

TASA Summary of House Interim Charges Related to Public Education 84th Legislative Session – November 2015

House Public Education Committee

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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 workforce training programs and associated assets in high schools and postsecondary schools, including ways to reduce 50 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)

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

House Agriculture & Livestock Committee

- Evaluate policy challenges to the state's agriculture and livestock industry, including long-term impacts of price declines in oil and natural gas; the

availability of natural resources, including water, necessary to operate the industries; and the mitigation of and preparation for potential future hazards to the industries caused by natural disaster, drought, or disease.

- Study the appraisal of agricultural land for taxation and related issues, including the change-of-use "rollback" provision. Examine the impact of the current appraisal system of agricultural land for taxation on rural economic development.

House Appropriations Committee

- Evaluate potential fiscal policy challenges or economic disruptions in the 2016-17 biennium, including the long-term impact of price declines in oil and natural gas on the Texas economy and any fiscal implications for the state budget. Examine options to mitigate the risk of unexpected downturns in state revenue. Examine further progress made during the 84th legislative session to reduce reliance on general revenue dedicated accounts for budget certification. Recommend new or alternative methods to further reduce reliance on dedicated accounts for budget certification purposes and maximize usage of dedicated funds for their intended purposes. Examine other accounts and funding streams utilized by state agencies and institutions of higher education for opportunities to further increase budget transparency.
- Examine Texas constitutional spending limits compared to limits utilized in other states, evaluate their effectiveness in maintaining fiscal discipline, and recommend potential modifications, if needed.
- Monitor the implementation of HB 9 (84R) and study updated projections towards actuarial soundness of the Employees Retirement System. Examine issues and costs associated with granting cost of living adjustments or “13th Checks” to retired state employees and teachers.
- Monitor the implementation of HB 2 (84R) as it pertains to the short-term funding provided to TRS-Care. Evaluate additional methods to address the health care needs of retired teachers in light of the current health insurance market, including the feasibility and costs associated with retired teachers not eligible for Medicare remaining on a school district’s health care plan until Medicare eligible.
- Conduct a review of current public education programs administered by the Texas Education Agency that are funded outside of the Foundation School Program. Make recommendations to increase, decrease, or eliminate programs based on measurable performance and effectiveness.
- Study the various methods of funding the state's transportation network including recent legislative enactments such as Proposition 1 (83(3)) and Proposition 7 (84R). Review the current budget structure for the Texas Department of Transportation as it relates to transportation funding categories and make

recommendations for future allocations to accurately address the transportation needs in the state.

House Elections Committee

- Evaluate options to improve the transparency of local bond elections, including but not limited to: current processes used to educate voters about how tax dollars will be spent, the time of year bond elections are held, and the description of bond proposals on the ballot. Make appropriate legislative recommendations.

House General Investigating & Ethics Committee

- Examine the ethics laws governing public officers and employees in this state and identify areas in which the laws are inadequate to maintain the public's trust and confidence in government. Assess whether required financial disclosures by those making governmental decisions adequately inform the public of potential conflicts of interest.

House Government Transparency & Operation Committee

- Study issues related to access to public information held outside of the custody or control of the governmental body by current or former officers or employees. Assess whether the Public Information Act's procedures for response to repetitious or redundant public information requests adequately protect small governmental bodies from the financial burdens imposed by such requests.

House Higher Education Committee

- Review the state's community college system, including a discussion of taxing districts, service areas and any barriers to access. Examine the governance structure to ensure that campuses in multi campus districts that are outside of a college taxing district receive fair and equitable treatment. Review the accounting and reporting requirements of community college districts to ensure open government and transparency. Study ways community colleges could offer accessible and affordable baccalaureate degree programs in areas where the state has a significant workforce shortage without compromising quality of education and training. Make recommendations to maximize efficient student pathways and to offer more affordable educational opportunities such as through dual credit and early college start programs.
- Study the affordability and accessibility of undergraduate college education in Texas, including a focus on middle-class students. Analyze the cost of attendance and tuition rates, comparing Texas institutions to their national peers. Review the availability and effectiveness of financial aid programs, and analyze student debt and default rates. Study and recommend ways to promote timely and cost efficient graduation.

- Review educational opportunities for non-traditional students, including adult learners who did not complete a secondary education credential. Recommend possible funding options to promote degree, credential, and/or certification completion. Develop recommendations to promote programs that simultaneously allow adult learners to complete degrees, credentials, and/or certifications for the purpose of promoting and increasing workforce ready graduates.

House Insurance Committee

- Examine available data on the cost of weather-related property insurance claims and the incidence of litigation of these claims. Study whether these data reveal trends or patterns over time and what the drivers of these trends might be. Identify impacts on the property insurance market and on consumers from claims litigation.
- Monitor the implementation of SB 900 (84R), including the rulemaking process by the Texas Department of Insurance and the adoption of an updated plan of operation by the Texas Windstorm Insurance Association.
- Review the implementation of HB 2929 (83R). Examine the bill's impact and compliance among affected health plans. Examine the costs incurred by the Employees Retirement System, Teacher Retirement System, and any other affected state health plans as a result of the legislation.

House Juvenile Justice & Family Issues Committee

- Study and evaluate the practice of youth being recruited into human trafficking. Specifically, evaluate the scope of the pipeline of potential victims from foster care, including methods and means used to lure youth into trafficking. Evaluate the types of services that are available to support children and youth in the conservatorship of the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) who are victims of human trafficking. Make necessary recommendations to assist DFPS in identifying, recovering, serving, or caring for children and youth who are victims of human trafficking prior to placement in foster care. (Joint charge with the House Committee on Human Services)

House Pensions Committee

- Study the impact that fluctuations in global financial markets have had on public pension funds. Analyze assumed rates of return on investments, structures among asset classes, long-term and shorter-term investment goals, and make appropriate recommendations to ensure the investment structure of public pension funds are meeting fiduciary responsibilities.

- Examine Texas pension funds' compliance with Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB) Financial Reporting Statements 67 and 68, and identify the effect the reporting requirements are having on the state's pension systems.
- Examine the fiscal and policy impacts of structural reforms that would increase state public pension plans' ability to achieve and maintain actuarial soundness. Evaluate the feasibility, costs, and benefits of utilizing one-time funding increases to reduce or eliminate unfunded liabilities.
- Evaluate the investment performance benchmarks utilized by the state's pension funds and the impact portfolio diversification and short- and long-term market assumptions have had on achieving expected investment returns. Analyze the fee structure and investment strategy for various investment classes to ensure the costs are reasonable and competitive versus other large public and private pension trust funds.

House Public Health Committee

- Study and assess the state's preparedness for public health threats and emergencies including responding to natural disasters and highly infectious diseases. Review current protocols and examine public health resources to determine if they are sufficient. Identify weaknesses within the public health response framework and make recommendations for improvements.
- Study the impact of chronic disease in Texas and identify the major regional chronic health challenges. Review the types of health data collected by the state related to chronic disease and how the data is utilized to improve health care. Study state programs targeting chronic disease, including the Texas Health Improvement Network, and identify the direct and indirect costs associated with obesity, tobacco, and other related chronic health conditions including impacts to Medicaid, Employees Retirement System, Teacher Retirement System, University of Texas System, and Texas A&M University System. Identify public health interventions for chronic disease and preventative healthcare services that improve health outcomes and reduce cost.

House State Affairs Committee

- Examine payroll deductions from state or political subdivision employees for the purpose of labor organization membership dues or fees as well as charitable organization and nonprofit contributions. Determine if this process is an appropriate use of public funds.

House Ways & Means Committee

- Review aspects of the property tax system that contribute to rising property tax levies and taxpayer dissatisfaction. Examine whether the current system allows

taxpayers meaningful participation in determining local property tax rates. Explore changes to the appraisal process that could improve the accuracy of appraisals.

- Assess the impact of a repeal of the franchise tax on the state's economy and on revenue stability for state government. The assessment should include a dynamic analysis of the economic impact.
- Examine whether issues raised in the State Auditor's review of Chapter 313 agreements warrant action by the Legislature to improve accountability, transparency, and compliance. Examine special issues raised by Chapter 313 projects covering more than one school district.
- Monitor implementation of the increased residence homestead exemption as approved by the voters in Proposition 1 (SJR 1 (84R)). Determine the amount of property tax relief for homeowners, taking into account increases in appraisals and local property tax rates. Additionally, determine the cost to the state to make up the revenue loss for school districts.