



UP Legislative UPDATE

A Publication of the TEXAS COMMUNITY COLLEGE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION
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BUDGET TIGHT AS 2001 SESSION CONCLUDES

The Texas Legislature wrapped up its regular session on May 28, appropriating \$113.8 billion for the next biennium. An accompanying rise in funding for technical and community colleges was driven largely by increases in enrollments. Therefore, colleges without robust growth during the preceding base period fared poorly. The session was plagued by selected shortfalls and a slower economy generating less revenue.

Furthermore, Comptroller of Public Accounts Carole Keeton Rylander, while certifying the balanced budget, warned of a possible \$5 billion shortfall when the next regular session convenes in 2003.

Senate Bill 1, the General Appropriations Act for the 2002-03 biennium, sets aside \$88 million in general revenue funds for the 5.74 percent enrollment growth in two-year institutions, and \$51 million in general revenue "catch-up" funds for the contact hour formula. Ten million dollars will be added if the Comptroller finds that funds are available.

The Act provides \$3 million in increased general revenue funds for institutional enhancement at the Lamar State Colleges and \$4 million for the Texas State Technical College components. Two million dollars are included for the Lamar State Colleges, as well as \$2 million for physical plant operations through the general academic infrastructure formula. \$4.2 million is added for one-time special items.

While the legislature has appropriated significant increases, community and technical college educators are concerned that momentum achieved during the 1990s toward "full formula funding" may have stalled somewhat. This is especially troubling in light of the Texas Higher Education Goals, endorsed by the legislature, of increasing college enrollments by 500,000 by 2015.

TCCTA State President Richard Elam testified before the House Committee on Appropriations and the Senate Committee on Finance, urging increased funding for two-year colleges and the Higher Education Employees Group Insurance Program. He also endorsed an increase in the formula "multiplier" for the Teacher Re-

tirement System (see below).

Dr. Elam noted, "We have heard a lot of talk about the future of Texas higher education and the need to recruit, diversify, and retain students. I am here to affirm that if that is going to happen, it will happen in my classroom...and in countless other classrooms at community and technical colleges throughout our state."

TASP Survives...With Changes

House Bill 125, introduced by Rep. George "Buddy" West (R-Odessa) to effectively abolish the Texas Academic Skills Program, did not pass.

Also, late in the session, a provision in the House version of the Appropriations Bill that would have exempted many students from TASP requirements (based upon one point above average TAAS scores in high school) failed to survive. As is often the case, careful monitoring proved beneficial. In a letter to Sen. Rodney Ellis (D-Houston), Chair of the Senate Finance Committee, TCCTA Executive Director Richard Moore and State President Mel Griffin wrote, in part: "We are concerned that this rider, which would dramatically alter the process of testing and remediation in the state's institutions of higher education, might be adopted without an opportunity for public testimony. We believe the proper course would be for this proposal to receive a complete hearing in the Senate Committee on Education."

A TASP-related bill, HB 234 by Rep. Judy Hawley (D-Portland) did pass this session, exempting active members of the armed services from the Texas Academic Skills Program. Another, HB 1645 by Rep. Dianne Delisi (R-Temple), also passed. The bill exempts certain out-of-state transfer students. (These and other TASP-related measures are listed on the back page.)

Efforts to create categorical exemptions from the requirements of TASP have existed almost as long as the program itself. Furthermore, policy makers increasingly continue to advocate conducting as much developmental education as possible in the high schools, where a new testing and curriculum plan is being implemented.

Retirement and Insurance Plans Fare Well

Both the TRS and ORP retirement plans escaped any serious threats this session. In fact, positive changes were added to TRS in SB 273 by Sen. Ken Armbrister (D-Victoria). Most significantly, the "multiplier" for determining retirement benefits was raised from 2.2 percent to 2.3 percent. Also, under a new Credit Purchase Option, any TRS member with seven years of actual service may buy up to three additional years by paying the actuarial cost.

There is good news also in employee benefits. The bulk of the request from the Employees Retirement System was granted this session. The ERS Group Insurance appropriation was increased by \$81 million—a 47.3 percent increase from last biennium.

New Legislation Benefits Community College Students

As part of the "Closing the Gaps" initiative put forth by the legislature and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, community college students can now participate in a grants program that previously benefited mainly university students. SB 1596 (by Bivins) establishes the TEXAS Grant II Program to provide grants to eligible students to attend Texas public community and technical colleges. The legislature appropriated \$10 million for the biennium, which will serve an estimated 4,300 students. An additional \$10 million may be appropriated if the Comptroller certifies that sufficient funds are available.

Post-Session Contacts Can Produce Results

The best time to contact representatives and senators is while they are at home in their districts between sessions. While community and technical college educators may disagree with some actions of the Texas Legislature, elected representatives tend to remember and appreciate a simple "thank you" for the work they do on behalf of the people of Texas. Effective representation is a long term process.

NEW LEGISLATION OF INTEREST TO TWO-YEAR COLLEGES

Following is a list of selected bills passed in the 77th Texas Legislature potentially affecting public two-year colleges. Unless otherwise indicated, the bill takes effect on September 1, 2001. For detailed information about specific measures, visit the TCCTA Web site (www.tccta.org) for access to Texas Legislature Online.

Bills Signed into Law

HB 152 (by Brown, Fred) authorizes a pilot program for reduced summer tuition for certain students at Texas A&M University and Texas A&M University, Kingsville.

HB 234 (by Hawley) exempts active members of the armed forces from TASP. Effective May 24, 2001.

HB 400 (by Giddings) creates the Higher Education Assistance Pilot Program to provide prospective students with information about admissions and enrollment at institutions of higher education.

HB 459 (by Carter) authorizes the exemption from tuition and fees for children of deceased firefighters or peace officers to be 120 hours rather than 8 semesters. Effective June 11, 2001.

HB 1127 (by Rangel) provides standards governing the dates by which institutions of higher education must issue contracts or employment agreements to full-time faculty members. Effective January 1, 2002.

HB 1359 (by Villarreal) directs the Coordinating Board to develop 15 "high demand" field of study curriculum transfer programs not later than January 1, 2004, and to report progress to the Legislature. Effective June 14, 2001.

HB 1465 (by Kitchen) directs the Coordinating Board to establish a pilot program at selected colleges to offer lower tuition rates for classes during off-peak periods.

HB 1467 (by Maxey) allows the governing boards of community and junior colleges to set aside from 6% to 20% of hourly tuition charges for the Texas Public Educational Grants Program. Effective May 26, 2001.

HB 1645 (by Delisi) exempts from TASP transfer students from accredited schools who have a "B" or better in each skill area. Effective June 14, 2001.

HB 1753 (by Gutierrez) authorizes the University of Texas-Pan American to establish an upper division extension campus in Rio Grande City and to enter into a partnership agreement with a junior college district for lower division courses. Effective May 4, 2001.

HB 2109 (by Farrar) exempts from TASP high school graduates with a grade point average of 3.5 or higher on a 4.0 scale and who have completed the "recommended or advanced" high school curriculum. Effective June 15, 2001.

SB 1 (the General Appropriations Act) sets aside \$88 million in general revenue funds for community college enrollment growth and \$51 million in general revenue "catch-up" funds for the contact hour formula. Ten million dollars will be added if the Comptroller finds that funds are available.

SB 82 (by Madla) requires college enrollment eligibility for students taking concurrent enrollment courses at private high schools or in home schools. Effective August 27, 2001.

SB 263 (by Ogden) requires the governing boards of each institution of higher education to adopt a policy regulating travel by students for college activities. The bill requires governing boards to seek advice from faculty and students before adopting any policy. Effective June 13, 2001.

SB 273 (by Armbrister) makes a number of changes to the Texas Teacher Retirement System, including a raise in the "multiplier" for retirement calculations from 2.2% to 2.3%. Effective on various dates, depending upon the category.

SB 1596 (by Bivins) establishes a Texas Grant II scholarship program for community and technical college students. Ten million dollars has been appropriated for the program, with another \$10 million contingent upon a finding by the Comptroller that funds are available during the next biennium. Effective immediately.

LEGISLATIVE INFORMATION

Even during the interim period between legislative sessions, valuable information is available on recently-passed bills, interim committees, and other developments. For official information, the best available source by far is Texas Legislature Online. At this Web site, bills can be tracked, committee activity can be monitored, and the full text of legislation past and present can be accessed.

The Web address for Texas Legislature Online is www.capitol.state.tx.us. Links to this and other useful Web pages (including the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board) may be found on the TCCTA Web site, at www.tccta.org.

Those without access to the World Wide Web are encouraged to call or write the TCCTA State Office.

The State Office would also be happy to provide you with a copy of the most recent edition of our "Guide to Political Participation."

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