Senate Finance discusses public education funding

Senators on the Senate Finance Committee met Monday to discuss Article III of the state budget, which deals with public education. They received updates from the Legislative Budget Board and Commissioner of Education Mike Morath on public school funding. Both provided presentations to the committee, and those presentations are available here: TEA presentation and LBB Presentation.

Senators spent a lot of time talking about the funds the state has already directed towards schools and how much more they intend to appropriate this session for tax compression, teacher compensation, and school safety. Commissioner Morath told the committee that his recommendation for new funding would be a mix of discretionary funding and funding directed to programs with proven positive impact on student success.

SB 1 (Huffman), as introduced, appropriates $332.9 billion in All Funds and $151.6 billion in General Revenue for the state budget. It appropriates $4.85 billion for an increase in public education funding, $3.5 billion for new property tax reduction, $1 billion for education savings account vouchers, and $400 million for increased school safety funding. The $4.85 billion in new education funding has initially been earmarked for teacher compensation through $4.1 billion for raises and $750 million to boost the teacher incentive allotment. The $400 million for school safety funding is intended to double the $10/student and $15,000/campus safety allotments. The bill also funds enrollment growth and an increase in the Golden Penny Yield. SB 1 also includes $450 million in additional funding for TRS-ActiveCare to contain healthcare premium increases for teachers.

Several school trustees and administrators, including Boerne ISD Trustee Rich Sena and Brownsville ISD Trustee Daniela Lopez Valdez, testified before the committee on behalf of their communities, urging legislators to help districts struggling amid rising inflation and increasing costs of education. Several witnesses asked specifically for additional support for special education services, as well.

Watch the hearing.

Senate Local Government to consider property tax reduction

The Senate Local Government Committee will meet at 8:30 a.m. on Tuesday (Feb. 11) to consider the following bills:

SB 4 (Bettencourt) would increase the residential homestead exemption from school district taxes. The bill would provide state funds to school districts to offset the loss of tax revenue.

SJR 2 (Bettencourt) would authorize the constitutional amendment necessary to increase the residential homestead exemption proposed SB 4.

Oral testimony will be limited to two minutes, and instructions for providing written testimony or registering on the bill are included in the online posting.