advocates see parent trigger laws as a corporate takeover of public schools hiding behind “parent rights”. Financial support for parent trigger laws in other states has come from foundations such as the Walton Family Foundation that funds many school choice programs. Texas has had a parent trigger law in place since 2011, but a bill to make it easier to implement failed in the last legislative session. The Public Education Grants (PEG) program was created by the Texas Legislature in 1995 and allows students at designated low performing schools to transfer to schools outside their school district. or more information on PEG, please see:

http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/peg_faq.html

AFT) testified that the accountability provisions included in SB 2 should not be weakened. Texas AFT provided the following report on its concerns about testimony from charter schools at the hearing:

By and large the charter operators seemed to be saying that their entitlement to taxpayer funds should not depend on strict compliance with state rules governing their academic and financial performance and practices.

Mere “administrative error” should not be the basis for adverse state regulatory action, several said. Texas AFT’s Quinzi pointed out that in several respects the proposed rules already appear to make it easier for charter operators to comply with state standards, not harder.

For instance, Quinzi called for tightening the rules to ensure that only truly high-performing charters receive approval based on a stated commitment to locate and serve students in high-need areas. The proposed rules for SB2 are available in the Texas Register at the following link:

<http://www.sos.state.tx.us/texreg/archive/July182014/Proposed%20Rules/19.EDUCATION.html#14>

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION HEARING ON INTERIM CHARGES

Date: Tuesday, August 26, 2014 Time: 10:00 AM Place: E1.028 (Hearing Room – Texas Capitol in Austin)
Chair: Sen. Dan Patrick

The Senate Committee on Education will take testimony on the original interim charges that were issued earlier in the year related to HB 5 and other new legislation, including virtual schools.

AGENDA *The Committee will hear invited testimony followed by public testimony on the interim charges below*

Senate Interim Charge #1 (portion) Examine STAAR writing scores for elementary, middle and high school students. For grade levels tested in writing, review the types of writing required. Explore the need for targeted professional development in writing.

Senate Interim Charge #2 Monitor the implementation of legislation addressed by the Senate Committee on Education, 83rd Legislature, Regular and Called Sessions, and make recommendations for any legislation needed to improve, enhance and/or complete implementation. Specifically, monitor the following:

- HB 5, relating to public school accountability, including assessment, and curriculum requirements; providing a criminal penalty;
 - HB 1926, relating to the operation of the state virtual school network and courses provided through other distance learning arrangements;
 - SB 376, relating to breakfast for certain public school students;
- and
- HB 617, relating to transition and employment services for public school students enrolled in special education programs.

Public testimony will be limited to two (2) minutes per person.

FOR MORE INFORMATION EdAlert Archives
Virtual Schools: Related to Interim Charge 2 on implementation of HB 1926 EdAlert Vol 3 (10.22.12)
Senate Committee on Education Considers Virtual Schools: But Do Virtual Schools Show Results for Students?

<http://tinyurl.com/burnam-edalerts>

Texas AFT Legislative Hotline <http://texasaftblog.com/hotline/?p=3899>