

SENATE:

The Senate was in session Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of this week conducting routine business. On Wednesday, they recessed until Thursday for first reading and referral of bills to committees.

Next Week: The Senate is observing the President's Day holiday on Monday. The Senate will reconvene at 11:00 a.m. on Tuesday, February 19, 2019.

HOUSE:

The House was in session on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of this week conducting routine business.

Next Week: The House is also observing the President's Day holiday on Monday. The House will reconvene at 11:00 a.m. on Tuesday, February 19, 2019.

PUBLIC EDUCATION:

House Public Education Committee – The House Public Education Committee held meetings on Tuesday and Wednesday this week.

On Tuesday, the House Public Education Committee heard invited testimony on public school finance and the final report of the Texas Commission on Public School Finance from representatives of the Buffalo, Coppell, Dallas, DeKalb, Elgin, Frisco, New Boston, San Antonio, Spring Branch, and Ysletta, ISD's; Texas School Alliance; Texas Association of School Administrators; Texas Urban Council of Superintendents; Uplift Education; Texas American Federation of Teachers; Texas Association of Rural Schools; Texas Taxpayers and Research Association; Texas Business Leadership Council; Texans Advocating for Meaningful Student Assessment; Texas State Teachers Association; South Texas Association of School Boards; Texas School Coalition; Disability Rights Texas; and Moak Casey & Associates;

On Wednesday, the House Public Education Committee heard testimony on the final report of the Texas Commission on Public School Finance from a panel of former chairs of the House Public Education Committee including Kent Grusenforf, Rob Eissler, and Jimmie Don Aycok. Other witnesses included former State Representative Paul Colbert (budget chair of the House Public Education Committee when HB 72 was passed); representatives of the Barbers Hill, Brownsville, Cypress-Fairbanks, Dallas, and Fort Bend ISD's; and representatives of the Dallas Federal Reserve Bank, Educate Texas, Austin Chamber of Commerce, IDEA Public Schools, Greater Houston Partnership, Charter School Association, Texas Education Grantmakers Advocacy Council, Texas Association of School Administrators, Equity Center, ARC of Texas, Intercultural Development Research Association, Texans Care for Children,

Texas Public Policy Foundation, Texas Classroom Teachers Association, Raise Your Hand Texas, Texas Aspires, Center for Public Policy Priorities, and Association of Texas Professional Educators.

Senate Education Committee – On Thursday, the Senate Education Committee held an organizational meeting. The committee heard from Education Commissioner Mike Morath and Justin Porter of Texas Education Agency.

Student Mental Healthcare and Campus Policing - Last Friday, Representative James Talarico (D-Round Rock) filed **HB 1467**, his first bill. Representative Talarico said, “As a former middle school teacher, I have chosen to make school safety the focus of my first bill. HB 1467 would create a ratio of mental health professionals to law enforcement officials in Texas public schools. It will help school districts prioritize a cost-effective, research-based approach to school safety by balancing mental healthcare and campus policing. HB 1467 will require a 4:1 ratio of mental health professionals to law enforcement officials in school districts with more than 5,000 students. The bill also lowers the ratio for smaller districts. This bill will ensure that when our students walk through their campuses they see more counselors than cops. Every expert - from the Department of Education to the Secret Service - agrees that creating positive, healthy school climates is a far more effective campus safety strategy than militarizing our schools. Texas schools are long overdue for greater mental health resources. For example, the National Association of School Psychologists recommends a ratio of 1 school psychologist per 500-700 students. Texas, however, has a ratio of 1 to 2,792 students. Governor Greg Abbott has named mental health services and school safety as emergency items. My bill focuses on the important nexus between these two issues, encouraging school districts to seek out a balance between a law enforcement response and a research-based approach that focuses on student well-being.”

Next Week:

Tuesday, February 19, 2019 - The **House Public Education Committee** will meet at 11:30 a.m. or upon adjournment in E2.036 of the capitol extension to take up:

HB 55 by Mary Gonzalez (D-El Paso) would limit the **pre-kindergarten instructor/student ratio** to 11-1 for classes of 16 students or more or at least one certified teacher or teacher’s aide per class for smaller classes.

HB 102 by Diego Bernal (D-San Antonio) would make several changes to **teacher mentoring** statutes including:

- requiring mentor teachers to demonstrate interpersonal skills, instructional effectiveness, and leadership ability;
- requiring school districts to provide training that includes content related to best mentorship practices to mentor teachers and other district and campus employees that work with classroom teachers;
- requiring mentor teachers to meet with each classroom teacher assigned to the mentor at least once a week for at least 45 minutes;

- requiring school districts to schedule release time or a reduced teaching load for mentor teachers to facilitate mentoring activities;
- instituting a mentor program allotment for school districts that have implemented a mentoring program for classroom teachers who have less than two years of teaching experience to fund the mentoring program and provide stipends for mentor teachers with the amount of the formula determined by the commissioner; and
- requiring teachers that are assigned as a mentor to agree to serve as a mentor teacher for at least two school years.

HB 108 by Mary Gonzalez (D-El Paso) would require the Commissioner of Education to establish a **pilot program** for participating school districts to implement a **digital portfolio method** to assess students in grades three through eight and use student performance under that method as a percentage (50 percent) of a student’s overall performance on assessment instruments for accountability purposes. It would require the Texas Education Agency to contract with a single entity to facilitate the use of the digital portfolio method of assessment by school district participating in the pilot program.

HB 109 by Armando “Mando” Martinez (D-Weslaco) would apply the statute **prohibiting classes on Memorial Day** to open-enrollment charter schools.

HB 111 by Mary Gonzalez (D-El Paso) would require **training for school employees** to include **prevention of sexual abuse**, sex trafficking, and other maltreatment of children with significant cognitive disabilities in both educational and non-educational settings.

HB 116 by Mary Gonzalez (D-El Paso) would require the State Board of Educator Certification to adopt rules specifying what each educator is expected to know and be able to do, particularly regarding **students with disabilities**.

HB 120 by Mary Gonzalez (D-El Paso) would exempt **students with limited English proficiency** from state-administered assessment instruments for up to two years (instead of one year) after initial enrollment in a school in the United States.

HB 128 by Gina Hinojosa (D-Austin) would require school districts to provide parents with a copy of the results of the **physical fitness assessment** of the parent’s child by the last day of the school year.

HB 134 by Valoree Swanson (R-Spring) would require **ballot propositions authorizing the issuance of bonds** to contain only one project or category of expenditure.

HB 165 by Diego Bernal (D-San Antonio) would allow **special education students** to earn an **endorsement** on the student’s transcript by successfully completing curriculum and endorsement requirements identified by the State Board of Education, with or without modification by the student’s admission, review, and dismissal committee.

TAX:

Senate Property Tax Committee – On Monday, the Senate Property Tax Committee took up:

SB 2 by Paul Bettencourt (R-Houston), which would be the **Property Tax Reform & Relief Act of 2019**. The committee discussed the bill and adopted 12 amendments before voting the SB 2 out of committee. The amendments will be rolled into a committee substitute. The following summary of the amendment was provided by Texas Taxpayers and Research Association. The amendments would:

1. allow “small taxing units” as defined in the bill to call local elections to reduce their rollback tax threshold from 8 percent to 2.5 percent;
2. provide that tax rates must be approved by the governing bodies of taxing units other than school districts, 71 days before the November uniform election date, if the governing body adopts a tax rate that exceeds the rollback tax rate;
3. change the term “rollback tax rate” to “voter-approved tax rate”;
4. permit chief appraisers to submit certified estimates of value to taxing units if appraisal review boards do not complete hearing protests by July 20;
5. require one public hearing on proposed tax rates, rather than two, and clarify publication requirements;
6. prohibit governing bodies of taxing units from reducing first responder compensation based on reductions in the rollback tax rate;
7. delete proposed date changes to the property tax calendar so that the current schedule for providing notices of appraised value, protesting values, and completing appraisal rolls is retained;
8. prohibit value increases as a result of binding arbitration and litigation, as well as appraisal review board protests;
9. specify the appraisal manuals that appraisal districts must use to comply with generally accepted appraisal methods and techniques;
10. provide that protests may not be heard by appraisal review board special panels unless requested or consented to by the property owner or agent;
11. provide that appraisal review board orders determining protest must list land and improvements separately; and
12. limit discovery that appraisal districts may request in litigation concerning value.

Senator Juan "Chuy" Hinojosa (D-McAllen), the only Democrat on the committee, voted “present-not-voting” on the motion to report SB 2 out of the committee favorably. Senator Hinojosa explained his vote saying, “While I support 97.5 percent of this bill, I cannot support the other 2.5 percent. Specifically, I cannot support the 2.5 percent ‘voter-approved rate’ currently in SB 2. While the existing 8 percent rate is too high, the 2.5 percent rate is too low and would jeopardize the ability of local governments to provide crucial services to their communities. There is no doubt that property tax appraisals are increasing faster than our paychecks. Property taxpayers need relief. However, we should find a balanced approach that does not tie the hands of our local elected officials and hinder their ability to provide basic services and public safety. The largest budget expenditure by local governments is public safety. On average, 60 percent of their budget supports our police officers and firefighters. With a 2.5

percent cap, SB 2 could hinder our local governments' ability to keep our communities safe and to fund other necessary services and infrastructure. Instead of applying a one-size-fits-all approach to our vast state, to provide true property tax relief we should focus more on school finance reform. School taxes are the largest portion of our property tax bill. We should also eliminate unfunded mandates by the state. I look forward to continuing to work with my colleagues to find consensus on a fair and equitable solution that improves the property tax and appraisal process without hindering our local communities' ability to fund public safety, education, indigent health care, and the infrastructure needed to continue Texas' prosperity."

House Ways & Means Committee - On Wednesday, the House Ways & Means Committee held an organizational meeting. Chairman Dustin Burrows (R-Lubbock) introduced Jimmy Skipton, the Committee Director and Paige Higerd, the Committee Clerk. Comptroller Glenn Hegar discussed his biennial revenue estimate that indicates that the state will have \$119.2 billion in available revenue for the 2020-2021 biennium. He said the growth rate in the Texas economy has moderated but the economy is continuing to grow. He mentioned factors that could affect his final revenue estimate including the price of oil, higher interest rates, and uncertainty about global trade. Obligations that will have to be met through a supplemental bill will reduce the revenue estimate by approximately \$2.5 billion. Other employees of the comptroller's office discussed the franchise tax, sales and use taxes, motor vehicle sales and rental taxes, severance taxes, insurance premium and maintenance taxes, mixed beverage taxes, tobacco taxes, hotel taxes, motor fuels taxes and the property tax. Representatives of the Legislative Budget Board gave an overview of state revenue by source, current biennium expenditures by state agency categories, the constitutional spending limit, the Economic Stabilization Fund, the Foundation School Program, Medicaid, child protective services, behavioral health, school safety, transportation, retirement and health benefits, the driver's license program, border security, higher education, adult criminal justice and judicial salaries. *Note: The committee had invited Dale Craymer of Texas Taxpayers and Research Association and Dick Lavine of the Center for Public Policy Priorities to testify, but Chairman Burrows announced that their testimony will be moved to next week.*