

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

## **Senate Education Committee**

- **School Choice:** Study school choice programs enacted in states across the nation, examining education savings account and tax credit scholarship programs in particular. Examine the implementation process used in other states and what impact these programs have had on student academics and state and local district budgets. Make recommendations on which choice plan could best serve Texas students.
- **Charter School Approval, Expansion, Revocation:** Study the approval, expansion, and revocation of public charter schools in Texas, including the implementation of SB 2 (83R) and other legislation. In particular, examine the issues surrounding the disposition of state property when charters are revoked, non-renewed, or cease to operate. Make recommendations regarding policies to ensure an efficient and effective transfer and disposal of state property that preserves state interest while ensuring that certain investment capital and the bond market supporting charter construction remains robust. In addition, make recommendations if needed to clarify policies regarding expansion of existing high-quality charter schools in Texas. Additionally, examine facility funding for charter schools in other states and make recommendations on facility funding assistance for charter schools in Texas.
- **Teacher Preparation, Retention, Shortages:** Study teacher shortage and retention issues in Texas and evaluate educator preparation programs to determine if these programs are preparing educators for the rigors of the 21st century classroom. In particular, examine the shortages of ELL, special education, and STEM educators across the state and identify the issues creating a shortage. Make recommendations to improve educator preparation throughout the state and increase certification rates. (Joint Charge with Senate Higher Education)
- **Efficiency/Productivity Review:** Conduct a comprehensive performance review of all public schools in Texas, examining ways to improve efficiency, productivity, and student academic outcomes. Study performance-based funding mechanisms that allocate dollars based upon achievement versus attendance. Identify any state mandates which hinder student performance, district and campus innovation, and efficiency and productivity overall.
- **Broadband Access:** Evaluate digital learning opportunities in classrooms and examine existing barriers to schools' ability to provide a digital learning environment. In particular, study the availability of affordable broadband access to school districts across Texas. Examine different options for improving access to broadband service in all areas of the state, for districts and student homes.

Make recommendations on a statewide plan for building the necessary infrastructure to provide a competitive, free-market environment in broadband service.

- **Teacher-Student Relationships/Student Safety:** Study the recent rise of inappropriate teacher-student relationships, the impact of social media interaction between teachers and students, and examine the current efforts by the Texas Education Agency, schools, law enforcement, and the courts to investigate and prosecute any educator engaged in inappropriate relationships. Determine what recommendations, if any, are needed to improve student safety, including increasing agency staff, adjusting penalties, and strengthening efforts to sanction educators' certificates for misconduct. Study and address the issue of prevention through training and education of school employees.
- **County School Systems:** Examine the structure and performance of the two remaining county-based school systems, Harris County Department of Education and Dallas County Schools. In particular, study the efficiency of these entities and determine whether those services are duplicative with education service centers or could be absorbed by education service centers.
- **School Board Governance, Low-Performing Schools:** Examine current school board governance policies and practices and make recommendations that could improve the focus, attitudes, and outcomes of Texas school boards, districts, and students. Study existing board training requirements for public schools and make suggestions to educate school board trustees of policies that could achieve better student outcomes, particularly within the framework set for low-performing schools in House Bill 1842 (HB1842)(84R).
- **Monitoring Charge:** Monitor the implementation of legislation addressed by the Senate Committee on Education and make recommendations for any legislation needed to improve, enhance, and/or complete implementation. Specifically, monitor the following: 1) Legislation establishing state intervention procedures for public schools with academically unsuccessful ratings of at least two consecutive school years; and providing school districts the ability to be designated as a district of innovation; 2) Initiatives to build a high-quality pre-kindergarten grant program; 3) Legislation to raise standards of teacher preparation programs and establish a more consistent, high-quality accountability system; 4) Program to require the placement and use of video cameras in self-contained classrooms or other settings providing special education services to students; 5) Legislation to address training support for counselors, and advising courses for middle school students; and 6) Legislation to establish criteria for alternative measures of assessments to meet high school graduation requirements.

### **Senate Higher Education Committee**

- **HB 5 Implementation, 60x30TX/Higher Education Alignment:** Monitor the ongoing implementation of HB 5 (83R), and examine current projections for preparation of Texas high school students for postsecondary education and workforce training. Examine best practices and recommend strategies to align the implementation with the 60x30TX higher education plan, including, but not limited to, dual credit, credit transferability, and fields of study. (Joint Charge with Senate Education)
- **Tuition Deregulation and Student Debt:** Examine and make recommendations regarding tuition and student debt at public institutions of higher education in Texas. Specifically, study how Texas compares to peer states, variance between institutions, how accountability measures can be used to impact tuition, and increases in tuition since 2003.
- **Tuition/Fee Waivers, Tuition Set-Asides, Financial Aid:** Conduct a review of all tuition and fee waivers and exemptions, as well as tuition set-asides currently in law, and examine how students who do not receive the benefits of either bear these resulting costs. Study how other states treat similar populations, whether federal benefits are available, and make recommendations to ensure the efficacy of waivers and exemptions, and tuition set-asides. Examine current financial aid programs, studying their efficacy, and make recommendations on how to provide programs to meet the needs of all students in light of the recent repeal of the state's Top 10% Scholarship program and B-On-Time program.
- **Teacher Preparation, Retention, Shortages:** Study teacher shortage and retention issues in Texas and evaluate educator preparation programs to determine if these programs are preparing educators for the rigors of the 21st century classroom. In particular, examine the shortages of ELL, special education, and STEM educators across the state and identify the issues creating a shortage. Make recommendations to improve educator preparation throughout the state and increase certification rates. (Joint Charge with Senate Education)

### **Senate Inter-Governmental Relations Committee**

- **Debt Transparency in the Voting Booth:** Examine ways to improve government accountability in elections regarding the issuance of public debt. Include a review of the information that is currently provided to individuals in the voting booth and provide statutory recommendations, if necessary, to improve transparency.

### **Senate Agricultural, Water and Rural Affairs Committee**

- **Surface Water/Groundwater:** Study and make recommendations regarding the ownership, production, and transfer of surface water and groundwater in the state of Texas.

### **Senate Business and Commerce Committee**

- Hail Storm: Monitor the number of lawsuits related to property claims filed as a result of multiple hail storms and weather related events across Texas. Examine negative consumer trends that may result in market disruption such as higher premiums and deductibles, less coverage, non-renewals, and inability to secure coverage due to insurance carrier withdrawal from the state and make recommendations on legislative action needed.
- Property Tax Liens: Examine and make recommendations for necessary changes regarding the collection process of delinquent ad valorem property taxes, including an inquiry into the role that tax lien transfers play in forestalling foreclosure.

### **Senate Criminal Justice Committee**

- Monitoring Charge: Monitor the implementation of legislation addressed by the Senate Committee on Criminal Justice and make recommendations for any legislation needed to improve, enhance, and/or complete implementation. Specifically, monitor the following: 1) Decriminalization of school truancy and the response of school districts to take steps to address truancy before referring students to court

### **Senate Finance Committee**

- Property Tax Process: Study the property tax process, including the appraisal system, and recommend ways to promote transparency, simplicity, and accountability by all taxing entities. (Charge to a select subcommittee on Property Tax Reform and Relief)
- Reduce Tax Burden: Examine and develop options to further reduce the tax burden on property owners. (Charge to a select subcommittee on Property Tax Reform and Relief)
- Franchise Tax: Study the benefits, including the dynamic effects, of continuing to phase out the franchise tax. Consider alternate approaches to funding the Property Tax Relief Fund.
- Spending Limit: Examine options and make recommendations for strengthening restriction on appropriations established in Article VIII Section 22 of the state constitution, including related procedures defined in statute. Consider options for ensuring available revenues above spending limit are reserved for tax relief.
- Fiscal Responsibility: Review the budgeting format of other states, such as whether they use strategy-based budgeting, program-based budgeting, or some

other approach and discuss the level of transparency with each approach. Review and make recommendations to reduce state debt liabilities, including state pension liability. Consider how to incentivize state agencies, boards, and commissions to identify and realize savings to taxpayers.

- **Sales Tax Holiday:** Review the state's current sales tax holiday structure and determine its economic benefit to the state. Evaluate and consider the merits of any potential expansion of the tax holiday either in the application of the sales tax exemption or the timing of the holiday.
- **Monitoring Charge:** Monitor the implementation of legislation addressed by the Senate Finance Committee during the 84th Legislature, Regular Session and make recommendations for any legislation needed to improve, enhance, and/or complete implementation. Specifically, monitor the following: 1) Tax relief provided to property owners; 2) The gradual phase out of the franchise tax.

### **Senate State Affairs Committee**

- **Union Dues:** Examine the practice of using public funds and employees for the payment processing of union dues. Make recommendations on whether Texas should end this practice.
- **Eminent Domain:** Gather and review data on the compensation provided to private property owners for property purchased or taken by entities with eminent domain authority. Examine the variance, if any, between the offers and the fair market values of properties taken through eminent domain. Make recommendations to ensure property owners are fairly compensated.
- **Ethics:** Review current ethics laws governing public officials and employees and recommend changes necessary to inspire the public's confidence in a transparent and ethically principled government. Review public officials' reporting requirements to the Texas Ethics Commission. Examine the categorization of ethics reporting violations and make recommendations to encourage accurate reporting and timely correction to inadvertent clerical errors.
- **Monitoring Charge:** Monitor the implementation of legislation addressed by the Senate Committee on State Affairs during the 84th Legislature, Regular Session and make recommendations for any legislation needed to improve, enhance, and/or complete implementation. Specifically, monitor the following: 1) Implementation of open and campus carry legislation and determine if the current laws regulating the places that handguns can be carried are easily understood or if clarification is needed to ensure the average citizen understands when, where, and under what circumstances it is lawful to carry a weapon, versus when it is a criminal offense for which there may be a defense; 2) The electronic voting program for certain military members serving overseas.