



TOPICS FOR TEXAS HOUSE COMMITTEES

Texas House Speaker Joe Straus last week published a long list of topics for House committees to study and make recommendations on during the interim leading up to the 2017 regular session of the state legislature. We will report on all of the so-called “interim charges” affecting public education, starting today with Straus’s list of assignments for the House Public Education Committee:

1. Examine the effectiveness and efficiency of the Cost of Education Index (CEI). Determine if other mechanisms or methodologies could better achieve the intended purpose of this public school finance driver. Make recommendations for improvements or elimination of the CEI.
2. Evaluate the current state of school district facility needs and debt. Determine what constraints or limitations exist across the state, particularly in communities experiencing rapid growth, to fund facilities at the local level. Examine state laws, rules and best practice models for facility efficiency and long term taxpayer savings. Review the current facility funding programs, the Instructional Facilities Allotment (IFA) and the Existing Debt Allotment (EDA), to address school districts’ facility needs and provide property tax relief.
3. Examine the accessibility to broadband services for schools, libraries, and institutions of higher education. Study the feasibility and affordability of providing scalable broadband to schools and other public institutions. Research federal and state funding opportunities to support increased access to broadband. Review innovative efforts by school districts to integrate technology in the classroom. Explore ways to enhance high-tech digital learning opportunities in the classroom to improve student achievement and fulfill future workforce demands.
4. Review current policies and rules to protect students from inappropriate teacher-student relationships. Examine efforts by the Texas Education Agency, school districts, law enforcement and the courts to investigate and prosecute educators for criminal conduct. Recommend needed improvements to promote student safety, including examining current criminal penalties, superintendent reporting requirements, teacher certification sanctions and the documentation provided in school district separation agreements. Review school employee training and educational efforts to promote student safety.
5. Examine partnerships between higher education institutions, public school districts, and workforce that promote postsecondary readiness. Provide coordination recommendations to ensure vocational, career, and technical education programs are more accessible. Determine the most effective ways to invest in these partnerships and programs to direct at-risk students to stable career paths. Examine current rules and laws limiting employers from providing meaningful internships, apprenticeships, and other opportunities. Consider new methods to finance



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workforce training programs and associated assets in high schools and postsecondary schools, including ways to reduce or eliminate these costs and options to incentivize businesses to invest in training equipment for schools. (Joint charge with the House Committee on Economic & Small Business Development)

6. Review the state's current education policies and initiatives regarding middle grades. Make recommendations to ensure a comprehensive, research-based state strategy for preparing students at the middle grades for high school retention, success, and postsecondary readiness. This review should include an examination of school-based strategies and best practices that encourage at-risk youth to finish school.

7. Review current public education programs that address the needs of high performing students. Identify the adequacy of these programs statewide in meeting the needs of this specific student group and explore additional means to promote high quality programs designed to meet the educational needs of these students. Study ways to increase the recognition of the performance of higher performing students on test-based and non-test based measures. Examine whether the current and proposed state accountability systems adequately promote districts' addressing the needs of students across the performance spectrum, including those students significantly outperforming their peers. Recommend whether the academic performance of high achieving students should be specifically addressed as a separate indicator in the accountability system.

8. Study ways to increase parental choice in education, and review the successes and failures of school choice programs in other states. Examine the benefits and costs of implementing such a program in Texas. Recommend whether an expansion of school choice in Texas is needed, and suggest ways to ensure that any school receiving public support is held accountable for its academic and financial performance.

9. Conduct legislative oversight and monitoring of the agencies and programs under the committee's jurisdiction and the implementing of relevant legislation passed by the 84th Legislature, specifically including HB 4, HB 743, HB 2205, and SB 149. In conducting this oversight, the committee should:

- a. consider any reforms to state agencies to make them more responsive to Texas taxpayers and citizens;
- b. identify issues regarding the agency or its governance that may be appropriate to investigate, improve, remedy, or eliminate;
- c. determine whether an agency is operating in a transparent and efficient manner; and
- d. identify opportunities to streamline programs and services while maintaining the mission of the agency and its programs.



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