

Texas School Quick Tip

Mock Student Gubernatorial Election

The Texas Secretary of State's

Project V.O.T.E. initiative has posted lots of fun activities for students **ages 13 and up** in the run-up to the November mock election in which students statewide will cast their ballots for Texas governor.

Info: texednews.com/22/29/1.html



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Issue 29

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First Survey Since Two-Year Hiatus Due to COVID Illegal Bus Passing Data Reported

On a single day last April, a total of 5,615 Texas school bus drivers reported that their buses were illegally passed by other vehicles a total of 8,726 times.

That's an average of 1.55 illegal Texas school bus passings reported per driver — and an increase from the average of 0.95 illegal bus passings reported per driver in Texas by the 10,100 participating school bus drivers on a single day in April 2019.

Note: No surveys were conducted for the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years due to COVID's impact on pupil transportation systems. In Texas (and nationally) there were far fewer bus drivers participating in the latest (2021-22) surveys than during the annual surveys conducted prior to COVID.

The state and national survey results for the 2021-22

school year were reported in the tenth *School Bus Stop Arm Survey* coordinated by the **National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation**. The survey results are released to coincide with the start of each school year to draw attention to the problem of drivers illegally passing school buses.

The **Texas Department of Public Safety** coordinates the data collection for the Texas portion of the survey.

The latest national survey included 33 states and the District of Columbia that volunteered to participate, with each state (or in some cases, individual districts) choosing their own days to conduct the survey. Texas chose Wednesday, April 27, 2022.

Nationally, 79,859 participating school bus drivers reported that 51,593 vehicles illegally passed their buses — 1.55 illegal bus passings reported per driver — which equaled the Texas average.

The start of the school year was marked with several school bus related accidents in Texas, and many districts are continuing to report that they have not recovered from COVID-era bus driver shortages.

The graphics to the left summarize the results of the Texas portion of the survey.

More info: texednews.com/22/29/2.html

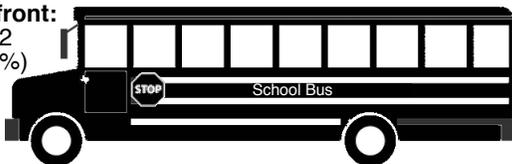
Survey:
Illegally passed
Texas School Buses
On April 27, 2022*

On the
Right:
302
(3.7%)



On the Left:
7,905
(96.3%)

From
the front:
5,512
(67.2%)



From
the Rear:
2,695
(32.8%)

Time of Day

AM **3,584** (41.1%)

Mid Day **158** (1.8%)

PM **4,984** (57.1%)

As reported by 5,615
school bus drivers

Total same day illegal bus passings reported = 8,726

(Based on "time of day" reported data)

***Data Source:** Texas Department of Public Safety data reported to the National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation.

Sept. 15-16 TRS Board Meeting Highlights

More info about all of the following is at:
texednews.com/22/29/3.html

Demographic Researcher Tells Board Texas Must Fill 50,000 Vacancies In Teacher Work Force Every 10 Years

The combination of teachers retiring (or quitting for other reasons) and student enrollment growth is putting Texas on track to need 50,000 new teachers every 10 years.

That is what Dr. **Ray Perryman**, president/CEO of the Waco-based **The Perryman Group**, said during a discussion item with the board.

Perryman noted that as of the last U.S. Census, nationally there were fewer people in the U.S. under 18 than 10 years ago. In Texas, in contrast, there were 400,000 more people under age 18 than there were in the state 10 years ago.

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Perryman noted that with two thirds of the state's student population Black and Hispanic — a population whose families earn about 7.5 percent of the state's household income — puts Texas on track to being a low-wage state.

Note: Perryman's reported data comes on the heels of the newly released 2022 **Texas Teacher Poll** results by the **Charles Butt Foundation** that concluded that 77 percent of surveyed teachers had seriously considered leaving the profession — a significant increase from survey results two years ago, and 72 percent have taken concrete steps to leave the profession.

The survey found that too little pay, support, and respect — combined with non-instructional work and pressures to respond to the individual needs of students without adequate resources — are driving teachers from the profession.

The main purpose of the presentation by Perryman was to preview the results of a major study of the economic impact that TRS has had on Texas.

Among other things, the report noted that combined Fiscal Year 2022 TRS pension, TRS-ActiveCare and TRS-Care payments totaled almost \$19 billion, and are a particularly important source of economic stimulus in rural communities.

The data will be published soon in an updated **TRS Great Value Brochure**, which is released by TRS every two years.

Among TRS-ActiveCare Insured Parents TRS to take a "Deep Dive" Soon on Data Reflecting High Numbers of C-Section Births

TRS Chief Health Care Officer **Katrina Daniel** told the board that the retirement system will be taking a "deep dive" to examine data related to TRS-ActiveCare insured mothers delivering their babies by induced-birth cesarean (C-section) at higher rates than what is recommended by medical professionals.

Daniel noted that based on the data examined thus far, it appears that ActiveCare-covered parents are timing pregnancies to try to arrange births at the end of the school year or at the beginning of summer.

Daniel said she believes this has something to do with timing — the difficulty of people taking time away from the classroom.

More Expensive and Bigger Health Risks

Daniel said that not only is a C-section a more expensive delivery method, it also comes with bigger health risks.

"We just want to make sure the C-section rates are better in line with what the health experts recommend, Daniel said.

Daniel's observations came in response to a comment by Dr. Perryman during his presentation (*see prior article*) to the board that Texas is seeing an average of 1,000 new Texans arrive in the state daily — a net combination of newcomers to the state and babies being born.

Daniel calculated that 17 of the 1,000 newly arrived Texans each day are automatically ActiveCare members. That's because, she said, that's the average number of babies being born to ActiveCare parents daily, based on data showing 6,200 new babies being born yearly to ActiveCare parents.

Study Recommends Lawmakers Hike ActiveCare State/ISD Total Contributions from \$225 to \$600

A legislatively-mandated study commissioned by the TRS recommends that the total share of monthly ActiveCare school employee health insurance premiums paid by the employer and the state increase from \$225 to \$600.

The report notes that the current mixture of ActiveCare employer/state funding has not changed since the program was launched 20 years ago, when the state set a flat monthly contribution rate of \$75 per employee and required ISDs to pay, at a minimum, \$150 per employee — with districts optionally allowed to pay more.

Note: TRS staff reported that the combined state and local monthly contributions to TRS-ActiveCare premiums — on average (*when federal health care funds allocated to districts is included*) — totals \$451. Without the extra federal funding allocated to districts, the total state/district share of ActiveCare premiums would have been \$330.

As health care premiums have increased — due to rising health care costs — employees have been forced to pick up more of their share of premium costs, the report notes.

The report does not recommend how much of the \$600 should be paid by the state and how much, at a minimum, ISDs should pay — and says that the decision should instead be left up to lawmakers.

The 84-page *Texas TRS Alternative Benefits Study* by the **Segal** consulting firm was authorized by Rider 21 in the biennial budget the Legislature passed for TRS in 2021 as a part of an overall strategy to begin work on trying to find ways to head off what could be massive ActiveCare premium increases for the plan year that starts Sept. 1, 2023.

Note: A *one-time* infusion of \$638 million in total federal COVID-19 funding allocated to ActiveCare by lawmakers and the governor helped limit premium increases for the current plan year — that began on Sept. 1, 2022 — to an average of about 6.2 percent.

Other cost saving measures implemented for the current plan year included switching to regional ActiveCare premium pricing and requiring districts to offer either ActiveCare or an alternative plan, but not both at the same time.

No Secret

TRS Executive Director **Brian Guthrie** told the board that he has not been keeping it a secret — from legislative committees and everyone else — of the looming ActiveCare premium increases if nothing is done, and that he is working with lawmakers on finding a solution.

The Segal report recommends that a number of potential solutions be examined — such as by giving the state's largest ISDs their own ActiveCare plans (and continuing to assign smaller districts to regionally rated plans).

Drop Spousal Coverage?

The report — in what was termed to be a "draconian" suggestion — said that dropping the expensive spousal coverage from ActiveCare may be something worth examining, either via eliminating spousal coverage from the program statewide or allowing individual districts to optionally drop the coverage.

The idea, the report says, is that if ActiveCare drops spousal coverage, then many spouses would become eligible

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for federal Affordable Care Act (ACA) subsidies to buy ACA marketplace plans (based on family income levels) that would be cheaper than the spousal portion of Active-Care plans.

The report also noted that if a pending **Biden** administration proposal were to be approved, this so-called “family glitch” would be eliminated, and would allow spouses (based on family income levels) to be eligible for ACA marketplace health insurance subsidies regardless of whether their spouse was enrolled in ActiveCare.

TRS Board Briefs

The board:

- **El Paso office** — Heard staff report that the new TRS El Paso regional office at the Region 19 Education Service Center headquarters building is on track to open in early November.
A grand opening is tentatively set for Nov. 14.
The center will be staffed and equipped to handle about 5,000 counseling sessions a year.
- **Divestments** — Was briefed by legal counsel and other staff in executive session, but later took no action on, the two new state laws that require (with certain exceptions) state investment funds to divest themselves of holdings in companies that discriminate against the oil and gas industry, and against gun manufacturers. TRS Executive Director **Brian Guthrie** said that TRS will comply with the legislation.
- **TRS-Care** — Approved TRS-Care insurance plans for retirees for the new plan year that starts Jan. 1, 2023.
TRS-Care Medicare Advantage retirees will see their yearly deductible reduced from \$500 to \$400, can have a free annual eye exam and will receive a \$200 hearing accessory when they buy a premium hearing aid.
- **Headquarters move** — Received an update on the progress toward the phased-in move by TRS to a new two-building headquarters complex.
Furniture for the first building will be ordered in November in preparation for the move to the “Alpha” building next summer. Construction on the second “Bravo” building has begun, staff said.
- **Complaints** — Learned from the **TRS Ombudsman Office** that the top complaints from TRS members for the first seven months of 2022 have been: **1)** extended telephone wait times, **2)** incorrect information provided and **3)** timeliness of responses.

Other News

Told Many Educators may not be Using the Tool Correctly School Safety Center’s “Bullying Checklist” Discussed by State School Health Committee

Texas School Health Advisory Committee (TSHAC) members were briefed on guidance issued to schools by the **Texas School Safety Center** regarding bullying issues during a meeting this month.

Brian Clason, the school safety center’s program manager for training and education, discussed the center’s 17-question *Bullying Checklist*, a four-page document that also includes examples of bullying situations that could arise in school settings.

Clason said that from his observations, the checklist is often not being used at all — or is not being used in the best way possible — in response to a student reporting to a school official that he or she is being bullied.

Distills Bullying Laws

Clason noted that the checklist is designed to distill the difficult-to-understand state laws about bullying (including cyberbullying) — that are contained in the state *Education* and *Penal* codes — to help school officials determine the correct course of action when a possible bullying incident is observed, or is reported.

Clason said that what will often happen is that when a student reports a bullying incident to (for example) a teacher, principal or counselor, the adult will make an independent judgment call about whether what was reported by the student actually constitutes bullying.

Thus, an incident in which a student who reported being poked on the back, repeatedly, by another student may be dismissed by the adult (with no further action taken) as being a case of the other student merely “goofing around,” Clason said.

But, this could be the harbinger of the start of something more serious — such as the student being retaliated against later, or the bullied student retaliating against the bully when the reporting leads to nothing being done.

Clason said that what should be done — in all cases of a reported or observed bullying incident — is for more than one school official (an administrator, counselor, teacher, and [if necessary] the school’s threat assessment team) — to independently complete the checklist and to collaboratively discuss the findings.

Parental Calls About Bullied Students

Clason said that although he could not remember being called by a parent prior to COVID about their child being bullied, he has seen an uptick in such calls by parents post-COVID over complaints that, for instance, their schools are not taking their complaints of their child being bullied seriously.

Mineral Wells ISD Superintendent **John Kuhn** said the checklist is a “great tool” and a “godsend” for administrators. Kuhn said he wished he had something like the checklist when he was an assistant principal trying to adjudicate bullying claims, and wading through what the law says — in figuring out “Is this bullying or not bullying?”

The committee also:

- Heard TEA Health and Safety Statewide Coordinator **Barney Fudge** briefly summarize several topics within his purview, including by highlighting the results of the physical fitness assessment, physical education and school health survey reports. *The reports have been posted on the TEA’s website.*
- Heard a presentation from the **Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living** about childhood obesity and physical activity during COVID-19.
- Heard from Department of State Health Services staff that the position for a nurse to serve as the state’s school health program coordinator has been reposted.
The position was last held by **Anita Wheeler-Hill**, RN, who retired on Aug. 31, 2021.
- Agreed to meet again on Feb. 27, 2023.

More info: texednews.com/22/29/4.html



- ➔ **Illegal School Bus Passing Data**
- ➔ **TRS Notes High C-Section Birth Rates**
- ➔ **Underused Anti-Bullying Resource**

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News Briefs

More info about all of the following is at:
texednews.com/22/29/5.html

- ➔ **SBOE meeting** — As this issue was going to press, the TEA announced that the State Board of Education was to hold a two-day special meeting starting on Monday, Sept. 26 for a public hearing — and then to adopt — limited **Social Studies TEKS** curriculum revisions to meet the requirements of **SB3**. *We'll have a report on what happened at the meeting in our next issue.*
- ➔ **Blue Ribbon schools** — Congratulations to the 31 Texas campuses named (Sept. 16) by the U.S. Department of Education as **National Blue Ribbon Schools for 2022**.
Texas led the nation in the most schools on the 297-campus list that recognizes schools for overall academic progress or in closing achievement gaps among student subgroups.
- ➔ **Ed-prep coalition** — A core group of more than two dozen associations — including the state's major teacher associations and a number of educator preparation leaders and education advocacy group representatives — launched a new **Texas Coalition for Educator Preparation** during a Sept. 14 event at the Capitol.
The coalition's stated mission is to "advance and raise the profile of the education profession by supporting the continuous improvement of educator recruitment, preparation, and certification practices as well as promoting ongoing professional growth and support."
- ➔ **Lead testing** — The **Texas Commission on Environmental Quality** has launched a new self-help portal to assist public schools and state regulated child care centers in conducting the voluntary sampling and analysis for lead in drinking water.
Priority is given to schools and child care centers that: **1)** serve low-income or underserved areas, **2)** serve children 6 and younger, or **3)** are in older facilities that are likely to have lead-laden water pipes and fixtures.
- ➔ **Fentanyl warning** — State health officials issued (Sept. 20) an alert that multi-colored versions of fentanyl tablets that children can easily believe to be candy

have recently appeared in the illicit drug market. In related news, **Gov. Abbott** sent a letter (Sept. 20) to the education commissioner and eight other state agency leaders directing them to "ramp up" the state's efforts to combat the deadly fentanyl crisis.

At least four young people in Hays County (near Austin) have died from suspected fentanyl overdoses.

- ➔ **Computer science education** — A new report says that Texas ranks 35th among the states in the percentage of high schools offering computer science courses. The report found that 47 percent of Texas high schools, compared to 53 percent of high schools nationally, offer the course.

Some of the other Texas data:

- 73.6 percent of high school students attend a school that offers a foundation computer science course, but only 6 percent of students are enrolled in a computer science course.
- 27.3 percent of students enrolled in a computer science course are female.
- In 2022, Texas had 60,400 available computer jobs each month that pay an average salary of \$94,799.

The *2022 State of Computer Science Report* was released by **Code.org**, the **Computer Science Teachers Association** and the **Expanding Computing Education Pathways Alliance**.

The report includes nine policy recommendations, and says that Texas has adopted all but two of them.

TEA Rule News

Proposed (with comment deadline):

- ➔ A **school finance** rule revision related to federal pandemic (COVID-19) funds. (**Oct. 17**)
- ➔ Setting the passing standard for the *Languages Other Than English: Spanish educator certification exam*. (**Oct. 17**)

Adopted (with effective date):

- ➔ The updated **Financial Accountability System Resource Guide** (FASRG). (**Sept. 13**)
- ➔ The 2021 **Charter School Performance Framework** (CSPF) **Manual**. (**Sept. 6**)