

TEXAS EDUCATION TODAY



News from the Texas Education Agency

NOVEMBER 2008

HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION PLANS

State Board to discuss providing more pathways to graduation

Concerned that the state's high school graduation plans have become too rigid and leave students with too little time to explore electives, the State Board of Education in November began discussing whether to provide more pathways to graduation.

"Not every child fits in a box. I think we have too narrow a focus on our Recommended plan. There are good career and technical courses that could be substituted" for required classes, such as math classes, said board member Bob Craig, R-Lubbock.

The state's primary graduation plan, the Recommended High School Program, requires student to earn 26 credits to graduate, which includes only 3.5 elective credits. The Distinguished Achievement Program, which is also a 26-credit program, provides room for only 2.5 elective credits. Both plans also require students to earn four credits each in math, science,

social studies and English. Students currently have a limited number of mathematics courses from which to select. The 22-credit Minimum Graduation Plan does not require students to follow the so-called four-by-four requirements.

Panels of educators who are reviewing the Career and Technical Education courses to make recommendations for revisions to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills have been asked to identify CTE courses that the educators believe could count for credit toward other graduation requirements.

Additionally, reacting to a citizen petition that asked the board to allow students to receive up to four state credits for athletics, board members, meeting as the Committee of the Full Board, initially voted 10-5 to ask staff to convene committees to develop TEKS for athletic courses. However the next day during the board's general meeting, members

decided to delay action on this item until January so that it could be considered as part of an overall examination of state graduation requirements.

Currently, students can only earn up to two state physical education credits for athletics. Students who continue to pursue athletics beyond two years can earn local credit in many districts but those do not help them fulfill their state graduation requirements.

Texas Education Agency staff noted that awarding additional state credit for athletics will trigger other requirements. There must be state-approved curriculum standards for any course that earns students state course credit. Teachers must also be certified to teach the courses. Presently, there are no certifications required for coaching. Currently, coaches or sponsors are certified to teach academic courses but are not certified in sports or extra-curricular activities.

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New web portal provides easy access to school and district information

The Texas Education Agency has launched a new data portal on its web site that provides easy access to public education data. Called LONESTAR (Longitudinal Education Statistical Resource), the site displays five-years of data at the state, regional and school district levels using easily understood charts and graphs.

The site may be accessed at <http://loving1.tea.state.tx.us/lonestar/Home.aspx>.

Current reports on the site provide data about student enrollment, high school graduation, accountability ratings, Adequate Yearly Progress evaluations and listings of school districts within legislative districts and State Board of Education districts. Additional information will be added in the future.

BLUE RIBBON SCHOOLS

26 Texas schools nominated for Blue Ribbon honors

Commissioner Robert Scott announced the nomination of 26 Texas schools for the 2009 No Child Left Behind-Blue Ribbon Schools recognition. The award honors schools that help students excel academically and that make significant progress in closing the achievement gap.

For the past 26 years, this prestigious program has honored more than 5,800 of America's most successful schools, including almost 500 Texas schools. The No Child Left Behind-Blue Ribbon Schools Program honors public and private elementary, middle and high schools.

The schools are selected based on one of two criteria:

- schools with at least 40 percent of their students from disadvantaged backgrounds that dramatically improve student

performance to high levels on state tests;

- schools whose students, regardless of background, achieve in the top 10 percent of their state on state tests.

Fifty percent of the schools selected are elementary schools; 24 percent are high school, 24 percent are middle schools and 2 percent are prekindergarten through grade 12. This mirrors the ratio of elementary, middle, high school and all grade level schools in the state.

The nominated schools will now complete a rigorous application process. Announcements of the award winners will be made in September. Schools that receive the prestigious award are recognized at the NCLB-Blue Ribbon School conference in Washington, D.C., in October.

2009 USDE No Child Left Behind Blue Ribbon Schools

- **Beaumont Independent School District (ISD):**
Fletcher Elementary School
- **Bosqueville ISD:**
Bosqueville Elementary School
- **Brownsville ISD:**
Southmost Elementary School
- **Brownwood ISD:**
Brownwood High School
- **Chapel Hill ISD:**
Chapel Hill Elementary School (Mount Pleasant)
- **Dallas ISD:**
George Bannerman Dealey International Academy
George Peabody Elementary School
School of Health Professions
Victor H. Hexter Elementary School
- **Devine ISD:**
Devine High School
- **Galena Park ISD:**
Tice Elementary School
- **Garland ISD:**
Brandenburg Middle School
- **Iola ISD:**
Iola Elementary School
- **Houston ISD:**
DeBakey High School for Health Professions
Garden Villas, Elementary School
Kennedy Elementary School
Lantrip Elementary School
- **Mumford ISD:**
Mumford Elementary School
- **Natalia ISD:**
Natalia Junior High School
- **North East ISD:**
Garner Middle School
- **Patton Springs ISD:**
Patton Springs School
- **Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD:**
Bowie Elementary School
- **Sands CISD:**
Sands CISD
- **St.Mary's Academy Charter School**
St. Mary's Academy
- **Wellington ISD:**
Wellington Elementary School
- **Yes Preparatory:**
North Central Campus

TEACHERS OF THE YEAR

2009 Texas Teachers of the Year announced at special ceremony

Christine Gleason, an English teacher at Fabens High School in the Fabens Independent School District, was named Texas Secondary Teacher of the Year, and Dora Newell, a third-grade teacher at Thigpen-Zavala Elementary School in McAllen ISD, was named Elementary Teacher of the Year.



*Secondary Teacher of the Year
Christine Gleason*

Gleason and Newell learned that they had achieved this top honor Nov. 22 at a special ceremony and luncheon at the Connally Banquet Hall at the University of Texas Etter-Harbin Alumni Center. Both Gleason and Newell were awarded a cash prize of \$5,000, a SMART Board technology package worth more than \$15,000, and a commemorative trophy.

Each educator vying for the top honors submitted an application that describes the kind of teacher they are. Secondary Teacher of the Year Gleason writes: "I am a teacher and can relate any piece of literature to teenage life in under 50 minutes. I do it with laughter, poise and integrity. Most importantly, though, I talk *to* my students. They know I genuinely care about them and their issues. I contribute everything I have every single day because that is what my students deserve."

Elementary Teacher of the Year Newell had this to say: "I am determined that each day each one of my students will get my absolute best. They will remember me ...with a smiling face, a kind heart and a genuine desire to form them into the best citizens they can be. I attend my students' birthday parties, basketball games, quinceañeras, and graduations—even when it has been many years since they have been my students. My students are always important to me, and I let them know that I will always make myself available to them."

In addition to the state's top two educators, the other 38 outstanding regional Teachers of the Year were honored. These teachers each received a \$500 check and will receive a commemorative trophy. Cash prizes for state and regional Teachers of the Year, totaling \$29,000, were provided by AT&T.

"I want to extend my heartfelt congratulations to each teacher honored at this annual event. These teachers deserve our thanks, recognition and respect. The work they do every day is shaping the future of our schoolchildren and ultimately the great state of Texas," said Commissioner of Education Robert Scott.

To achieve recognition through this program, a teacher must first be chosen as a campus and a district Teacher of the Year, and ultimately a regional honoree. Statewide, there are 20 regional elementary awardees and 20 regional secondary



*Elementary Teacher of the Year
Dora Newell*

honorees selected. From this group of 40 teachers, six finalists are chosen and interviewed by an independent panel of judges. The state's top teachers are selected from the six outstanding finalists.

Gleason, Texas' Secondary Teacher of the Year, will be considered for the National Teacher of the Year award.

The national program, which began in 1952, is sponsored by the Council of Chief State School Officers.

The Texas Teacher of the Year program, considered the top teaching award in the state, is sponsored by the Texas Education Agency with financial support from the following generous benefactors:

- AT&T
- Association of Texas Professional Educators
- Career and Technology Association of Texas
- Chalk Ink
- H-E-B
- Mike A. Myers Foundation
- SHW Group
- SMARTer Kids Foundation
- Texas ASCD
- Texas Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation
- Texas Association of Partners in Education
- Texas Association of School Administrators
- Texas Association of School Boards
- Texas Association of School Business Officials
- Texas Association of Secondary School Principals
- Texas Business and Education Coalition
- Texas Classroom Teachers Association
- Texas Computer Education Association
- Texas Congress of Teachers and Parents
- Texas Educational Support Staff Association, Inc.
- Texas Elementary Principals and Supervisors Association
- Texas Elementary Teacher of the Year
- Texas Federation of Teachers
- Texas Middle School Association
- Texas Retired Teachers Association
- Texas School Public Relations Association
- Texas State Teachers Association

"This program, through the support of our generous sponsors, provides a way to publicly recognize and thank these dedicated and deserving educators," said Scott.

HEROES FOR CHILDREN

Nationally known artist, community activists and parents honored for volunteerism in public schools

A nationally recognized artist, long-time PTA volunteers and parents were recognized for their many hours of volunteerism and their overall contributions to Texas public schools at the November State Board of Education meeting.

In SBOE DISTRICT 1, **ANITA TREVINO** has been a valued parent volunteer at Honore Ligarde Elementary School in the Laredo Independent School District for the past seven years. She goes to the campus daily and even on weekends to help the teachers and students with the TAKS Super Saturdays and campus activities.

Nationally known artist **SANTA BARRAZA** is the hero for SBOE DISTRICT 2. Barraza, a professor of art at Texas A&M University – Kingsville, is well known for her stirring and passionate art that reflects her Chicana/Tejana roots. Barraza is being honored for her work with middle and high school students throughout District 2 and inspiring them to appreciate the arts.

GIANCARLA HERRERA, a volunteer at Las Palmas Elementary School in the Edgewood ISD, is the hero for SBOE DISTRICT 3. Herrera has volunteered in the Edgewood district for the past 43 years, dedicating five days a week, eight hours a day for the PTA at Las Palmas Elementary.

The hero for SBOE DISTRICT 4, **J. A. ROB JR.**, has contributed to the social, physical and emotional well-being of hundreds of students at the former M.B. Smiley High School in North Forest ISD. His significant contributions include helping create the Buffalo Soldiers Junior Troop and the 100 Black Men of America Mentoring program for males 11 to 18.

The hero for SBOE DISTRICT 5, **THERESA VOISS**, does her volunteer work in Austin ISD. She created and developed the Sister School Project for Kiker Elementary School in Southwest Austin and Allison Elementary in Southeast Austin. The program goal is to bring the two communities together to help one another and learn from one another.

In SBOE DISTRICT 6, the hero is **MARY CARD**, who started one of the first mentoring programs in the Spring Branch ISD. By partnering with her church, Memorial Drive Presbyterian,

more than 175-plus mentors have been sponsored in one-on-one relationships with students at Spring Woods Middle School. The IMPACT mentoring program offers ongoing flexibility, training and support to the mentors.

HADLEY CLARK, the Hero for SBOE DISTRICT 7, started volunteering in 2000 by tutoring a group of third graders. Now, eight years later, this volunteer at Red Bud Elementary in the Pasadena ISD tutors third graders, along with first and second graders on reading or math foundation skills.

STEPHANIE COLLINS, Hero for SBOE DISTRICT 8, has volun-



Heroes pictured on front row (from left to right): Mary Card, Santa Barraza, Stephanie Collins, Giancarla Herrera, Stacey Hawkins, and Theresa Voiss. Back row: Hadley Clark, Allen Weeks, Scott Hogue, Tamra Sadafszaz, Anita Trevino, J.A. Rob Jr., Jim Douglass, Derrick Smartt, and Stuart Foster.

teered full time at Kurth Primary School in the Lufkin ISD for six years and has become a great advocate for all students. Her nurturing spirit, patience and encouragement have made her a very positive role model and mentor.

In SBOE DISTRICT 9, Hero **STACEY HAWKINS**, is referred to as a “superior volunteer” at Grand Saline Elementary School. Hawkins has been a classroom volunteer and she helps with parties, field trips, and field day. She also spends many hours volunteering in the library and at the school’s spring book fair.

The Hero for SBOE DISTRICT 10 is **ALLEN WEEKS**, who has been involved in education for 30 years – 15 as a teacher and the

TEKS UPDATE**State's curriculum to be updated in stages**

The State Board of Education (SBOE) is in the midst of an ongoing process to revise and update the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) curriculum requirements. The new standards will set guidelines for textbooks and standardized tests. The board has already revised curriculum standards for mathematics, English language arts and reading, and Spanish language arts. Next up for consideration is science and Career and Technical Education, with social studies and English language arts electives to follow.

SCIENCE—At the November state board meeting, 67 people testified about the revisions to the science TEKS and additional citizens filed written testimony. The board heard about seven hours of testimony, staying until the last person weighed in.

The majority of speakers—including scientists, teachers, parents, and clergy—expressed concern that creationism or intelligent design would find its way into the science curriculum. The current science standards require students to be taught the “strengths and weaknesses” of all scientific theories, a phrase that some say undermines the theory of evolution. The TEKS review committee appointed to revise the standards eliminated that wording on the first draft; however, the second draft added back modified language requiring students to be taught “strengths and limitations” of scientific explanations, wording that some who testified say should be eliminated all together.

A public hearing on science TEKS will be held on Jan. 21 during the board's next meeting. The board is expected to vote on the science standards at its January meeting for first reading.

CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION—Members of the Career and Technical Education (CTE) review panel presented recommendations for the CTE curriculum standards to the board. The panel was asked to bring back a prioritized list of recommendations and

provide notations for those that have already been implemented. The new CTE recommendations can be found on the Texas Education Agency's web site at www.tea.state.tx.us/teks/cte/CTEReviewPanelRecs.pdf

The CTE TEKS writing teams have met throughout 2008 and will meet again in January 2009. A public hearing on the CTE curriculum standards is expected to be held in May, and the board is expected to vote at that time on first reading.

MATH—The state board originally approved revisions to the mathematics TEKS in July of 2005. However, the board has revisited the math curriculum to incorporate college readiness standards, a requirement of House Bill 1. In November, the board approved for first reading and filing authorization the revisions to the mathematics TEKS that incorporate approved college readiness standards into the state curriculum standards. The board is expected to give final approval on the math curriculum at its January meeting. The revised math TEKS will be implemented in the 2009-2010 school year, with professional development opportunities provided in the spring and summer of 2009.

SOCIAL STUDIES—Board members were asked to provide nominations for individuals to serve on the TEKS social studies review committees by December 10. The deadline for educators to submit applications to serve was Oct. 31. The social studies review panels are expected to meet beginning in January 2009.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS ELECTIVES—Board members were asked to provide nominations for individuals to serve on the TEKS English language arts electives review committees by December 12. The deadline for educators to submit applications to serve was November 7. The social studies review panels are expected to meet beginning in February 2009.

rest as a volunteer coach, community organizer, mentor and supporter of public schools in the Austin ISD. Along with his wife, Weeks formed a small volunteer group called Partners in Hope to mobilize volunteers in healthcare and education.

STUART FOSTER, a dedicated volunteer at Benbrook Elementary School in Fort Worth ISD is the Hero for SBOE DISTRICT 11. Foster volunteers four days a week, working with 21 students in several grades. He tutors these students in reading, phonics, spelling, math and science.

The Hero for SBOE DISTRICT 12, **TAMRA SADAFSAZ**, has been involved with Plano ISD PTA for 15-plus years; has served as the president of three different Parent-Teacher School Associations and has held numerous other offices. She helps with the choir booster clubs at two schools and serves as president of one.

DERRICK SMARTT, the hero for SBOE DISTRICT 13, volunteers daily in the Cedar Hill ISD with the Food 4 Kids Program

through the North Texas Food Bank. Every week, he provides food packages for Cedar Hill ISD students to take home over the weekend. He makes sure that no student in need goes without.

The Hero for SBOE DISTRICT 14 is **SCOTT HOGUE**, a Burkburnett police officer who volunteers at Hardin Elementary School in Burkburnett ISD. For the past 11 years, Officer Hogue has utilized his lunch hour, days off and any extra time to mentor severe at-risk students on the Hardin campus. Officer Hogue has invested more than 600 hours mentoring students.

JIM DOUGLASS, the Hero for SBOE DISTRICT 15, has been involved with the PTA in the Lubbock ISD for more than two decades. He served as PTA president; on the Blue Ribbon Committee on Academic Excellence for Lubbock ISD; on the National Board of Directors for Big Brothers/Big Sisters; as a board member of Special Olympics; and as a parent has served in other capacities including booster clubs for band and athletics.

ASSESSMENTS

Vertical scale system allowing for year-to-year comparisons on TAKS test to be used

Texas in 2010 will change the way it determines whether students pass or fail reading and math TAKS tests in grades 3-8.

Legislation passed in 2007 requires the state to implement a vertical scale in designated grades that can be used to determine whether a student passed the exam and whether he or she is progressing academically from year to year.

Currently, all Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills tests use the same horizontal scale score system. A score of 2100 is passing on all tests and a score of 2400 or better earns a student a Commended Performance designation.

Under the new vertical scale system, the score range for English and Spanish TAKS is 0 to 1000. The main advantage of a vertical scale is the ability to interpret year-to-year score changes.

“A vertical scale helps students know how much they have grown since last year and how much they need to grow for the

next year,” said Jon Twing, a psychometrician with Pearson, the state’s testing contractor.

During six meetings, panels of educators reviewed the current cut points for the TAKS tests to determine whether they should be adjusted under a vertical scale system.

Based on recommendations that emerged from these meetings, the State Board of Education in November gave preliminary approval to the proposed vertical scale cut scores. Thirteen Met the Standard passing standards were simply converted from the horizontal scale score system to the vertical scale score system and it did not become harder or easier to pass the tests.

But the review caused the passing standard to be raised on six tests, effective in 2010. Those exams are the grades 6 and 8 English reading TAKS; the grades 3, 4, and 6 Spanish mathematics TAKS,

and the grade 6 Spanish reading TAKS.

The Commended Performance standard was converted to the vertical scale but remained at the same difficulty level on 12 tests. This standard will increase on the grades 5, 6, and 8 English-language math TAKS; the grade 6 and 8 English reading TAKS; the grades 4 and 6 Spanish math TAKS, and the sixth grade Spanish reading TAKS.

Twing said the review panels were guided by the concept that standards should rise with the progression of grades, which resulted in recommendations to raise the standards on certain tests.

As a transition, TAKS results for grades 3-8 math and reading will show both the horizontal scale score and the vertical scale score on the spring 2009 reports. Beginning in 2010, only vertical scale score results will be reported for these tests.

EDUCATION TASK FORCE

Texas Education commissioner provides recommendations to president-elect

Texas Commissioner of Education



Robert Scott was selected to serve on a 10-member task force to develop education recommendations that could be carried out during the first 100 days

of the Obama administration.

The presidential transition task force was created by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). This geographically and politically diverse group is developing recommendations that will be forwarded to the next U.S. secretary of education.

“I’m humbled to be included on this task force,” Scott said. “As a former congressional aide and as a state education chief, I look forward to developing education policy proposals that will strengthen and improve the nation’s public schools. I’m very pleased that Texas has a seat at the table,” he said.

The task force met in Washington, D.C. on Dec. 1. CCSSO President T. Kenneth James, the education chief in Arkansas, said his goal is to present a document to President-elect Barack Obama’s transition team on Dec. 15 that communicates the chiefs’ recommendations for the first 100 days they are in office.

CCSSO was the first member group

to engage in a conversation with Linda Darling-Hammond, a Stanford University professor and campaign advisor to Obama.

During a recent meeting in Austin, the chiefs presented a series of issues to Darling-Hammond dealing with topics such as school accountability; professional development; state education agency resources; innovation; efforts to move away from a compliance-driven relationship with the U.S. Department of Education, and research dealing with best practices.

Serving on the transition task force are the state education chiefs from Texas, California, Iowa, Wisconsin, Kansas, Alabama, Illinois, Maine, Rhode Island and Virginia.

HURRICANE IKE Damage and destruction left in wake of Hurricane Ike

About one out of every five Texas school districts lost instructional time due to Hurricane Ike, which slammed ashore in Southeast Texas on Sept. 12. Districts also lost roofs, buses and other material goods but thanks to extensive preparations, millions of Texans successfully evacuated the area but few lost their lives because of this massive storm.

Photos sent to the Texas Education Agency by Southeast Texas school districts document the damage that was wrought.



Photo provide by East Chambers Independent School District

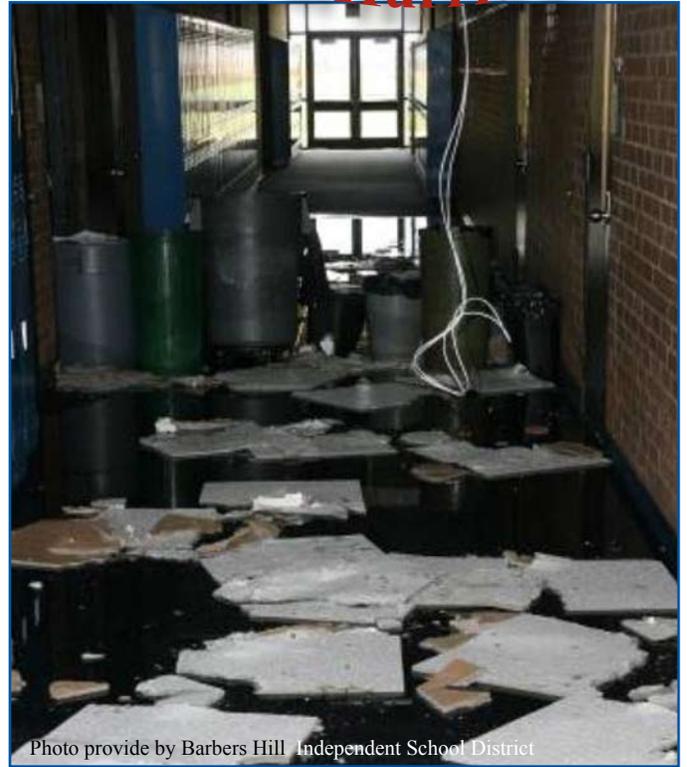


Photo provide by Barbers Hill Independent School District



Photo provide by Anahauc Independent School District

EMPLOYERS FOR EDUCATION EXCELLENCE

Employers honored for encouraging staff to volunteer in public schools

The State Board of Education honored 14 Texas businesses, organizations and governmental entities for encouraging employees to volunteer in the state's 8,000-plus public schools.

This is the first year for the Employers for Education Excellence (EEE) Award, which was created by the Legislature in the 2007 session. Designed to promote more community involvement in the public schools, the award recognizes employers who implement policies that encourage employee involvement in school activities.

"This award is just one way of saying thank you to companies and organizations who have demonstrated – in a very tangible way – a strong commitment to public education," said Don McLeroy, chair of the State Board of Education. "Educating the next generation of leaders is an enormous undertaking, and we all share some responsibility for contributing to this important effort. These leaders have stepped up to the challenge and I am proud that the board is honoring them for their support."

The award is open to any employer in the state, including private businesses or corporations, nonprofit organizations, state and government agencies, and educational entities that have at least one employee.

The EEE Awards are given in three categories – Gold, Silver and Bronze. Winners in the Gold Award category have implemented policies that encourage and support employees who attend parent-teacher conferences, who implement policies to encourage employees to volunteer in schools, and who support employees who participate in student mentoring programs.

The 2008 GOLD AWARD companies are:

Capital Group Companies/American Funds, San Antonio. A total of 1,600 employees have volunteered more than 40,000 hours over 11 years at Sul Ross Middle School in the Northside Independent School District. Employees have mentored students, participated in intramural sports and worked with a scholars program and Junior Achievement.

City of Austin. Working with Austin ISD, employees are allowed up to two hours of administrative leave per week to mentor and tutor students. About 3 percent of the city's more than 14,000 employees participated in the program in 2007-2008.

CompassLearning, Austin. The company provides time off to employees for volunteer and parent involvement in schools and day care centers. Employees also mentor students, participate in job shadowing and support Communities in Schools, a dropout prevention program.

English + Associates Architects, Inc., Houston. The company has a written policy allowing employees paid time off to attend parent-teacher conferences, volunteer in school activities and participate in student mentoring. A total of 27 percent of employees have participated in the effort.

ExxonMobil, Houston. The company is a major supporter of

Junior Achievement, an organization that encourages students to stay in school and teaches them about business and economics. More than 2 percent of the company's 13,000 employees participate in Junior Achievement or other educational programs.

Federal Reserve Bank, Houston. For almost 20 years, the bank has been a business/school partner with Sherman Elementary School in Houston ISD. Forty-four percent of the bank staff volunteered as tutors, pen pals and story tellers last year.

IBM, Austin. The company encourages employees to be active in schools their children attend and to serve as volunteers. IBM sponsors MentorPlace, a specially-designed web site where employees can mentor high school students online.

PricewaterhouseCoopers, Houston. More than 20 percent of employees participate in Junior Achievement. Staff members invite students from a Houston high school to the office for a day of mentoring and other employees participate in community service projects that benefit youth and education.

Renaissance Worthington Hotel, Fort Worth. At the hotel, students work alongside employees on the job. Professionals also participate in a pen pal email program. A total of 17 percent of the hotel's employees participate in various school activities.

Sprint, Fort Worth. Company policy allows flextime for employees to attend parent-teacher conferences and volunteer activities. A volunteer paid time-off pilot project is under way. Employees give time to Big Brother Big Sisters and work to ensure that students get family support in their studies.

Tara Wilson Events, Fort Worth. Company employees sponsor round table discussions with students about career paths and the importance of staying in school. Students are also taken on tours of companies that offer professional opportunities.

Winners in the Silver category have implemented policies that support employees who attend parent-teacher conferences and who want to volunteer in school activities.

The 2008 SILVER AWARD winners are:

National Society of Hispanic MBAs, Irving. NSHMBA supports activities that encourage students to enroll in college. The organization sponsors an annual College Summit, providing information about a college education to students and parents.

Resources for Learning, Austin. The company encourages volunteering in educational efforts, including the Partners in Literature Program, a pilot program that promotes reading proficiency. More than a third of the company's staff has volunteered.

Winners in the Bronze category have policies that enable employees to attend parent-teacher conferences.

The 2009 BRONZE AWARD winner is **Childress Regional Medical Center, Childress.** At the medical center, supervisors adjust work schedules to accommodate school activities and employees are not required to use vacation time.

EXCEPTIONAL EDUCATORS

Three Texas teachers win prestigious Milken Award

Three Texas teachers – two from the Rio Grande Valley and one from San Antonio – won prestigious Milken Family Foundation National Educator Awards in October and November. They are Zulema Williams-Santa Ana of Los Fresnos Consolidated Independent School District, Claudia Pena of Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD, and Joanna Bacon of North East ISD.

Each teacher receives a \$25,000 cash prize, which they can spend on anything they wish. The three are among about 80 educators nationwide being recognized this year with the Milken Educator Award, which is designed to honor and reward exemplary teachers. In the eight years that Texas has participated in the awards program, 37 educators have been recognized.

“These three teachers have brought innovation, hard work and a love of education to their classrooms and the results have been outstanding,” says Robert Scott, commissioner of education. “I am proud of their accomplishments and extend my congratulations to each of them. Ms. Williams-Santa Ana, Ms. Bacon and Ms. Pena represent thousands of other educators statewide who go above and beyond the call of duty on a daily basis.”

Williams-Santa Ana is a third-grade teacher at Laureles Elementary School in San Benito. A former actress in Mexico, she has helped her students markedly improve their skills in reading and math.

Pena is a second-grade teacher at North Alamo Elementary School in Alamo. She uses an activity-based approach and high expectations to help her students improve achievement results on math and reading assessments.

Bacon, a kindergarten teacher at West Avenue Elementary School in San Antonio, uses a combination of learning and play to help her students succeed. Her methods, which include employing technology in the educational process, are emulated by other teachers.

“Nothing in America’s K-12 schools has more influence on student learning than the quality of the classroom teacher,” says 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.”

Each teacher received the award at a surprise assembly at her respective school. Representatives from the Milken Family Foundation and TEA were on hand for each event.

Photos of Pena and Bacon provided by Paul Bliese of the Milken Family Foundation. Photo of Williams-Santa Ana provided by Los Fresnos Consolidated Independent School District.



Milken Family Foundation Chairman Lowell Milken presents teacher Joanna Bacon with an oversized check representing her \$25,000 Milken Educator Award.



Teacher Claudia Pena reacts with stunned disbelief and her colleagues cheer excitedly as she was named a Milken Educator Award winner.



Teacher Zulema Williams-Santa Ana (center) poses with an oversized \$25,000 check after receiving the Milken Educator Award.

State Board Actions

The State Board of Education met November 21 and took the following actions.

SECOND READING

At second reading and final adoption, the board:

- Approved amendments to the Annual Report on Open-Enrollment Charter Governance. The amendments reflect a statutory correction and modify the annual governance reporting requirements.

IN OTHER ACTION

In other actions, the board:

- Approved the per-student cost of administering the 2008-2009 TAKS test for private schools.
- Delayed action on the search for outside legal counsel for the Permanent School Fund (PSF) to the board's January meeting.
- Approved the purchases and sales of securities executed in the portfolio of the PSF for the months of June, July, August and September 2008.
- Approved the appointment of MSgt Monique Slater to the board of trustees of the Lackland Independent School District for a term of two years from Nov. 20, 2008 through Nov. 19, 2010.
- Approved a second volume of the question and answer document dealing with Proclamation 2010 as amended by the board.
- Approved amendments to Proclamation 2011 to add a Statement of Intent from the commissioner and an updated Copyright Notice within the Prekindergarten Guidelines to the call for instructional materials. Proclamation 2011 was issued by the board in May 2008 and is scheduled for adoption in November 2010. The proposed amendments to Proclamation 2011 result from changes to the Prekindergarten Guidelines. Proclamation 2011 includes the following instructional materials: English Language Arts, grades 2-8; Spanish Language Arts, grades 2-6; Spelling, grades 1-6; Handwriting, grades 1-3; Speech, grades 6-8; English I-IV, grades 9-12; English as a Second Language, Student Edition and Teacher Edition, grades K-8; and Prekindergarten Systems (with Spanish components and Spanish Teacher Edition).

- Voted to levy \$749,871 in penalties to textbook publishers who had an insufficient supply of their adopted instructional materials available, which resulted in a back-order for the 2007-2008 school year.
- Voted final approval of \$877,989 in penalties for failure to correct factual errors in instructional materials adopted under Proclamation 2004 in November 2006.
- Selected BlackRock Inc. of New York to provide investment management services for the PSF's International Index Fund and authorized the commissioner to execute a contract.
- Postponed until the January meeting any action on selecting a firm(s) to provide private equity specialist advisor and/or fund of funds manager for the PSF.

New requirements for bond guarantees

Responding to financial market volatility, the State Board of Education has tightened procedures for school districts to follow when issuing bonds backed by the Permanent School Fund. Districts are now being asked to notify the PSF prior to issuing their offering documents and prior to executing the final sale documents so that fund capacity can be checked at each step.

In addition under the planned changes, all applications received during a calendar month will be held until the 20th business day of the subsequent month, allowing the PSF staff enough time to gather all the necessary information before announcing approvals.

In other business, the board:

- Approved a per capita apportionment rate of \$258 from the Available School Fund for the 2008-2009 school year. This number is a projection of earnings from the Permanent School Fund, which will be revised in July.
- Approved a 2.5 percent distribution from the Permanent School Fund for 2009-2010. This rate means an allocation of \$579.39 million per year, or \$1.16 billion for the biennium. In the current biennium, it is 3.5 percent.

CHARTER SCHOOLS

State Board of Education approves eight new charter schools

Following approval by the State Board of Education at the November board meeting, the state of Texas has eight additional charter schools, which means all 215 available slots for open-enrollment charter schools have been awarded for the first time.

The SBOE had a total of 17 applicants that scored high enough during the evaluation process to vie for the eight charters available to the Generation 14 applicants. One of the applicants requested to be removed from consideration. Of the

eight remaining applicants who did not receive a charter in November, the SBOE left their applications pending until Sept. 1, 2009. These pending applications will be considered for award should any charters be returned to the state during the coming year.

Approved for a charter to open in fall 2009 were:

- Bob Hope School, Port Arthur;
- City Center - Health Careers, San Antonio;

- Henry Ford Academy, San Antonio;
- Imagine International Academy of North Texas, McKinney;
- Imagine International Academy Williamson County, Georgetown;
- Manara Academy, Irving;
- The East Austin College Prep Academy, Austin; and
- TLC Academy, San Angelo.

Since there are no additional charters to be awarded, the board voted to delay issuing the 15th Generation Charter School application.

BOARD OF MANAGERS

State takes over North Forest Independent School District

The troubled North Forest Independent School District in Houston was taken over by the state Oct. 16 with the commissioner of education naming a superintendent and appointing a Board of Managers to replace the school board.

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) took this action because of on-going financial concerns in the district. The district had a budget deficit of about \$13 million in August at the end of the fiscal year. Its bond ratings have been downgraded. Because of systemic financial, academic and programmatic problems, the district received an Accredited-Probation status from TEA in June.

Robert Scott, the commissioner of education, is hopeful that the board of managers and new superintendent can stabilize and improve the district and the education it provides to students.

Scott named Dr. Adrain Johnson as the new superintendent. Johnson previously served as superintendent in the La Marque and Aransas County school districts. He was serving as the Texas Education Agency's associate commissioner for accreditation until this appointment.

Joining Johnson in the district is a three-member board of managers made

up of George H. McShan of Harlingen; Willie Jones, a North Forest ISD resident; and Carolyn B. Williams, a North Forest ISD resident.

McShan, who holds a master's degree in education, is a former president of the National School Board Association. He has been certified as a Master School Board Trustee by the Texas Association of School Boards. A former dean at the Texas State Technical College campus in Harlingen, McShan is currently the senior associate of BWP & Associates, LTD, which is a national superintendent search firm. He is also a provider of continuing education for school boards and has conducted team building training for more than 25 school districts.

Jones has served as the senior pastor of New Mt. Calvary Baptist Church in Houston since 1980. Over that time, his church grew from 150 members to 2,000 members. Jones is a board member of the African Crusade Ministries. He holds a master of divinity degree from Faith Seminary in Tacoma, WA.

Williams has worked for more than 27 years in the home health care industry. She has worked as an administrative assistant for the CHRISTUS Visiting Nurse

Association of Houston since 1992. She has been recognized as the Visiting Nurse Association Star of the Year. Williams holds a bachelor's degree from Prairie View A&M University.

The appointment of the superintendent and three-member board received the necessary pre-clearance from the U.S. Department of Justice. That federal clearance was necessary because TEA's action suspends the authority of the seven member elected school board.

A state takeover of a district is rare in Texas. In the past 15 years, this action has previously only occurred in the Kendleton and Wilmer-Hutchins school districts. The state in recent years also annexed the Asherton Independent School District and the Mirando City Independent School District to a neighboring district. This action also required preclearance from the Justice Department because the annexation included the abolition of that district's board.

The TEA-installed superintendent and board of managers have all the authority granted by law to a superintendent and a school board. The appointed Board of Managers must call a board election within two years of this appointment.

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Division of Communications
Texas Education Agency
1701 North Congress Avenue
Austin, Texas 78701-1494
(512) 463-9000
www.tea.state.tx.us

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HISTORY DAY WINNERS



Texas winners of the National History Day program were honored in a resolution approved by the State Board of Education. Teacher Sharon Wilson (far left) of Falfurrias High School in Brooks County Independent School District was recognized as the recipient of the National History Day's PBS Teacher of Merit. Also recognized were Samantha Lin and Karen Martinez of Earl Rudder Middle School in Northside ISD; Tasnim Mohamed of Eisenhower High School in Aldine ISD; Ian Tuttle of Carroll High School in Corpus Christi ISD; and T. Annie Salinas of Salinas Homeschool in Spring. Representing the Texas State Historical Association (back left) is Steve Cure, Director of Education.