



DR. RIVERA'S DISPATCH FROM AUSTIN



It's clear that the 86th Legislative Session is in full swing—our elected officials have been busy meeting with constituents, attending committee hearings and filing bills. Believe it or not, we're already one-third through this session!

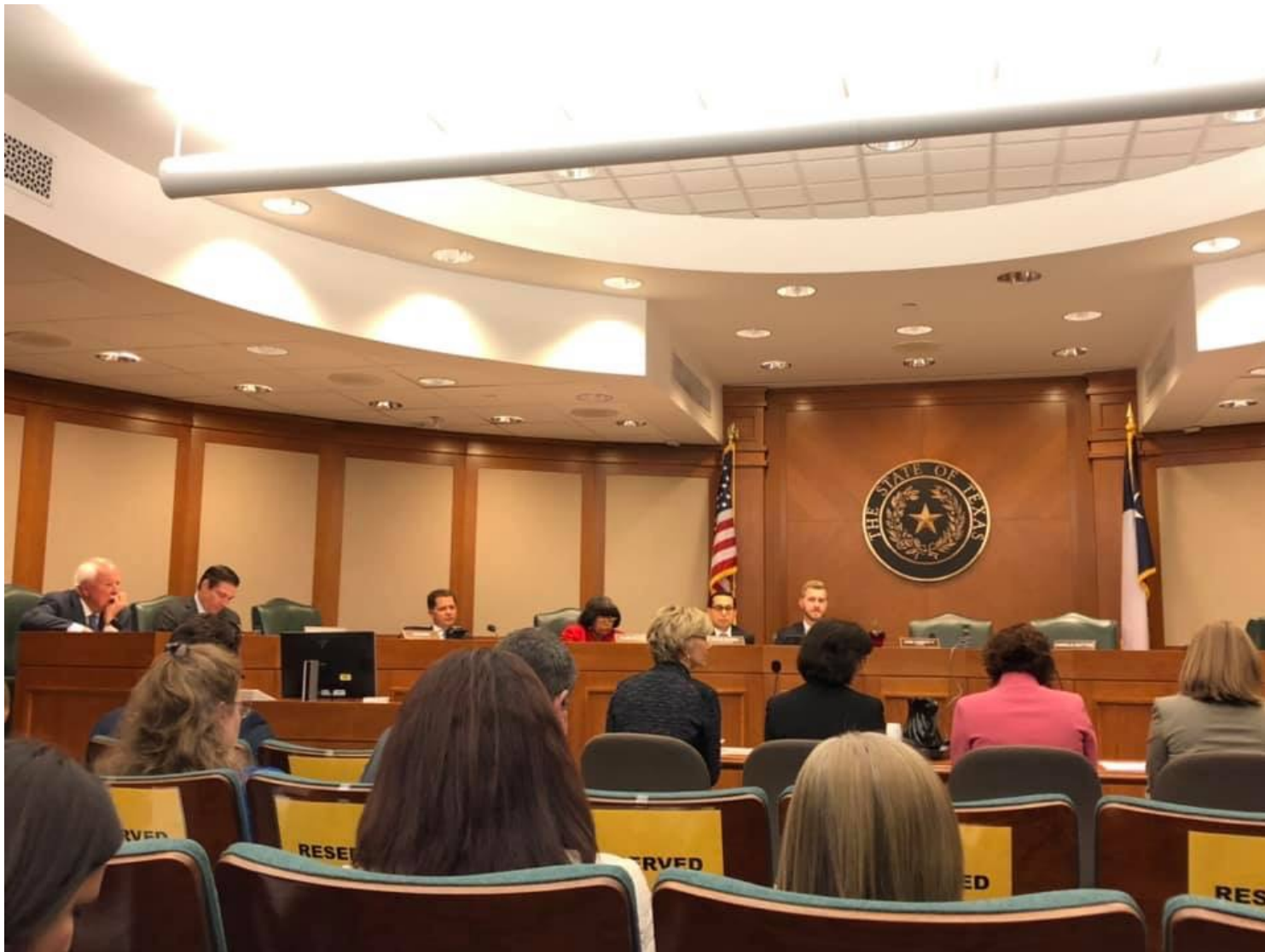
As legislation begins moving through committees in the coming weeks and months, I want to encourage you again to contact your district office to let them know your thoughts. Remember that they work for you, and hearing from the folks who have entrusted them to serve as a voice in Austin is the only way to be assured that they are properly representing your views and interests.

One easy way to support Texas public schools is through [this advocacy tool](#).

When you sign up (using your personal email address), you'll be matched to your respective lawmakers and able to express your views directly through email and Twitter.

While we cannot and do not endorse any group's philosophies or interests, we recommend you use this handy tool to help address your own personal questions or concerns.

MISD LANGUAGE ARTS COORDINATOR QUESTIONS FAIRNESS OF STAAR TEST



Elementary English Language Arts Coordinator Andrea Bailey testified before the House Public Education Committee in Austin on March 5 regarding the current measurement tools used on the STAAR reading test. She said to the Committee, "We as educators want to aim in the right direction, but that is an impossible task without understanding where the target lies." Andrea is pictured (left) in pink and was one of several educators who addressed the Committee. [You can read Andrea's complete testimony here.](#)

SCHOOL FINANCE TALKS IN PROGRESS

The House Public Education Committee heard public testimony on Feb. 12-13, as superintendents, school board members and advocates spoke specifically about school finance challenges. Speakers generally supported the work of the [Texas Commission on Public School Finance](#). But school officials continue to be troubled by proposals for outcomes-based funding and multi-measure teacher evaluations.

Committee Chair Dan Huberty (R-Houston) made clear he intends to move forward with certain Commission recommendations, like the removal of outdated and ineffective funding components. During a March 5 meeting, the House filed a comprehensive school finance bill, HB 3. The \$9 billion bill is significantly different from SB 3, which introduces a \$5,000 raise for teachers and librarians. HB 3 instead seeks to raise minimum salaries for a broader group of educators, increasing health and pension benefits, and offering opportunities for merit pay programs under the control of school districts.

Now, we wait for the Senate to file its school finance bill. Then, the committees will make amendments and move toward a conclusion.

MISD STUDENTS SHOW SUPPORT FOR

PUBLIC ED

On Monday, Feb. 25, students gathered at the Texas Capitol during Rally Day to express their support for public education and to visit their elected officials. As I witnessed their passion displayed in their efforts, it was evident that our future is in great hands. These young people showed they were truly educated on the issues being discussed in the 86th Legislature. Mesquite ISD was well represented by this group of 350 students expressing their concerns.



STATE FUNDING PRIORITIES TO BE ESTABLISHED

Legislators have begun discussing how to address tax relief for property owners. This is a priority for both chambers, as they filed identical bills proposing to cap the growth on property taxes at 2.5 percent. The bills (HB 2 and SB 2) aim to require voter approval if local governments want to exceed the 2.5 percent cap. While both chambers seem to be working together, details must be resolved and scarce revenue sources complicate the issue; the 2.5 percent limit seems to be a moving target rather than a firm threshold.

During revenue discussions, the state projected an estimated \$119.12 billion available for general-purpose spending in the 2020-21 biennium. This figure represents the sum of the:

- 2018-19 ending balance
- 2020-21 tax revenue
- 2020-21 non-tax receipts, excluding estimated reserves for transfers to the Economic Stabilization Fund the State Highway Fund and the Texas Tomorrow Fund, as well as other smaller account adjustments.

As you can probably tell, there are only enough funds to address some priorities, but not all. Legislators will need to tackle the most important issues during this session and return to some during the next.

KEEP UP WITH THE 86TH SESSION



The Advocate will be published monthly during the session to keep you informed of key legislation affecting the MISD community and Texas public education. In the meantime, you can gain some background by researching the legislative priorities of any professional or civic organizations you are associated with.

Other Resources:

- www.capitol.texas.gov (View proposed legislation)
- www.trs.texas.gov (Teacher Retirement System website)
- <https://www.facebook.com/TRSofTexas/> (Teacher Retirement System Facebook page)
- <https://capitol.texas.gov/myTLO> (Personalized viewing of legislative content)



The Advocate

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