

TEXAS EDUCATION TODAY

JANUARY 2009

TEXAS ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

Final approval of science standards scheduled for March meeting

Although far reaching work is under way to revise and update Texas' science curriculum standards for kindergarten through 12th grade, public testimony during the State Board of Education's January meeting focused largely on one word: weaknesses.

Many of the citizens who testified in January and at the board's November meeting focused their remarks on how the state's educators teach evolution and whether other views such as creationism and Intelligent Design should be mentioned in classes. A final board vote on the science standards is expected March 26-27.

The current Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, which were adopted in 1997 and implemented in 1998, contains this language:

“(3) Scientific processes. The student uses critical thinking, scientific reasoning and problem solving to make informed decisions within and outside the classroom. The student is expected to:

(A) analyze, review, and critique scientific explanations, including hypotheses and theories, as to their strengths and weaknesses using scientific evidence and information;”

The “strengths and weaknesses” language, originally created as compromise language by a Democratic board member, has been used in Texas' textbook proclamations, which are essentially textbook production requirements, since at least 1988. But in the past few years, each time the language is considered by the board in standards or textbook adoptions, it sparks impassioned speeches from scientists and creationists.

The third draft of the science TEKS prepared by SBOE-appointed teacher review committees recommended deleting the phrase. But SBOE member Cynthia Dunbar, R-Richmond, at a Jan. 22 meeting offered



Teachers of the Year—Dora Newell & Christine Gleason



News from the Texas Education Agency

an amendment to reinstate the strengths and weaknesses language into the TEKS. She said that because of threats of litigation, the “safest route is to keep current language which is tried and true.” The state has never been sued because of this language.

Board member Barbara Cargill, R-The Woodlands, who is a former science teacher, said, “We need to let our teachers discuss these things with their kids.”

But board member Mavis B. Knight, D-Dallas, said, “Longevity is no indicator of the quality of something. The strengths and weakness phrase has taken on a different meaning than perhaps it had 10 or 20 years ago.”

Ultimately, efforts to reinstate the strengths and weaknesses language in the TEKS failed on a 7-7 vote with one member absent.

Instead, this language in the standards was given preliminary approval:

3) Scientific processes. The student uses critical thinking, scientific reasoning and problem solving to make informed decisions within and outside the classroom. The student is expected to: (A) analyze and evaluate scientific explanations using empirical evidence, logical reasoning, and experimental and observational testing;

On a 9-6 vote, the board did approve an amendment to the biology standards that asks students to “analyze and evaluate the sufficiency or insufficiency of common ancestry to explain the sudden appearance, stasis and sequential nature of groups in the fossil record.”

The board added a knowledge and skill statement to every high school course that “students should know the definition of science and understand that it has limitations, as specified in subsection (b)(2) of this section.” Subsection (b)(2) reads “Science, as defined by the National Academy of Sciences, is the use of evidence to construct testable explanations and predictions of natural phenomena, as well as the knowledge generated through this process.”

Along with these changes, the revised standards contain a number of other substantial changes.

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EXCEPTIONAL EDUCATOR

Clear Creek ISD teacher wins prestigious Milken Award

Texas was honored with its fourth Milken Family Foundation National Educator Award of 2008 when second-grade teacher Margaret Calagna of the Clear Creek Independent School District was recognized at a surprise assembly in December. Calagna, who teaches at Armand Bayou Elementary School in the Houston area, won a \$25,000 cash prize, which she can spend on anything she wishes.

Calagna is one of about 80 educators nationwide recognized in 2008 with the Milken Educator Award, which is designed to honor and reward exemplary teachers. This is the 22nd year that Milken Family Foundation representatives have crisscrossed the country to name recipients of the awards in surprise ceremonies.

Dubbed the “Oscars of Teaching” by Teacher Magazine, the Milken National Educator Awards were created in 1987 to reward, retain and attract the highest caliber professionals to our nation’s schools.

Calagna joins three other Texas recipients from 2008 who were honored earlier: Joanna Bacon, a kindergarten teacher in North East ISD in San Antonio; Claudia Pena, a second-grade teacher in Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD; and Zulema Williams-Santa Ana, a third-grade teacher in Los Fresnos ISD.

“There’s no doubt about it. Margaret Calagna was born to teach,” said Robert Scott, commissioner of education. “She brings enthusiasm and tremendous energy to her classroom every day. Her willingness to embrace new teaching methods and



Maggie Calagna of Armand Bayou Elementary School is enveloped by her students as she is named a Milken Educator Award winner.

practices and her strong leadership ability make her exemplary in every way. She is changing students’ lives and is a great representative for so many of her colleagues.”

An educator for six years, Calagna uses technology to engage her students, all of whom read at or above grade level. Her second-graders have the computer skills to create PowerPoint presentations on their own. She has trained other teachers how to teach science and uses musical instruments and costumes to stimulate interest and

enthusiasm in her students.

“Nothing in America’s K-12 schools has more influence on student learning than the quality of the classroom teacher,” said Lowell Milken, chairman of the Milken Family Foundation. “Highly effective teachers are the bedrock in constructing a world-class education system that meets our challenges and opportunities in this 21st century. It is a national imperative that we attract, retain and motivate people of talent to the profession. America’s prosperity depends on it.”

Since its inception, the Milken Educator Awards have recognized more than 2,300 educators and presented them with more than \$60 million in cash awards. The 2008 recipients will receive their \$25,000 checks during the Milken National Education Conference in Los Angeles in April 2009. The recipients also attend an all-expense paid professional development conference while in California.

ENHANCED FEATURES

Texas Education Agency Web site, logo get makeover

The Texas Education Agency has unveiled a new Web site featuring a new look and user experience. One of the biggest changes is an enhanced search engine designed to dramatically improve a visitor’s ability to locate specific information. The site, when fully in place, will also meet usability standards now required under federal law for people with disabilities.

The new home page, which has taken over the www.tea.state.tx.us address, features portals where administrators, teachers and outside entities doing business with TEA can go for targeted information. Additional portals organize information by topic, including Funding, Curriculum, News & Events, Reports and Testing/Accountability. Parents and prospective teachers have ready access to key information through a new feature called

“How do I...,” which answers frequently asked questions.

Many current home page Web site features remain in place under the new look, including the [A-to-Z index](#), the [School District Locator](#) and the latest news and announcements from the agency. To aid in the transition over the coming months, users will be able to click on a home page link that will take them back to the old home page. But gradually, TEA content will migrate to the new look and navigation system.

In addition, TEA has a new logo featuring a new red and gold color scheme and mortar board/graduation theme. It replaces a red, white and blue logo featuring the outline of Texas and a star. The new logo already appears on the agency’s web site and will gradually be replaced on stationery as supplies are replenished.

◆ SCIENCE *continued from page 1* _____

Several amendments approved on third draft of science standards

Those include:

- Elementary Grades Kindergarten-5: More focus on science disciplines of life, earth and physical science; and less focus on scientific principles such as systems or patterns.
- Middle Grades 6-8: Emphasis on physics and chemistry concepts at Grade 6, emphasis on life science concepts in Grade 7, and emphasis on earth/space science concepts in Grade 8.
- High School: Specific lists of standard equipment and tools for each course were developed, except for Integrated Physics and Chemistry. Changes in specific courses include:
 - ▶Biology - Greater focus on cell biology and genetics;

and less focus on the study of organisms, which is a national trend.

▶Chemistry and Physics - Many Student Expectations have students perform calculations.

▶Earth and Space Science – A comprehensive new course.

A public comment period on this latest version of the standards will begin Feb. 13. The revised standards, as amended in January, will be available at: <http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/rules/home/sboeprop.html>. Comments may be submitted to rules@tea.state.tx.us. Public testimony on the standards will be taken on March 25. A committee vote is expected March 26, with a final board vote on March 27.

FINANCIAL MARKET

Decline in value of Permanent School Fund affecting state and local districts

The State Board of Education (SBOE) convened for a special meeting Jan. 13 to reconsider the payout from the Permanent School Fund (PSF) to the Available School Fund. Because of significant declines in the global investment markets, the Texas Constitution may limit the Fund's ability to make the \$1.4 billion payout for the upcoming biennium. The board unanimously agreed, to the extent allowed by law, to increase later payments to make up for the shortfall.

The PSF, which is made up of proceeds from investments, land and other properties and mineral rights, pays for textbook and other instructional materials.

Before each legislative session, the board determines how much of the Permanent School Fund's proceeds to make available for education in the next two-year budget cycle. The total amount distributed is based on the average market value of the fund over the past sixteen state fiscal quarters ending November 30, 2008 and cannot exceed 6 percent.

In November, the board set the distribution rate at 2.5 percent for the upcoming biennium, beginning Sept. 1, 2009. However, the current state of the economy has reduced the value of the fund, from a high of \$26.6 billion in October of 2007, to \$18 billion as of December 31, 2008.

The amended language approved by the board may allow the Fund to catch up on any payments that are constrained by the Constitutional limitation. The board has requested guidance from Attorney General Greg Abbott to clarify the implementation of the Constitutional language. The AG's opinion is expected sometime in early May.



— SCHOOL BOND GUARANTEE PROGRAM —

As the stock market continues its roller coaster ride up and down, the Permanent School Fund continues to feel the effect.

The latest PSF victim of the times is the School Bond Guarantee Program for School Districts according to information presented to members of the State Board of Education in January.

Lisa Dawn-Fisher, deputy associate commissioner for school finance, told members of the board's Committee on School Finance/Permanent School Fund, that the Texas Education Agency has stopped accepting applications from school districts to guarantee their bonds because the program is out of capacity.

She said the agency currently has 27 applications pending and agency officials were determining the best course of action to take.

As of Jan. 30, the PSF was valued at \$17.5 billion. IRS law allows that the fund may guarantee bonds worth up to two and a half times its current value. As of Dec 31, 2008, there were 2,662 bond issues outstanding with a balance of \$52 billion.

Dawn-Fisher told the board that Commissioner Robert Scott had recently taken action to increase the fund's reserve balance from 5 percent to 8 percent due to the market fluctuations.

As she presented the information, she asked to committee members to approve amendments to policies for administration of the school district bond guarantee program and procedures a school district must follow when applying for a bond guarantee.

Committee members approved the request including authorizing the commissioner to increase the amount of capacity held in reserve if necessary to prudently manage fund capacity. Any changes to the amount held in reserve made by the commissioner are to be ratified or rejected by the SBOE at the next meeting for which the items can be posted.

ONLINE TESTING

Study conducted to determine feasibility of moving to online assessments

In a study conducted to determine the feasibility of moving from paper-and-pencil assessments to computer-administered testing, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) found that only about 9 percent of campuses in the state currently have enough computers to administer all but accommodated tests online if no other change is made to the statewide assessment program.

These findings are the result of a comprehensive survey of all schools and districts regarding their readiness to move to computer-administered testing. With a response rate of 98 percent, 1,214 districts and charter schools and 8,220 campuses participated in the survey.

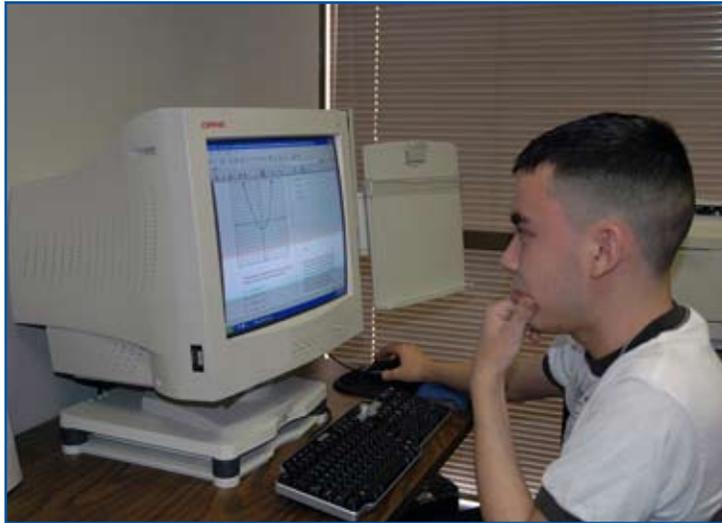
The study, a requirement of Senate Bill 1031 passed during the 80th Legislative Session, looked at the following information:

- a review of prevailing state practices regarding computer-based testing;
- a review of the literature related to the comparability of assessment results from computer- and paper-based tests;
- a comprehensive survey of all school districts regarding their readiness to move toward computer-based testing; and
- case studies of six representative Texas school districts.

While approximately 6 percent of campuses reported having enough computers for all enrolled students to test at the same time during one test administration, another 5 percent of the responding campuses with students in grades 2–12 reported having no computers available for online testing.

Statewide, campuses reported having approximately 933,000 computers available for use, with 40 percent located in classrooms and 60 percent in computer labs or libraries. With approximately 3.3

million students in grades 3-12, adequate inventory of computers and equipment would need to be addressed before the state could move to online testing exclusively.



Because state tests are not timed, it is currently not feasible to schedule more than one student per computer per day. However, if the testing window were to be expanded to one week per test from the current schedule of one test per day, then approximately 65 percent of the state's schools could support full online testing.

Survey results showed that 99 percent of participating campuses have Internet access, approximately 75 percent of which have high-speed connections. However, about three-fourths of responding campuses reported having experienced Internet or network congestion during school hours in the past two years.

A key challenge to online administration will be to help districts and campuses resolve recurring bandwidth congestion issues. In addition, campuses without high-speed Internet connections will need to be addressed so that students at those campuses are able to test online.

Currently, online tests are available as an option for districts for Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) exit-level retests. During this school year, online-only versions of tests are available for both the Texas English

Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS) reading test and for the End-of-Course (EOC) assessments in Algebra I, geometry, biology, chemistry, and U.S. history.

The state has been using online versions of its assessments since fall 2005 and has successfully delivered more than one million online tests to date.

Despite challenges associated with online testing, roughly half of the campuses believe that the benefits of online testing outweigh these challenges. Some of the advantages expected by districts and campuses included a reduced need for printed materials, quicker turn-around

time for test results, and a reduced need to handle secure paper materials.

Based on survey results, the report recommends implementation of online testing for end-of-course assessments only. The recommended timeline for implementation would coincide with the scheduled transition of the secondary-level TAKS testing program to the end-of-course assessments. Although the report offers three other implementation options, this option provides districts and the state time to acquire necessary computer capacity, infrastructure, and personnel.

To view the report in its entirety, go to the Reports portal on the TEA Web site and click on the link to *An Evaluation of Districts' Readiness for Online Testing* at http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/comm/leg_reports/2008/09online_readiness.pdf.

The research partnership formed to conduct this study consisted of TEA; Pearson, the prime contractor in support of the Texas student assessment program; the Texas Association of School Administrators (TASA); researchers from the State of Texas Education Research Center at Texas A&M University; and the Education Commission of the States.

BEST PRACTICES**Dropout Prevention study finds Texas programs successful**

A new report on *Best Practices in Dropout Prevention* recently released by ICF International, in partnership with the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network, found that three Texas programs had consistent, positive and meaningful effects on preventing dropouts. The three dropout programs with the most potential for success were Career Academies, Communities In Schools, and Project GRAD.

Career Academies operate as alternative schools within a larger high school and focus on making students career-ready by combining regular academic coursework with career centered curricula, having students focus on one career track, and giving them the opportunity to intern with local businesses.

Communities In Schools is a stay-in-school program utilizing a case management model to help students by providing services directly or linking students with other agencies and programs in the community to help them stay in school, attain better attendance rates, reduce behavior problems, improve

academically and graduate or receive a General Education Development (GED).

Project GRAD works with high schools and their feeder schools to prevent dropouts and encourage college attendance by providing scholarships, while focusing on classroom management, student performance, parental involvement, graduation rates and college acceptance rates.

In addition to identifying the most effective dropout programs, the study provides an overview of dropout prevention efforts and research, both nationally and across Texas.

The study found that the most effective dropout programs utilized the following dropout strategies:

- School-community collaboration;
- Safe learning environments;
- Family engagement;
- Mentoring/tutoring;
- Alternative schooling;
- Active learning; and
- Career and technology education

The report also provides legislative recommendations and identifies dropout prevention programs that have potential for success in Texas. To view the full report, go to http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/comm/leg_reports/bdpd_finalreport_20081219_toTEA.pdf.

REPORTS ONLINE

To view other reports to the 81st Legislature, go to the *Reports* page on the Texas Education Agency Web site at <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index4.aspx?id=3490>

There you will find a list of reports, including the following:

Evaluation of Communities in Schools

Progress Report on the Long-Range Plan for Technology

2008 Comprehensive Annual Report on Texas Public Schools

A Report on Field Testing for Texas Assessment Program

TEXAS PROJECTION MEASURE**Accountability growth measure approved by U.S. Department of Education**

The U.S. Department of Education recently announced that it has approved, with conditions, the Texas Projection Measure (TPM), a growth measure that will be used by Texas to determine whether students are meeting annual performance goals.

Growth measures track individual student achievement on state tests from one year to the next, giving schools credit for student improvement over time. The Texas Education Agency developed the TPM as a measure for use in its federal and state accountability systems. Once the TPM becomes available for use in determining state and federal accountability ratings,

districts and schools will then have an opportunity to receive credit for students who did not meet passing standards on state tests, but who demonstrate they are projected to pass in a subsequent year.

U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings in January approved the Texas growth measure in federal accountability, contingent on the state receiving final approval from the Department of Education on TAKS-Alternate, a test for students with severe cognitive disabilities.

“We are very excited that the department has approved the Texas growth measure,” Commissioner of Education Robert Scott said. He noted that use of the TPM

will strengthen Texas’ federal and state accountability systems and, in particular, will enhance the ability of schools to close achievement gaps based on race, ethnicity, socio-economic and program status.

“Our ability to use a growth measure for accountability purposes will help recognize the hard work being done in schools where students are making significant educational progress,” Scott said.

Details about the Texas Projection Measure are available at http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/resources/growth_proposal/010709_SummaryofTexasAYP_Growth_Proposal_USDE.pdf.

State Board Actions

The State Board of Education met January 23 and took the following actions.

FIRST READING

At first reading and filing authorization, the board:

- Adopted the review of 19 TAC Chapter 30, Administration, Subchapter A, State Board of Education: General Provisions. The rule establishes the process for petitioning for the adoption of changes to State Board of Education (SBOE) rules and adopts the petition form. Texas Government Code, §2001.039, establishes a four-year rule review cycle for all state agency rules, including SBOE rules.

SECOND READING

At second reading and final adoption, the board:

- Approved performance standards for the reading and mathematics assessments in Grades 3-8 based on the implementation of a vertical scale. No additional changes were recommended since this rule was approved for first reading.

IN OTHER ACTION

In other actions, the board:

- Approved the rule review plan for SBOE rules. The review plan will begin in September 2009.
- Approved the reappointment of Keith Toney, Deborah Seabron, and Eustace Lewis to the Fort Sam Houston Independent School District Board of Trustees.
- Approved a Midcycle 2010 Proclamation advertising for bids on instructional materials. The following subjects, for both elementary and secondary grades, are included: Mathematics, Technology Applications, Languages Other Than English, Health, Physical Education, and Fine Arts.
- Readopted instructional materials that have contracts set to expire on Aug. 31, 2009. This will ensure that these materials remain available for distribution to school districts until new replacements become available.
- Took no action on consideration of options for graduation credit for athletics.
- Approved five nominees for the governor's consideration for appointment to the board of trustees of the Teacher Retirement System of Texas (TRS). The appointee will serve on the TRS board through Aug. 31, 2013. The nominees are: Cynthia A. Thornton, James "Jim" P. Cummings, James Simms, Eric Craig McDonald, and Joe Colonna. The TRS board is comprised of nine members. Two of the members are appointed by the governor, subject to confirmation by two-thirds of the senate, from lists of nominees submitted by the SBOE.
- Approved the proposal that offers each remaining charter

school applicant in Generation 14 an opportunity to provide a 10-minute overview of the program to the Committee on School Initiatives if one or more charters become available prior to Sept. 1, 2009. The Committee on School Initiatives will hear each presentation at its regularly scheduled committee meeting the day before the state board meeting and then make its recommendation the following day to the full board. An alternate process was needed as a result of reaching the 215 cap on open-enrollment charters during the November board meeting when eight charters were awarded. At that meeting, the board placed the remaining Generation 14 charter applicants in pending status for a time not to exceed Sept. 1, 2009 in the event that a charter becomes available.

- Passed a resolution honoring Texas Elementary Teacher of the Year Dora Newell from Thigpen-Zavala Elementary School in the McAllen ISD, and Texas Secondary Teacher of the Year Christine Gleason from Fabens High School in the Fabens ISD.

- Approved an amendment to the rules for Student Attendance Accounting for State Funding Purposes. The amendment updates the rule to reflect statutory changes and changes in other administrative rules that provide for an alternative attendance accounting program. The amendment also modifies certain attendance accounting requirements that school districts must follow.

- Ratified the purchases and sales of securities executed in the portfolio of the PSF for the months of October and November 2008 in the amounts of \$1,716,475,800 and \$1,220,483,113, respectively.

- Adopted the review of the rules addressing the historically underutilized business (HUB) program and procedures relating to protest for purchasing issues and dispute resolution, in accordance with Texas Government Code requirements. The board also adopted an amendment to the rule to reflect the transfer of HUB rules from the Texas Building and Procurement Commission (TBPC) to the Comptroller of Public Accounts.

- Voted to select a manager to implement a discretionary private equity fund-of-one separate account within the constraints developed by the board regarding the PSF's private equity structure and voted to terminate the current request for proposal (RFP) for a firm(s) to provide private equity specialist advisor and/or fund of funds manager and directed staff to develop a new RFP based on the structure approved

The board members took no action on the following items:

- Selection of a firm to provide investment counsel services for the PSF and authorization for contract execution by the commissioner.
- Issuing a RFP for global custody and securities lending services for the fund.
- Search for outside legal counsel for the fund.

BUSINESS OF THE BOARD**SBOE members take oath, elect officers, make committee assignments**

Members re-elected to the State Board of Education were administered the Oath of Office by State Representative Diane Patrick. Members sworn in (from left to right) were: Gail Lowe, R-Lampasas; Mavis B. Knight, D-Dallas; Patricia Hardy, R-Fort Worth; Barbara Cargill, R-The Woodlands; David Bradley, R-Beaumont; and Terri Leo, R-Spring. Not pictured, Mary Helen Berlanga, D-Corpus Christi.

As is required by operating procedures, the State Board of Education elects board officers and organizes committees at the first meeting after an election.

In January, board members elected Lawrence Allen Jr., D-Houston, vice chair of the board and elected Terri Leo, R-Spring, secretary of the board. Don McLeroy, R-College Station, continues to serve out his appointment as chair.

Following are the new committee assignments:

- **INSTRUCTION** – Lawrence Allen Jr., D-Houston; Barbara Cargill, R-The Woodlands (chair); Terri Leo, R-Spring; Ken Mercer, R-San Antonio (vice chair); and Geraldine Miller, R-Dallas.

- **SCHOOL INITIATIVES** – Mary Helen Berlanga, D-Corpus Christi; Bob Craig, R-Lubbock (chair); Patricia Hardy, R-Fort Worth; Mavis B. Knight, D-Dallas (vice chair); Don McLeroy, R-College Station;

- **SCHOOL FINANCE/PERMANENT SCHOOL FUND** – Rick Agosto, D-San Antonio (vice chair); David Bradley, R-Beaumont (chair); Cynthia Noland Dunbar, R-Richmond; Gail Lowe, R-Lampasas; Rene Nuñez, D-El Paso.

LEGISLATIVE RECOMMENDATIONS

More monitoring of schools districts, funding for implementation of End-of-Course tests and funding for textbooks are among the items the State Board of Education is requesting from the Texas Legislature this year. Board members approved a list of eight items that they would like legislators to consider and pass into law during the 81st session.

The list of legislative recommendation are:

1. Appropriate funding for schools to begin preparing for the implementation of End-of-Course exams.
2. Assure that Permanent School Fund (PSF) monies paid to the Available School Fund each biennium are appropriated to fully fund instructional materials first before they are utilized for other education-related expenses.
3. Require that the Texas Education Agency perform regular on-site state program compliance monitoring of school districts [similar to former District Effectiveness and Compliance (DEC) monitoring] and provide technical assistance.
4. Give the State Board of Education authority to employ and dismiss the executive administrator of the PSF and appropriate funds for the management of PSF investments.
5. Appropriate funds for the quality implementation of the 4x4 legislation, especially for the provision of qualified math and science teachers and adequate science laboratories.
6. Provide guidelines that would permit school districts discretion in administering Chapter 37, Safe Schools–Discipline; Law and Order.
7. Require school districts to provide homework and classroom lesson assignments to students while they are appealing their disciplinary action.
8. Require school districts to provide electronic or individual tutoring for courses that honor students were enrolled in at their regular school that are not offered in the disciplinary alternative education setting.

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Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics & Science Teaching



The State Board of Education honored winners of the Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics & Science Teaching. These five Texas teachers become candidates for the National Presidential Award. Pictured from left to right: Kenn Heydrick, TEA director of science; Irene Pickardt, assistant director of science; Amanda Santana (Houston ISD); Candy Ellard (Austin ISD); Barbara Kelley (Grapevine-Colleyville ISD); Amy Sample-Pence (Carrollton-Farmers Branch ISD); Heather Villalobos (Alvin ISD); and Erika Pierce, TEA assistant director of mathematics.