

Texas Education Today

News from the Texas Education Agency



Mike Morath becomes commissioner

On Jan. 4 Mike Morath was administered the oath of office to become the state's Commissioner of Education. Appointed by Gov. Greg Abbott, Morath heads the Texas Education Agency, which oversees pre-kindergarten through high school education in public and charter schools. Read complete story on [page 2](#).



Superintendent certification path widens

School district managers who have not been classroom teachers now have a route to become a certified superintendent under a plan that won the backing of the State Board for Educator Certification. The rule change will be effective by Feb. 28.

[[complete story on page 3](#)]

High School Equivalency options expand

The State Board of Education voted to award contracts to three separate companies to provide high school equivalency assessments. The high school equivalency assessment serves as the basis for the Texas Education Agency to issue the Texas Certificate of High School Equivalency. [[complete story on page 4](#)]

Schools nominated for Blue Ribbon honors

The Texas Education Agency announced on Jan. 13 the nomination of 26 Texas public schools for national 2016 Blue Ribbon Schools recognition. Founded in 1982, Blue Ribbon Schools is a U.S. Department of Education program that recognizes public and private elementary, middle and high schools where students perform at very high levels. [[complete story on page 5](#)]

Nominate top volunteers

The State Board of Education is now accepting nominations for the 2016 Student Heroes and the annual Heroes for Children Award.

[[complete story on page 6](#)]

Inside this Issue

New commissioner named... 2

Superintendent certification... 3

Equivalency assessments 4

Student Performance 4

Blue Ribbon nominees 5

Nominations open 6

Pocket Edition online..... 6

Top educators honored..... 7

SBOE summaries 8

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TEA

Morath becomes Commissioner of Education

On Jan. 4, 2016, Mike Morath was administered the oath of office in Austin to become the state's Commissioner of Education. Appointed by Gov. Greg Abbott in December 2015, Morath heads the Texas Education Agency.

Morath previously served on the Dallas Independent School District board of trustees for more than four years. A strong advocate of public education, the Commissioner graduated from Garland High School in the Garland Independent School District. He earned his Bachelor of Business Administration degree, summa cum laude, from George Washington University in two-and-one-half years.

In a visit with Texas Education Today, Commissioner Morath reflected on his first few weeks on the job.

Q: What's the biggest lesson you've learned in your first few weeks on the job?

"It's not so much a big lesson learned, but rather confirming a long-held belief as I've talked to folks from around the state. First and foremost, there are many people – parents and teachers at the top of that list – who truly care about the quality of education our children receive and who want to make sure we're doing all we can to give every child a chance to succeed. It's heartening to know that while we may differ on approach, we are all committed to the same goal."

Q: What are your priorities as Commissioner?

"My initial priorities revolve around: supporting our teachers, improving the transparency and effectiveness of our accountability system, and ensuring the Texas Education Agency is being of greatest service to school systems around the state. We must have a mindset that focuses on helping to improve performance and outcomes rather than simply focusing on compliance."

Q: How does your experience as a school board member help you in your job as Commissioner?

"I learned so much in my years as a local school board member. Dallas ISD is the second largest school system in our state with about 225 campuses that range from a few low-poverty to a large number of high-poverty campuses. There are different academic focuses, different grade configurations, all kinds of logistical issues, all levels of community engagement issues, and board members have to understand it all. But the primary responsibilities of board members are setting policy and exercising oversight, duties that are fairly similar to that of the Commissioner."

Q: What do people need to know about how you approach your job as Commissioner?

"That every decision I make will be driven by one question: Are we doing what's best for the kids in our state? I think most parents would tell you that when it comes to education, the rules, issues and processes quickly become complex. Public education seems to have a language of its own – and most of that language is in acronyms. Regardless of the many decisions I will have to make in the coming years, I can assure you that doing what's best for our children – and that is every child in all parts of our state – will be the driving force."

Commissioner Morath succeeds outgoing Commissioner of Education Michael Williams. Williams served in the position for more than three years. The Commissioner of Education is a gubernatorial appointment and serves at the pleasure of the Governor. Commissioner Morath's appointment is subject to Senate confirmation during the next legislative session in 2017.

...every decision I make will be driven by one question:
Are we doing what's best for the kids in our state?

Commissioner Mike Morath



SBEC

Pathway to superintendent certification widens

School district managers who have not been classroom teachers now have a route to become a certified superintendent under a plan that won the backing of the State Board for Educator Certification. The rule change will be effective by Feb. 28.

The current certification rule requires a candidate for superintendent certification to hold a principal certification, which in turn requires two years of teaching experience.

The new rule provides a broader pathway by allowing someone to substitute public school district managerial experience for the principal certification. The experience must be at least three years in duration and include supervisory or appraisal duties; district-level planning and coordination of programs, activities, or initiatives; and involve either the creation or maintenance of a budget. The managerial experience must be reviewed and approved by Texas Education Agency staff for a candidate to use this approach.

The application for the new certification pathway is expected to be available in March.

The [new certification rule](#) is available online.

The new rule does not contain a second, more controversial, approach that would have allowed a school board to hire someone with a post-baccalaureate degree as superintendent even if that

person had no public school experience.

With 1,024 independent school districts and 195 charters, there is a constant demand for qualified candidates for the top district job. A survey released by the Texas Association of School Boards and Texas Association of School Administrators in November found that of the 88 districts with a new superintendent in the 2015-2016 school year, 68 percent hired a superintendent with no previous experience in that position.

The 2015-16 survey also found that superintendents have been in their current position for an average of four years and report an average of seven years of total experience as a superintendent in any district.

The State Board of Education also endorsed a number of amendments to rules dealing with educator preparation programs to comply with recent legislative changes. The changes also clarify minimum admission standards for all educator preparation programs, allow for flexibility and ensure consistency among programs in this state.

The updates include:

- Clarifying that the minimum GPA must be from the current accredited higher education institution or the institution from which the most recent college degree was conferred.
- Requiring the overall GPA of each incoming class admitted by a preparation program to be not less than a 3.00 on a four-point scale or the equivalent. Because some certification programs have rolling admissions, an incoming class incorporates those students who enrolled between Sept. 1 and Aug. 31 of each year.
- Clarifying that an applicant is ineligible to register for a pre-admission content examination (PACT) if the applicant had previously been admitted to an educator preparation program.
- Clarifying that those who are seeking an initial certification in mathematics and science at or above grade seven must have 15 semester hours of credit in the subject before being admitted into the preparatory program.
- Maintaining the 12-hour prerequisite in the subject-area content area for initial certification for all areas except math and science above grade seven.
- Clarifying that an applicant to an Educator Preparation Program for initial certification must have either a 2.5 grade point average (GPA) or a 2.5 GPA in the last 60 semester credit hours;

This [new rule](#) is available online.



SBOE

State Board awards contracts for equivalency assessments

The State Board of Education (SBOE) on Jan. 29 voted to award contracts to three separate companies to provide high school equivalency assessments. The high school equivalency assessment serves as the basis for the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to issue the Texas Certificate of High School Equivalency.

The three companies – Data Recognition Corporation, Educational Testing Service and GED Testing Service – responded to a Request for Proposals (RFP) the SBOE issued during its September 2015 meeting. The vote by the State Board marks a shift from the use of a single testing provider to three.

“Members of the board looked at several issues, including the costs of each test battery and whether they are offered online or by paper and pencil, and determined that students should get a say in which assessment they take,” said SBOE Chair Donna Bahorich.

Approximately 53,000 individuals take high school equivalency exams in Texas each year. Currently,

the assessments are administered in computer-based form at testing centers across the state, as well as in correctional facilities that may administer the test on paper or by computer.

The test providers must make available reasonable accommodations that comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act requirement at no additional charge to the test taker.

Submitted proposals were reviewed by an eight-member evaluation team that consisted of TEA staff and reviewers outside the agency who have expertise in the area. Each company presented its qualifications to the SBOE and answered questions from board members during its Committee of the Full Board meeting on Jan. 27.

The Texas Education Code authorizes the SBOE to provide for the administration of high school equivalency examinations. The SBOE has given the TEA the authority to administer the Texas Certificate of High School Equivalency. TEA is the only agency in Texas that is authorized to issue a certificate of high school equivalency.

SBOE

Student Performance



The West High School Junior Historians, West ISD, performed a series of native Czech dances at the January 2016 SBOE meeting in Austin. For more photos, visit www.flickr.com/photos/txedu/sets/.



TEA

Texas schools nominated for national Blue Ribbon honors

The Texas Education Agency announced on Jan. 13 the nomination of 26 Texas public schools for national 2016 Blue Ribbon Schools recognition. Founded in 1982, Blue Ribbon Schools is a U.S. Department of Education program that recognizes public and private elementary, middle and high schools where students perform at very high levels.

The nominated schools in Texas are:



Alief ISD

Alief Early College High School
Kerr High School

Azle ISD

Cross Timbers Elementary School

Belton ISD

Leon Heights Elementary School

Bishop CISD

Petronila Elementary School

Borden County ISD

Borden County School

Brownsville ISD

Brownsville Early College High School

Carrollton-Farmers Branch ISD

Rosemeade Elementary School

Dallas ISD

George Bannerman Dealey International Academy
George Bannerman Dealey Montessori Vanguard
Sch. of Health Professions at Yvonne A. Ewell Townview Ctr

Edinburg CISD

Canterbury Elementary School
Norma Linda Trevino Elementary School

Fort Worth ISD

Young Women's Leadership Academy

Garland ISD

Hillside Academy for Excellence

Houston ISD

Lovett Elementary School
Oak Forest Elementary School

Lubbock ISD

Margaret Talkington School For Young Women Leaders

Malakoff ISD

Tool Elementary School

Miles ISD

Miles Elementary School

Panhandle ISD

Panhandle Elementary School

Pittsburg ISD

Pittsburg Intermediate School

United ISD (Laredo)

Trautmann Elementary School

Van Vleck ISD

Van Vleck Elementary School

Vista Del Futuro Charter School

Vista Del Futuro Charter School (El Paso)

Whitehouse ISD

Gus Winston Cain Elementary School

All schools that have been nominated for the 2016 honor were selected as exemplary high performing schools as measured by state assessments or nationally normed tests. Each school has an economically disadvantaged population of 20 percent or greater.

The nominated schools must now complete a rigorous application process through the U.S. Department of Education. Announcements of the national award winners will be made in September 2016. Schools that receive the award are recognized at the Blue Ribbon Schools awards ceremony in Washington, D.C.



SBOE

Nominations open for two SBOE award programs

The State Board of Education (SBOE) is now accepting nominations for the 2016 Student Heroes and the annual Heroes for Children Award.

Student Heroes

The Student Heroes award recognizes Texas public school students in prekindergarten through high school who do outstanding things to benefit their fellow Texas students.

Award requirements include:

- The service/assistance or good deed must be voluntary and not part of any curriculum, graduation requirements or class or community project.
- The service/assistance or good deed must benefit other students in Texas, either individually or as a whole.
- The benefit may be to students of one campus, a district or a community.

The 15 recipients of the Student Heroes awards will be announced in May. A certificate of recognition will be awarded to the Student Hero by his or her SBOE member. The deadline for nominations is March 11.

Nomination forms and program guidelines are available at tea.texas.gov/About_TEA/News_and_Multimedia/Awards/Student_Heroes/.

Heroes for Children

The Heroes for Children Award recognizes public school volunteers, typically adults, who have been strong advocates for Texas schoolchildren.

The State Board of Education will select 15 Heroes for Children—one person from each of the 15 SBOE districts. Heroes will be honored during the State Board of Education's Sept. 16, 2016 meeting.

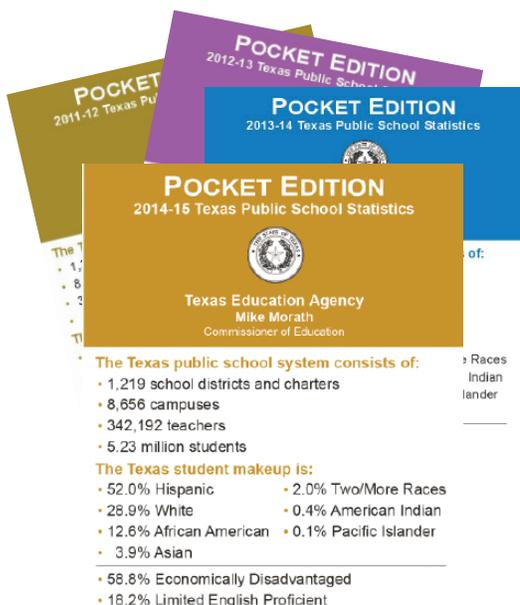
Completed applications must be received by 5 p.m. Friday, May 27. The nomination form is available on the Heroes for Children Award page on the Texas Education Agency website at tea.texas.gov/About_TEA/News_and_Multimedia/Awards/Heroes_for_Children_Award/.

Since its inception in 1994, this program has recognized and celebrated the work of hundreds of active school volunteers.

For more information on both programs, email Heroes@tea.texas.gov or call the Texas Education Agency at (512) 463-9839.

TEA

2014-15 Pocket Edition available online



Produced since 1991, the Pocket Edition reports a variety of state-level statistics on topics including:

- Students
- Accountability Ratings
- Personnel
- Finances
- Test Performance and Participation
- Graduates & College Admissions
- Attendance, Completion, and Dropouts Rates.

The 2014-15 edition of the Pocket Edition may be found online at www.tea.texas.gov/communications/pocket-edition/.



SBOE

Top educators honored at SBOE meeting



Superintendent of the Year

Thomas Ratliff, SBOE District 9, and Mary Ann Whiteker, Texas Superintendent of the Year – Hudson ISD.



Teacher of the Year

Revathi Balakrishnan, Texas Teacher of the Year – Round Rock ISD, Tom Maynard, SBOE District 10, Martha Saucedo, TX Secondary Teacher of the Year – Brady ISD and Martha Dominguez, SBOE District 1.



Presidential Awards for Excellence in Math and Science (PAEMST)

Math PAEMST state finalist

Jo Ann Bilderback (TEA), Penny Smeltzer (Round Rock ISD), Jonathan Claydon (Spring Branch ISD), Patty Hill (Austin ISD), Rebecca Grant (Plano ISD), Darla Emerson (Lovejoy ISD), James Slack (TEA)



Science PAEMST state finalist

Jo Ann Bilderback (TEA), Sheri Cole (Clear Creek ISD), Mark Misage (Eanes ISD), Carol Brown (St. Mary's Hall), Cara Johnson (Allen ISD), Ferleshare Starks (Houston ISD), Irene Pickhardt (TEA)



SBOE

Summaries of SBOE actions can be found online

The State Board of Education met Jan. 27 - 29, 2016. Summaries of actions taken by the SBOE can be found on the Texas Education Agency's website at tea.texas.gov/sboe/actions/.

SBOE

National Career & Technical Education month recognized

The SBOE recognized February as National Career & Technical Education Month. On hand for the recognition were representatives from several of the affiliated student groups. Texas has 1.2 million public school students enrolled in career & technical education classes.



Texas Education Today may be found online at tea.texas.gov/communications/tet.aspx.

State Board of Education

Please visit the SBOE on Facebook and Twitter

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