

Giovanni's Journal

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“The Education Issue”

Texas House passes budget for the 2016-2017 biennium, dedicates money to FSP, TRS, instructional materials & technology

After 18 hours of deliberation, the House passed the estimated budget for the 2016-17 Biennium. The total budget allocated for Education is \$76,388.9 million out of the entire budget, \$202.4 billion. With all that money, you're probably wondering what the money funds.

For all funds, the methods of finance include: General Revenue (66.7%), General Revenue-Dedicated (3.57%), Federal (13.67%), and Other Funds (16.07%). Over all, education funds saw an increase of 3.3% since the 2014-15 budget.

Part of the increase can be attributed to the projected increases in revenues from the Property Tax Relief Fund and from recapture payments, both of which are classified as Other Funds.

The majority of Public Education, which consists of 68.22% of the education budget, goes towards state aid for school districts and charter schools through the Foundation School Program (FSP) system. Non-FSP programs and administration at the Texas Education Agency see a decrease in their funding primarily due to the exclusion of the one-time \$330 million transition aid to school districts (see Senate Bill 1458, 83rd Legislature, 2013). Instructional materials and technology funding did see a \$102.9 million increase compared to the 2014-15 biennium. The majority of Higher Education funding consists of formula funding to

the General Academic Institutions, Lamar State Colleges, Texas State Technical Colleges, Health-Related Institutions, and the Public and Community Colleges.

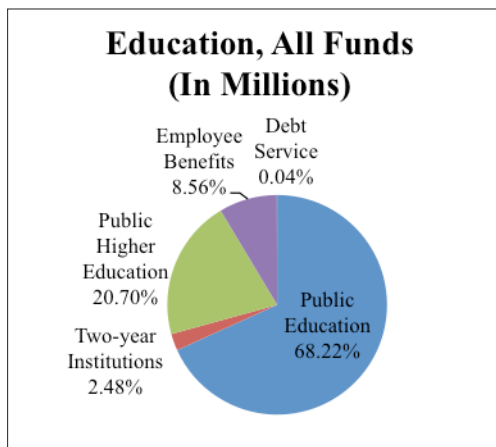
Funding for Higher Education also sees

a \$142.1 million increase from the General Revenue Fund appropriations to the Higher Education Coordinating Board for the Texas Research Incentive Program. This will provide research funding for the eight emerging research universities in the state.

Under Em-

ployee Benefits, the Teacher Retirement System funding consists of state contributions for retirement and health care benefits for employees of public schools, higher educations, and retirees. TRS funding was increased from the 2014-15 expenditures to \$4,346.8 million in the 2016-17 biennium. This level of funding will maintain the current state contribution rate for retirement of 6.8% of active member payroll and 1.0% for retiree health. This is only a small portion of what the budget allocates funding for under the Education budget and an even smaller portion of the overall budget estimates.

For more information about the 2016-17 Biennium Budget Estimates, check out: (http://www.lbb.state.tx.us/Documents/Publications/Bill_Summary/2043_Summary_LBE_House_2016-17.pdf).



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A-F School Rating System Moves Through Senate

A specific issue in education I'd like to highlight is the "A-F System." The A-F system gives schools a letter grade rating based on their performance. The intent of this system is to give parents a reliable and easy-to-understand assessment of their children's schools. Proponents say it encourages accountability in schools and prevents the mediocre performance that the current system promotes. Currently, the system marks Texas schools on a spectrum from "exemplary" down to "unacceptable." In contrast to the A-F system which gives a definitive rating, the current system can be seen by some as ambiguous on how the schools are evaluated and provides an easy way to mask performance.

Proponents believe adopting an A-F system would prevent low rating schools from hiding behind a vague rating. The hope of the new system is to continue growth in the amount of career and college-ready high school graduates, and keep a competitive economic edge in the future.

Those who oppose the bill fear it would stigmatize low-income schools, making it difficult for them to retain good teachers and top-performing students. They do not believe legislation would help the struggling schools across Texas. Opponents think this new system would only serve to re-label the problem instead of help solve it.

Bill Hammond, president and CEO of the Texas Association of Business, believes that not adopting the new system will keep Texas out of the competition necessary to maintain a strong business climate and economy.

There are currently 10 states across the

country who have adopted an A-F system. Florida was the first state to adopt the system, and former Gov. Jeb Bush says it has bettered public schools through the reward attachment concept. Moving from an F to a D is a clear improvement, therefore rewarding the improvement with a superior grade. Oklahoma is one of the latest states to adopt the system, and the former Florida Education Com-



At the public education finance press conference with Chairman Aycock and other representatives on March 25.

missioner Eric Smith is convinced the decision will show statewide impact. Senate Bill 6, authored by Senator Larry Taylor, passed on its third reading. With this bill, the new A-F system would take effect in the 2017-2018 school year.

High School Seniors: Apply For These Scholarships!

The Texas Armed Forces Scholarship

The Texas Armed Services Scholarship has been created to assist promising students from throughout the state who are committed to education and service. It encourages young leaders to participate in the Texas Guard, Army National Guard, or Air National Guard, or to become commissioned officers in the United States armed services.

The scholarship will provide recipients with up to \$10,000 per academic year for up to four years (out of the five years allowed for graduation) toward undergraduate education at any Texas university with an active ROTC program.

To be eligible, a student must meet academic criteria including:

- Be on track to graduate high school in a Distinguished Achievement Program or International Baccalaureate program
- A GPA of 3.0 or higher
- Ranked in the top third of their graduating class
- SAT score of 1590 or ACT score of 23

Additional details and criteria can be found at: <http://www.texas-armedservicescholarships.com/>.

High School seniors, please contact Amanda Calongne at amanda.calongne@house.state.tx.us for nomination requirements. Please submit all materials by May 1, 2015.

Texas Hospitality Association Underage Drinking Scholarship

The Texas Hospitality Association (THA) is fighting underage drinking and promoting alcohol responsibility through a statewide poster contest that will award four high school seniors \$10,000 in educational scholarships.

A \$5,000 scholarship will be awarded to the Texas high school senior who submits the best poster conveying the message or theme: "If you are under 21, it's illegal to consume or purchase alcoholic beverages in Texas."

A \$2,500 scholarship will go to the 2nd place winner, \$1,500 for 3rd, and \$1,000 for 4th. The winning posters will be used in a statewide alcohol awareness campaign.

The contest is open to all 2015 graduating Texas high school seniors. Artwork must be an original design and may be electronically generated, hand drawn or photographed. Students have until May 1 to submit their poster to THA. For more information visit www.TexasHospitalityAssociation.com.

Giovanni's Journal is an official publication of State Representative Giovanni Capriglione, Texas House of Representatives District 98



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