

The 80th session of the Texas Legislature ended at midnight May 28th. One of the most contentious in history, legislators still managed to pass some legislation. Over 6,000 bills were filed, not including resolutions. Roughly 24% of the bills filed became law, a slight decrease in the passing percentage in recent years.

A \$152.5 billion budget was approved. With claims that the budget was bloated with more than \$100 million in spending designed to secure loyalty to Speaker Tom Craddick who has been the subject of repeated attempts to unseat him, the budget was nevertheless passed with a large majority.

The \$152.5 billion state budget is the largest of three major spending bills considered this session. Lawmakers approved \$14.2 billion two-year measure to subsidize local school property tax relief and \$1.8 billion in improvements to CHIP, the Children's Health Insurance Program. CHIP provides health coverage to working poor families. The changes to the CHIP program would allow most families to apply once a year, rather than every 6 months. The state would verify eligibility for families with incomes above 185% of poverty level. The 3 month waiting period for new enrollees was also eliminated.

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES:

All voucher legislation died this session, a victory for Texas PTA.

The School Nutrition policy was not codified, but newly elected Agriculture Commissioner Todd Staples has agreed to work with TX PTA and others to continue to improve this critical program.

The Clean School Bus Program is funded for the next biennium at \$7.5 million. Districts will be able to apply for funds to retrofit their buses.

The Tobacco Cessation and Prevention programs are funded for the next biennium at \$10 million and a grant process created so that cities may apply for funding.

The Booster Seat bill died this session in the waning hours of the session. In an earlier email the details of that 11th hour defeat were explained.

While the statewide smoke-free legislation died this session the coalition of which Texas PTA is a member does not consider this a failure. An endeavor of this magnitude generally takes 2-3 sessions to

accomplish. This session was largely spent educating members and developing a legislative leadership team.

The AED Bill will become law. This bill will mandate training in CPR and use of AEDs by campus personnel and will require districts to have AEDs at UIL athletic events on a campus.

OTHER ISSUES OF INTEREST TO TEXAS PTA:

SCHOOL BUS IDLING: The School Bus Idling Bill was vetoed by Gov. Perry. It requires school buses to be turned off when students are loading and unloading at schools or school functions except when being warmed up for use.

OTHER NUTRITION ISSUES: \$1.3 million for school cafeteria child nutrition inspection; \$800k for the Governor's Physical Fitness Council for grants to local communities to promote wellness and physical activity across the state; \$20 million for grants to school districts for their support of in-school PE fitness programs in grades 6-8.

SEAT BELTS: The Seat Belts on Buses Bill will become law. School districts will need to begin buying buses with seat belts 9.10 and will only be able to charter buses with seat belts beginning in 9.11. There is no funding mechanism in the bill, although donations will be allowed.

INSTRUCTION IN JUVENILE FACILITIES: Several bills dealing with instruction for students in juvenile facilities and district alternative educational placements will become law.

STEROID TESTING: Lawmakers approved the largest student athlete testing program in the country. High school athletes will now have to agree not to use steroids and to submit to random testing for steroid use.

PE: Requires at least 30 minutes of vigorous physical activity a day for grade school students to combat childhood obesity

PLEDGE: The Texas pledge of allegiance will note the state is not only indivisible, but "under God" as well.

BIBLE CLASSES: High schools will be able to offer elective Bible courses. And students who express their religious faith in their classwork or on the playground won't be punished or penalized.

HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION: A law to increase the number of high school graduates in Texas public schools by explicitly authorizing diploma-seeking students who are at least 21 years of age but under 26 years of age be admitted to public schools and allowing districts to receive state-funding for such students. This new law seeks to reduce drop-out rates by lowering the attendance requirements necessary to obtain class credit, provided that the instructional requirements of the class are met.

HIGHER ED: The House defeated attempts to dilute the Top 10% Law, the law that allows students who graduate in the top 10% of their class in high school to automatically be accepted to state colleges and universities. Concerns over the percentage of the freshman class that are admitted through this program prompted this session's efforts to adjust the policy.

TEACHER RETIREMENT PROGRAM: A one-time 13th check was authorized for retired teachers, paid for by the state and by active teachers through their contributions. The check is capped at \$2,400 and will be issued in 2007 if there is enough money to pay for it.

FINAL EXAMS: Lawmakers came up with new mandated tests for high school students. End-of-course exams will count for 15 percent of students' grades, and they must get a certain number of points from the exams to get their high school diploma. The exams will replace the TAKS tests.

If there is something you were tracking that is not mentioned in this wrap up or in the attached document on other bills of interest to Texas PTA, please do not hesitate to contact my office and we'll do the research and get you a report.

Thank you for the opportunity to represent Texas PTA before the Texas Legislature. It was a privilege. Your efforts, whether in the form of capitol visits, testimony, calls or faxes, made a difference. Texas PTA is a powerful voice, one that is thoughtful and reasoned. As time goes on I believe you will see your influence increase.