

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE!

Governor Perry, vetoed Major School Bills

HB217, banning the sale of beverages of limited nutritional value in elementary and middle schools during instructional periods and other specified times.

HB2824, providing more flexibility for the 23 ISD's selected to be "Texas High Performance Schools Consortium" districts.

HB2836, containing numerous testing and curriculum TEKS mandates, with an eye toward responding to criticisms that the TEKS for the various subjects contain too many elements for which students are tested. Perry's veto message said the process under **HB2836** to review and streamline the scope of the curriculum standards should remain the State of Board of Education's (SBOE) sole responsibility—and he noted the board has already started the process to address concerns about the number of curriculum standards taught and assessed.

SB17, a guns-in-school bill that would have required the Department of Public Safety to create a training program that would be offered free to up to two school employees (who hold concealed weapons licenses) per campus that lack security personnel and have permission from their school boards to take the training. Employees who completed the training could carry weapons at school and at school events.

SB504, a bill that would have changed

a requirement for mandatory screening of grades 6 and 9 students for abnormal spinal curvature by allowing public schools to choose whether to: 1) screen grades 6 and 9 students for the condition or 2) provide parents of students in the affected grades with state-approved information about abnormal spinal curvature. Perry said in his veto proclamation that the mandatory screening is needed to ensure children receive the attention and treatment they need.

SB 1234, a major school truancy bill that would, among other things, require districts to take several progressive steps to address a student's chronic unexcused absenteeism from school, starting with a warning letter, on the student's third unexcused absence, before a truancy complaint could be forwarded to a count.

TRS Board Meeting Highlights

A portion of the June 13-14 TRS Board meeting included a review by TRS Executive Director, Brian Guthrie, of TRS-related bills that passed (all of which were signed by the governor)—most notably SB 1458. That's the bill that was crafted, among other things, to ensure that the TRS fund becomes actuarially sound.

Guthrie told the board that retirees eligible for a 3% cost-of-living adjustment (capped at \$100 monthly increase, and payable only to TRS members who retired on or before August 31, 2004), under SB1458, could see

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the increases reflected in their pension payments as early as October 1, 2013.

UIL Approves Rule Changes

The UIL Legislative Council on June 11 approved three rule changes that had been recommended in April by the league's Medical Advisory Committee. These rule revisions will be effective August 1, 2013, if approved by the education commissioner:

1. Limiting full-contact football practice to 90 minutes per athlete per week during the regular and post season.
2. Requiring cheerleading participants to comply with state law, enacted in 2011, pertaining to the prevention, treatment and oversight of concussions.
3. Requiring parents/guardians of each student athlete to sign a new **UIL** acknowledgement form that contains information and resources related to sudden cardiac arrest. Among other things, the form will contain information about organizations that perform ECG's of students—such as the Cypress ECG project, among others, that partner with Texas ISD's to provide cardiac screenings of students.

NEWS BRIEFS

CSCOPE—The battle over the controversial

CSCOPE curriculum management system is continuing, even after the education service center-connected nonprofit responsible for **CSCOPE** is preparing to withdraw **CSCOPE** lesson plans as of August 31, 2013.

West—State officials are expected to appeal a **FEMA** decision denying aid to West ISD and the city of West in the wake of the fertilizer plant explosion. WISD asked **FEMA** to pick up the tab for the \$40 million portion not covered by insurance to repair and replace schools.

Troubled ISD—A state district judge in Austin, on June 14, dismissed a suit filed by **North Forest ISD** to keep education commissioner, Michael Williams from enforcing his order to close the 6,700-student district and transfer the ISD's territory into neighboring **Houston ISD**.

El Paso ISD federal audit—A final audit report by the U.S. Department of Education's inspector general's office concludes that efforts to manipulate the accountability system occurred not only in **EPISD**'s Bowie High School, but another **EPISD** high school (Coronado High School) as well. The scheme, which sent a former **EPISD** superintendent to federal prison, included ensuring that recent immigrant students, among others, were kept out of the 10th grade—either by holding them from ninth grade to 11th grade—to keep them from taking the high-school, accountability related student assessments at 10 grade.

OTHER LEGISLATIVE NEWS

No signature—The governor let 14 bills become law without his signature—including the virtual schools bill (**HB1926**). In a short statement, Perry said that while he has concerns that **HB1926** might impact full-time online learning, the bill broadens opportunities for students to engage in technology-based learning.

Without saying why, Perry also let become law, without his signature: (1) **HB1348**, relating to the property taxation of manufactured aircraft temporarily located inside a “defense base development authority,” (2) **SB329** increasing, from 16.5 to 18, the minimum age a person can use a commercial tanning facility.

Special ceremony—Amid a great deal of fanfare, Perry on June 13 signed the winter-celebrations related “Merry Christmas” bill (**HB308**) allowing (among other things) students and staff to use traditional holiday greetings and display religious scenes and symbols on school property.