



GENE WU

STATE REPRESENTATIVE ★ DISTRICT 137



Issue 19

August 2016

NEWSLETTER

BACK TO SCHOOL!

This week, we wish the best of luck to school children, parents, teachers, and staff as they begin another school year.

With each new beginning of the school year, we see stories of school kids who cannot afford the supplies needed to get the most out of their education. Similarly, we hear of teachers spending money out of their own pockets to provide school supplies for their students and needed supplies for their own classroom. While teachers have been spending the past two weeks to gear up for school, Representative Wu has been working with schools in the Gulfton neighborhood to ensure that teachers and students are equipped to succeed this school year. This year, the following contributions were made to Pilgrim, Cunningham, Rodriguez, and Benavidez Elementary Schools in District 137:



- 200 small storage bins for teachers to organize their classrooms with.
- 100 backpacks full of school supplies for needy students.
- \$200 worth of additional school supplies to students and visitors at recent back-to-school events.

Drive Safely

Please be aware of school zones, watch for children who are walking to and from school or waiting for buses, and drive carefully.



State law requires that approaching drivers stop when a bus is stopped and operating a visual signal – either red flashing lights or a stop sign. Drivers should not proceed until the school bus resumes motion; the driver is signaled by the bus driver to proceed; or the visual signal is no longer activated.

Drivers who illegally pass school buses face fines up to \$1,250 for a first offense.

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Education Listening Tour 2016

Constituents have repeatedly stressed the importance of improving educational opportunities and outcomes throughout Southwest Houston. For our local economy to be productive and our neighborhoods to remain vibrant, there is no way to achieve these goals without investing in education at all levels.

As the school year ramps up and the next legislative session rapidly approaches, Representative Wu has been actively seeking input from local area educators and leaders to identify ways that the legislature can help. Direct input from educators and school leaders is important as the legislature will contend with issues such as:

- Identifying ways to increase our investment in education at a time when revenue for the state tightens.
- Continuing and/or expanding grants for Pre-Kindergarten programs that commit to meeting the high standards for educating our most vulnerable children.
- Addressing school finance funding and formulas that result in the overwhelming majority of school districts - such as Houston ISD - paying more in local taxes, yet keeping fewer of those dollars in their school district.
- Helping Community Colleges meet the state's new goal of seeing 60% of Texans between the ages of 25 and 34 earning a college degree or professional certification.

With these issues in mind, Representative Wu met with the following educators and school leaders during the last month.



H.D. Chambers - Superintendent, Alief ISD

Alief ISD serves over 46,000 students in Southwest Harris County and presently provides Pre-Kindergarten for only half a day. Under Chambers' leadership, Alief ISD is taking steps to improve both the quality and opportunity for full-day Pre-K. Alief ISD recent passed a school bond that adds funding for new pre-K facilities that will help them transition to a full-day program. The district has also been awarded pre-K grant to enhance the training and preparation of Pre-K teachers. Superintendent Chambers updated Representative Wu on the challenges faced by diverse school districts and stated his desire to see the pre-K grants continued.

Greg Meyers & Michael Lunceford - Trustees, Houston ISD School Board

Under Texas' current school funding formulas, Houston ISD is set to become the largest school district to face what is called "recapture." This occurs when the property wealth in a school district meets a threshold for being considered a "wealthy" school district and must give some of their tax dollars to the state so that they can provide those funds to "poor" districts. While Houston ISD is considered "property rich", Houston ISD educates a large number of at-risk students that cost more to educate. Meanwhile, many of the funding formulas used by the state to fund school have not been updated since the 1980s. Trustees Meyers and Lunceford updated Representative Wu on the negative impact of this situation and the need to address it during the next legislative session.



Kristina Troutman - Principal, Gabriela Mistral Early Childhood Center

Gabriela Mistral Early Childhood Center has the distinction of being a one-year school that serves their community for many more years after their students leave. Representative Wu met with Principal Troutman and teachers to get their feedback on how the state can better provide for our students at the first step of their educational journey. Early childhood education has been a priority for Representative Wu every legislative session. Houston ISD will see \$9 million in new funds for pre-K as a result of grants provided by House Bill 4 in the last legislative session. While this goes a long way toward improving teacher quality and improving literacy programs, all school districts are limited in what they can spend the money on due to the temporary nature of the grant program.



Representative Wu visits with students and education professionals at Gabriela Mistral Early Childhood Center in District 137.

Cesar Maldonado - Chancellor, Houston Community College



We routinely celebrate high school graduates who go on to the finest universities in Texas and beyond. But the majority of high school graduates in Texas go to Community Colleges. If Texas is to sustain a growing economy, we have no choice but to graduate more community college students into four-year institutes and earning either a college degree or a professional certificate. Chancellor Maldonado updated Representative Wu on steps Houston Community College is taking to improve the quality of education received by students as well as improve transferability of college credits.

Mark DiBella - C.E.O., YES Prep



Southwest Houston is home to the most diverse population in the entire state. Educating a diverse population requires a multitude of approaches toward education and opportunities for children to seek out the best fit for them. I'm proud of the fact that District 137 is the (unofficial) Charter School Capitol of Texas due to the large number of charter schools located in the area. YES Prep has a lengthy track record of helping economically disadvantaged students succeed prepare for college. Charter schools still face challenges in meeting the demand for access to high-quality schools and the legislature will undoubtedly look for ways to help expand these opportunities.



Christine Aboud - Principal, St. Michael's Learning Academy

St. Michael's Learning Academy is a unique private school located in District 137. Although it is a private school, they partner with school districts throughout the greater Houston area on dropout recovery programs that help at-risk students get back on track for graduation. Principal Aboud updated Representative Wu on some of the obstacles that unnecessarily limit school districts' ability to work with private schools in this manner.

HISD Student Congress Education Summit

On August 2nd, the Houston ISD Student Congress hosted "Our Shared Future", a student-led education summit. Representative Wu joined 50 round-table panelists, including fellow elected officials, business leaders, non-profit leaders, professors, educators, and community advocates. Brainstorming alongside students, panelists made commitments towards the future of the 5 million Texas public schoolchildren.

Representative Wu committed to raising the juvenile jurisdiction age and identifying other juvenile issues that can be used to end the school to prison pipeline. You can view other panelist commitments [here](#).



PlazAmericas Back to School Event

We were very proud to be a part of the 8th Annual Back to School Drive, Health Fair, and Business Expo at PlazAmericas. Every year since its inception, multiple organizations come together to help thousands of families prepare for the school year. We thank every business, organization, sponsor and volunteer for helping make this year a success - especially La Rosa Family Services, the Houston Credit Union, the Lions Club International Foundation, PlazAmericas Mall, and the 2016 Back to School Chair, Nelvin Joseph Adriatico.



New Houston ISD Superintendent

On August 18, Houston ISD named Richard Carranza as their new Superintendent of Schools. Carranza comes to Houston after serving as Superintendent of the San Francisco Unified School District since 2012. Carranza was approved unanimously by the Houston ISD Board of Trustees and brings a wealth of experience in the same values needed to see Houston ISD schools grow. Carranza has already begun the school year by working toward his goal of visiting every HISD school. Representative Wu welcomes Carranza to Houston and looks forward to partnering with the district as we work to build world class schools in Southwest Houston. Read more on the decision from HISD [here](#).



Texas Medicaid Helps Fight Zika

On August 15th, Texas became the first state to issue a standing order for mosquito repellent prescriptions for women on Medicaid between the ages of 10 and 45 or pregnant. Eligible women no longer need to call or visit their doctor for a prescription, but can go straight to their pharmacist, ensuring that mosquito repellent is as easily and widely available as possible to slow the spread of the Zika virus.



Women in the Medicaid, CHIP, CHIP-Perinate, Healthy Texas Women, or Family Planning programs are covered for up to two cans per month through October 31st. Additionally, the following Zika-related items are covered under current Texas Medicaid benefits: family planning services, contraceptives, diagnostic testing, targeted case management, physical therapy, long term services and support, acetaminophen and oral electrolytes for Zika symptoms, and potential coverage for additional ultrasounds for pregnant women.



Zika can cause severe birth defects in unborn children whose mothers are infected while pregnant. The best way to stay protected from Zika is to avoid mosquito bites. There is currently no vaccine to prevent the disease or drugs to treat it, making it essential that Texans use mosquito repellent to prevent infection. For more on Zika in Texas, visit www.texaszika.org.

Houston Becomes An Official 'Welcoming City'

Neighborhood Centers, in partnership with the City of Houston and the Houston Immigration Legal Services Collaborative, announced a new initiative that will make Houston an official welcoming city. The initiative brings local government, business, and civil society leaders together to develop multi-sector strategic plans for welcoming and integrating new Americans.

Research shows that inclusive policies towards immigrants helps our economy thrive. [A recent report by the New American Economy](#) highlights the contributions of immigrants in Texas.

Rep. Wu threw his support behind this initiative, touching on his own immigrant origins and pointing out the demographics of District 137, home to a large number of immigrant business owners and residents.



Sharpstown CERT Training: September 13 - November 1, 2016

The [Community Emergency Response Team \(CERT\)](#) program is a disaster volunteer program that trains individuals in basic disaster response skills. Using training learned in the classroom and during exercises, CERT volunteers can assist others in their community following a disaster when professional responders are not immediately available to help. CERT volunteers are also encouraged to support emergency response agencies by taking an active role in emergency preparedness projects.

A [Sharpstown area training](#) will take place at the HPD Midwest Patrol Station at 7277 Regency Square, Houston, TX 77036. Training is free and open to the public. Classes will be held on Tuesday evenings from 6:00 – 9:00 pm beginning September 13 and ending November 1, 2016.



**Sharpstown Area CERT Training
Tuesday, September 13th
6:00 PM - 9:00 PM
HPD Midwest Patrol Station
7277 Regency Square, Houston, TX 77036**

To register contact Charmaine LeBlanc at cleblanc@libertyoffice.com or 281-687-1323.