House, Senate find compromise on school funding bill

Legislators across the Capitol on Wednesday were talking about a negotiated compromise on HB 2, the school funding bill. Under the compromise, the Legislature will appropriate about $8.5 billion for public schools. While the bill language is not available and certainly not final, a one-pager was distributed by legislative staff that highlighted the following features of the bill:

- $4.2 billion for teacher compensation, including the Teacher Incentive Allotment
- $500 million for non-administrative staff pay raises
- $850 million increase for special education
- $1.3 billion for a new fixed cost allotment to help pay for health insurance premiums, utilities, etc.
- $430 million in additional school safety funding
- $200 million for charter facilities
- $300 million for an increase to the small- and mid-size school allotment
- $135 million for teacher preparation and certification initiatives
- Ties the basic allotment to property value growth going forward

The Senate must consider and pass the bill, then the House must concur in Senate amendments or call for a conference committee to negotiate further changes (though the latter option is unlikely given the announced compromise). Once the House approves the negotiated bill, HB 2 goes to the governor for his signature.

House Pub Ed votes out bills

The House Public Education Committee held two formal meetings on Wednesday to vote out the following bills, which now head to the full House:

SB 10 (King) requires elementary and secondary schools to display in each classroom a durable poster or framed copy of the Ten Commandments as presented in the bill. Schools without posters in each classroom must either accept a gift of posters or purchase the posters. This bill sustained a point of order on the House floor, was recommitted to the House Public Education Committee, and voted out again later the same day.

SB 12 (Creighton) is a broad parental rights bill that includes several provisions. The bill prohibits public schools or state agencies from infringing on parental rights unless it's necessary to further compelling state interest or narrowly tailored using the least restrictive means to achieve that interest. The bill requires districts to complete facility usage reports and allows students to transfer to any Texas public school unless the receiving school is full, the child has a history of criminal behavior or disciplinary problems outlined in district policy regarding accepting transfers, or the transfer would violate a court-ordered desegregation plan. The bill also prohibits public schools (ISDs and charters) from assigning diversity, equity, and inclusion duties to anyone and prohibits district employees, contractors, or volunteers from engaging in DEI duties. SB 12 prohibits public schools (ISDs and charters) from withholding information from parents regarding their children unless sharing said information violates a law, such as FERPA. School boards would also need to develop a plan for parental engagement in the district and provide parents with information (using a form developed by TEA) about parental rights and options. The committee substitute also states that districts must notify employees of changes and that they may only enforce disciplinary actions against employees who intentionally or knowingly violate the provisions of the bill. The committee sub also prohibits student clubs focused only on sexual orientation or gender identity and parental permission is required for participation in student groups. Senators amended the bill on the floor to prohibit districts from requiring parents to pay legal fees for grievances until they reach the TEA level. A second and third amendment apply school health advisory committee requirements to charter schools and districts of innovation.

SB 204 (Paxton) requires school board trustees to take training on parental rights created by the SBOE and would also require TEA to create and post online a handbook on parental rights.

SB 570 (Bettencourt) requires each school district to establish and implement an attendance policy to inform parents and students at the beginning of the school year about the importance of attending school. The attendance policy must inform parents and students about the benefits and possible detriments of not attending school, including any criminal repercussions. SB 570 also requires the school to adopt a notification system to notify parents whenever there is an excused or unexcused absence via text, email, or first-class mail. The bill requires a meeting between a parent of a student enrolled in the district or school with a school counselor, principal, or appropriate administrator at the school when a student becomes at risk of being truant. If the parent fails to attend the meeting, then a school attendance officer can make a home visit or contact the parent to investigate the student's behavior and living conditions to report back to the appropriate staff member at the school. SB 570 requires schools to establish guidelines to identify students in need of additional support and refer the student to in-school or out-of-school services aimed at addressing their failure to attend school regularly.

SB 735 (Menéndez) requires school districts to submit reports to the TEA regarding holocaust remembrance week instruction. The bill also creates a grant program to provide support for holocaust remembrance week education and a pilot program to include information on providing holocaust remembrance week education in educator prep programs.

SB 747 (King) relates to bullying and cyberbullying in public schools, particularly focusing on incidents involving the production or distribution of intimate visual material, including those created using AI. The bill mandates the development of comprehensive policies and educational programs to prevent and respond to such incidents, emphasizing student awareness, reporting mechanisms, and the legal and social consequences of these actions.

SB 784 (King) allows students of peace officers to transfer to any school district without tuition.

SB 1207 (King) requires the SBOE to include information related to adoption in the parenting and paternity awareness program currently required in the high school health curriculum.

SB 1396 (Hall) prohibits the SBOE from adopting standards derived from national standards and prohibits districts from selecting human sexuality curriculum materials based on these standards.

SB 1447 (Menéndez) would require TEA to adopt standards for permissible electronic devices and software apps that provide for exceptions to allow a student with a disability, in accordance with their IEP or 504 plan, to use reasonable accommodations or assistive technology devices or software apps that might otherwise not be permissible.

SB 1962 (Bettencourt) relating to public school accountability and actions and other proceedings challenging the operations of the public school system.

SB 2392 (King) expands the list of conduct for which reporting is required to include misconduct related to sexual coercion, human trafficking, obscenity, and child pornography, among others. Additionally, the bill makes the provision excepting a principal from reporting if the principal "reasonably believes that the activity does not constitute a criminal offense" inapplicable to sexual offenses. SB 2392 also requires that the principal report misconduct immediately upon, or not later than 72 hours after, becoming aware of it.

SB 2540 (Nichols) requires an agreement between two school districts to adjust a common boundary to include any terms that will continue to apply to the real property following transfer. The agreement would need to include an explanation of the rights and responsibilities of each district related to the agreement.

SB 875 (Birdwell) creates a class A misdemeanor for superintendents and trustees who engage in electioneering to include use of district email.

Senate Ed continues to hear House bills

The Senate Education K-16 Committee will meet at 9:45 a.m. on May 22 to consider the following bills related to public education:

HB 4 (Buckley/Bettencourt) eliminates the STAAR test and implements through-year testing with three tests per year with results provided within 24 hours for grades 3 through 8. The bill limits testing to those subjects required by federal law but still allows districts to administer state-developed U.S. History and eighth-grade social studies exams. HB 4 also adds optional accountability indicators for grades 3 through 8. Read more about the bill as it left the House. https://t.e2ma.net/message/5ohoqf/xeszfb

HB 4687 (Gervin-Hawkins/Bettencourt) extends immunity from liability currently provided to districts to charter school campuses, programs, and their governing bodies.

HB 4623 (Little/Paxton) makes an independent school district or open-enrollment charter school liable for an act or omission that is committed by a professional school employee against a student enrolled in the district or charter school that is sexual misconduct or failure to report suspected child abuse or neglect.

HB 824 (Jones, J./Middleton) requires the SBOE to adopt social studies curriculum standards that address the role of state and local governmental officials, state voting processes and election laws, eligibility requirements to run for office, Robert's Rules of Order; and the elected officials who represent students at each level of government.

HB 20 (Gates/Schwertner) creates the Applied Sciences Pathway Program to provide opportunities for students to concurrently earn high school diplomas and certificates from institutions of higher education. The bill requires the commissioner to approve partnerships between public schools and institutions of higher education to provide courses that lead to a high school diploma and completion of a certificate program with a successful job placement rate in high-wage, high-growth jobs such as robotics, plumbing and pipe fitting, electrical, welding, carpentry, electronics technology, etc.

HB 4236 (Martinez Fischer/Bettencourt) establishes a school district property value study task force to examine the use and effect of the public school district property value study conducted by the comptroller of public accounts under state law and to develop recommendations on the elimination or replacement of that study and alternative methods

by which the purpose of the study may be accomplished.

HB 2243 (Oliverson/Creighton) creates the Texas Commission on Teacher Job Satisfaction and Retention to develop and make recommendations for improving teacher job satisfaction and retention.

HB 610 (Leo Wilson/Paxton) reduces the current limit on severance payments to school superintendents from one year to six months of salary and benefits. The bill would only impact contracts enacted after its effective date of Sept. 1, 2025.

HB 2598 (Button/Zaffirini) changes several references in the Education Code from "licensed specialist in school psychology" to "school psychologist."

HB 3629 (Noble/Zaffirini) prohibits a person from serving as a school trustee if they are required to register as a sex offender.

Public testimony will be limited to two minutes, and those wishing to submit written testimony should provide 13 copies to committee staff.

Senate Ed passes cell phone ban bill

The Senate Education K-16 Committee passed the following bills on Wednesday, sending them to the full Senate for consideration:

HB 1481 (Fairly/Creighton) requires districts and charters to adopt policies prohibiting student use of personal communications devices—like tablets, smart watches, and mobile phones—during instructional time. The bill makes accommodations for the use of devices aligning with a student's Individualized Education Program.

HB 2310 (Ordaz/Parker) requires TEA, in collaboration with the Health and Human Services Commission and the Texas Workforce Commission, to develop and implement a strategic plan to improve early learning and educational opportunities for young children with disabilities or developmental delays.

HB 2674 (Cook/ Hagenbuch) prohibits TEA, SBOE, or any other educational institution from increasing regulation of home schools.

HB 3627 (Tepper/Menéndez) allows the SBOE chair to employ personnel to assist the board in performing its duties.

HB 5515 (Buckley/King) requires instructional material publishers to align prices with the lowest offered in the country, prohibits inflated shipping charges, and enforces quality and factual accuracy standards.

HB 322 (Guillen/Zaffirini) expands the allowable uses of the Jobs and Education for Texans (JET) Grant Program.

HB 3062 (Guerra/Zaffirini) mandates public higher education institutions in Texas to provide research-based instruction on fentanyl prevention and drug poisoning awareness to new undergraduate students, starting from the 2026 fall semester.

HB 126 (Tepper/Creighton) seeks to address the changing landscape of NIL in college sports. The bill helps Texas universities respond to provisions of the settlement that would allow them to directly compensate their student-athletes and maintain Texas' competitive place among other states' NIL laws.