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May 6, 2023

The Dallas Morning News

NEWS | EDUCATION

Teaching to the test is 'officially dead' in Dallas schools, superintendent says

At her State of the District address, Stephanie Elizalde said officials should free up educators' time to teach

Dallas ISD superintendent Stephanie S. Elizalde delivers her remarks during 2023 Dallas ISD State of the District on Thursday May 4, 2023 in front of Dallas Hall in Dallas. (Michael Aronow / Staff Photographer)

By Todd Stappert
 6:53 AM on May 6, 2023

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During her State of the District address in front of a packed ballroom at the Omni hotel, Dallas schools Superintendent Stephanie Elizalde made a bold statement: Teaching for the sake of preparing students to take a standardized state test is "officially dead."

"The test will take care of itself if joy is in the classroom with on-grade-level materials," she said. "We don't need to do drill and kill to prepare for a state assessment."

All Texas districts are required to administer the STAAR, a statewide standardized test that is used to evaluate students' academic readiness and to determine if a school is meeting certain standards. The test is a major component of the state's accountability system and how progress is charted over time.

To prepare, teachers often spend hours on practice exams, benchmarks and worksheets that mimic the layout of the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness. Elizalde said some schools are testing kids every few weeks to evaluate their progress for the standardized test.

The New York Times

A national movement to give parents public vouchers to spend on private schools has run up against the deep loyalty Texas has always had for its public schools.

By J. David Goodman
 April 14, 2023

NEW HOME, Texas — Bright yellow uprights tower over what was recently a flat expanse of cotton fields, now transformed into football turf. Nearby, cranes pull up the walls of what will soon be a new elementary school.

Not too long ago, you could count on two hands the number of annual graduates from the New Home Independent School District. Now, families are flocking to the windswept patch of West Texas just south of Lubbock, drawn to the deeply conservative farming community by the promise of good public schools.

"What's keeping this place together is the school," said Ramon Benitez, 39, an agriculture science teacher at New Home.

Amid a growing national movement to give parents public money to spend on private schools, it is in places like New Home — where the football coach is a local fixture and students learn both how to read and how to judge the quality of a cut of meat — that the

THE TEXAS TRIBUNE

2023 Legislative Session | Bryan Station Investigation | LGBTQ+ Bills | Border Inspections

TEXAS LEGISLATURE 2023

Texas House advances bill that would give retired teachers a pension raise

The proposed raise would be the first time in nearly 20 years that some retirees would get a cost-of-living adjustment.

By BRIAN LOPEZ | APRIL 28, 2023 | UPDATED: MAY 1, 2023

Kindergarten teacher Angie Hagan instructs students to make a "bubble" of room between other students to keep a social distance on the first day of in-person classes at Highland Village Elementary on Sept. 8, 2020. (Dorothy Taylor for The Texas Tribune)

Sign up for *The Brief*, The Texas Tribune's daily newsletter that keeps readers up to speed on the most essential Texas news.

The Texas House on Monday gave final approval to a bill that would give retired teachers a small bump in their monthly retirement checks. For some, this could be their first cost-of-living adjustment in almost 20 years.

The House unanimously passed an amended version of Senate Bill 10, authored by state Sen. Joan Huffman, R-Houston. The lower chamber's version of the bill seeks to give a 6% increase to retirees' monthly checks if they retired before 2004, a 4% increase if they retired between 2004 and 2014, and a 2% increase if they retired between 2015 and 2021.

The bill calls for a \$5,000 one-time payment to retirees age 70 or older and stipulates that annual cost-of-living increases should not exceed 2%, depending on whether the Teacher Retirement System met or surpassed its projected investment gains. It would also raise the portion of active teachers' salaries that goes into the teachers'

Austin American-Statesman

EDUCATION

TEA plans conservatorship of Austin schools over special education evaluations backlog

By Kerl Heath
 Austin American-Statesman
 Published 7:15 a.m. CT March 31, 2023 | Updated 1:08 p.m. CT April 1, 2023

The Texas Education Agency plans to install a conservator over the Austin school district due to systemic backlogs in evaluating students for special education services, officials told the district Friday.

Unlike the agency's stunning takeover of the Houston school district two weeks ago, Austin will retain its school board and interim superintendent, but it will face strict oversight from the state.

TEA Director of Special Investigations Adam Benitez, in a report about the district's backlog, told board members and staff Friday the state planned to install a board of conservators because of "systemic noncompliance."

"TEA's final investigative report sheds light on the systemic issues found within Austin ISD's Special Education Department and the district's shortcomings in identifying and providing services for students with disabilities," the TEA said in a statement. "The lack of support for those students has significantly hampered their ability to achieve academic success and negatively impacted their school experience."

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UNIVERSITY INTERSCHOLASTIC LEAGUE

CURRENT ISSUES & EVENTS

STATE • 2023

- 1. Which of the following was true of the coronation of King Charles III?**
 - a. After the ceremony, the entire family appeared on the balcony at Buckingham Palace — the king, the queen, their parents, their children and grandchildren.
 - b. For the first time, a woman, Penny Mordaunt, carried the 17th-century Sword of State into Westminster Abbey in the procession.
 - c. For the first time, the king challenged British citizens worldwide to swear an oath to the British flag, “So help me God.”
 - d. The Bank of England issued 1 million copies of a £1 special note, equivalent to a U.S. \$1 bill.
- 2. A major league athletic team is moving to Grand Prairie, Texas, with its first game July 13. What sport?**
 - a. baseball
 - b. softball
 - c. cricket
 - d. field hockey
- 3. The three banks that failed this year accounted for 2.4% of all assets in the banking sector. Which of the following is NOT one of the banks that failed this year?**
 - a. First Republic Bank
 - b. Silicon Valley Bank
 - c. Signature Bank
 - d. Washington Mutual
- 4. Move over Quarter Pounder with cheese. McDonald’s is testing a new burger in Canada. What 860-calorie burger?**
 - a. a chicken Big Mac
 - b. the Carolina BBQ quarter pounder
 - c. a Krispy Kreme burger
 - d. burger and waffles
- 5. Earth’s average surface temperature in 2022 tied with 2015 as the fifth warmest on record, according to an analysis by NASA. Global temperatures in 2022 were how far above the average for NASA’s baseline period (1951-1980)?**
 - a. 4.4 degrees Celsius
 - b. 0.06 degrees Fahrenheit
 - c. 1.6 degrees Fahrenheit
 - d. 13.9 degrees Celsius
- 6. A Tallahassee charter school principal was forced to resign after parents complained about a sixth grade art history lesson, claiming what was “pornographic”?**
 - a. Vitruvian Man, a drawing by Leonardo da Vinci
 - b. David, a marble statue by Michelangelo
 - c. Venus of Urbina, an oil painting by Titian
 - d. David, a bronze statue by Donatello

7. **Bola Tinubu, declared the winner in the presidential election, has boasted of making the careers of major politicians. Now he has to deliver for a what country facing multiple emergencies?**
 - a. Paraguay
 - b. Comoros
 - c. Finland
 - d. Nigeria

8. **Leading to an outcry over how the label undermines the independent news outlet, Twitter labeled the main account for what American news outlet as “state-affiliated media”?**
 - a. Stars and Stripes
 - b. CBS
 - c. Al Jazeera
 - d. NPR

9. **The Writers Guild of America strike began 12:01 a.m. PDT on May 2, a minute after the contract between the WGA and Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers expired. The studios rejected proposals from the writers related to staffing, specifically the use of mini-rooms where shows hire fewer writers for a shorter period of time, and what?**
 - a. a guaranteed minimum wage of \$17/hour and paid overtime
 - b. a minimum of 20 shows per season; additional compensation for streaming shows
 - c. minimum compensation for writers on reality shows even though such shows do not require writers
 - d. protections against the use of artificial intelligence

10. **Offering a biological twist on its cataclysm, HBO premiered “The Last of Us,” a zombie thriller adapted from what medium?**
 - a. a fantasy role-playing card game
 - b. a video game
 - c. a Broadway musical
 - d. a graphic novel

11. **AMC Entertainment, the world’s largest cinema chain, said a new pricing system, known as Sightline at AMC, would be in all of its U.S. theaters by the end of the year. What would it do?**
 - a. AMC would increase the price of tickets for people who bring in their cellphones.
 - b. AMC would remove the Tuesday special discount for which the theater is known.
 - c. All users who subscribe to Netflix could see movies shown in AMC theaters for free.
 - d. AMC would increase the price of tickets in more desirable seats.

12. **Vladimir Putin said he would suspend Russia’s participation in the New START treaty — the last surviving arms control agreement between the two largest nuclear-armed powers, a treaty that expires in February 2026. What limits does this treaty place on the creation of nuclear weapons?**
 - a. It limits Russia to 725 weapons, but the U.S. can have 1,550.
 - b. It limits Russia and the U.S. to 1,550 deployed nuclear warheads each.
 - c. Russia and the U.S. can have as many such weapons as necessary for mutually assured destruction, but other countries are limited to no more than 50.
 - d. It limits all U.N.-member countries to no more than 500 nuclear weapons.

13. **The drugmaker Eli Lilly and Company said it would significantly reduce the sticker prices of what product used by diabetes patients?**
 - a. glucagon
 - b. ivermectin
 - c. insulin
 - d. metformin

14. In new editions of the works of Roald Dahl, hundreds of words — including descriptions of characters' appearances, races and genders — have been changed or removed. Revisions include characters who are no longer described as “fat,” and references to “mothers” and “fathers” have been updated to “parents” or “family.” Which best-selling children’s classic did Roald Dahl write?
- The Little Prince*
 - Winnie-the-Pooh*
 - Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*
 - The Secret Garden*
15. A Washington, D.C., jury found four members of what group guilty of seditious conspiracy for their roles in trying to prevent the peaceful transfer of power from then-President Donald Trump to Joe Biden after the 2020 election?
- the far-right Proud Boys
 - the National Socialist Club, NSC-131
 - Antifa, a left-wing anti-fascist and anti-racist political movement
 - Redneck Revolt, a working-class revolutionary group
16. Formally ending Helsinki’s decades of official nonalignment, what country, one that borders Russia, became the 31st member of NATO?
- Bosnia
 - Finland
 - Sweden
 - Georgia
17. The Food and Drug Administration approved a vaccine for adults who are 60 and older in May. Six decades in the making, the vaccine, to be sold as Arexvy, appears to be the first in the world approved for sale to protect older adults from what?
- COVID-19
 - human metapneumovirus
 - RSV, respiratory syncytial virus
 - pneumonia
18. China will have 1.4257 billion people by the middle of this year, according to U.N. projections. What country will surpass that by 2.9 million people, making it, not China, the world’s most populous country?
- India
 - Brazil
 - Indonesia
 - Pakistan
19. After severing ties with the rapper Ye over antisemitic comments, Adidas was left with unsold merchandise worth \$1.3 billion. What kind of merchandise?
- sneakers
 - evening wear
 - spandex (elastane)
 - brightly colored trefoil jackets

20. **Fox News agreed to pay Dominion Voting Systems nearly \$800 million in order to avert a trial in the voting machine company's lawsuit about what?**
- Fox News advocated for Donald Trump to be president, even donating to his campaign.
 - Fox News sided with Donald Trump that the election was rigged and that Trump was the rightful president.
 - Tucker Carlson actually voted for Biden while publicly telling stories about Trump based on alternative facts.
 - Fox News knowingly aired falsehoods about Dominion's voting machines and did so with actual malice and reckless disregard for the truth.
21. **As a candidate, Joe Biden promised voters worried about the warming planet "No more drilling on federal lands, period. Period, period, period." However, in March, President Biden approved an \$8 billion plan to extract 600 million barrels of oil from pristine federal land. Where?**
- Alaska
 - Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming
 - in the Outer Banks off the coast of North Carolina
 - in the vast ranchlands of West Texas
22. **Nuclear power has long been contentious in Germany. What action did the country take in mid-April?**
- Europe's largest nuclear reactor began regular output in Rostock. It is expected to produce enough power to meet 14% of the country's electricity demand for 60 years.
 - The country's final three nuclear power plants closed.
 - Officials with Germany's nuclear regulatory agency took responsibility for a near meltdown investigators said was caused by "lack of maintenance."
 - During the winter, officials ramped up power output at the country's three nuclear power plants to "near red-line levels" to compensate for fuel Russia refused to distribute.
23. **Utah's social media law is the first state law in the nation that would require all of the following EXCEPT what?**
- prohibit social media companies from allowing users under 18 to have accounts without the explicit consent of a parent or guardian
 - give Utah parents access to their children's posts, messages and responses
 - require social media companies to block Utah minors from accessing their account from 10:30 p.m. to 6:30 a.m.
 - hold social media companies responsible for content posted on their sites
24. **Toy company Mattel revealed a new Barbie doll in April. The doll wore ankle foot orthotics, had three chevrons on her necklace, and wore a blue and yellow dress adorned with butterflies. Why?**
- The butterflies were there to remind people to protect endangered insects.
 - The blue and yellow honored Ukraine the war.
 - The doll represented a person with Down syndrome.
 - The doll represented soldiers who return from war with injuries.
25. **Under the current voting system, 90 counties in Texas use countywide voting centers on Election Day. SB990 — if approved by the state House — would eliminate countywide voting centers on Election Day. Where would people vote?**
- at one central location approved by the county judge
 - at an assigned precinct, typically in their neighborhood
 - at one central location approved by the Texas legislature
 - at the office of the county judge with approved observers watching all interactions

26. It is sometimes thought of as a problem of the developed world. It costs more than \$4 trillion to treat related illnesses. And, by 2035, more than half of the global population, a sharp jump from current numbers, will have it. What?
- cancer
 - smoking-related health issues
 - tooth decay
 - obesity
27. According to Deputy Interior Secretary Tommy Beaudreau, it provides water for more than 40 million Americans. It fuels hydropower resources in eight states, supports agriculture and agricultural communities across the West, and is a crucial resource for 30 tribal nations. A drought and overuse of water from what river's basin forced the Biden administration to propose "painful choices" for policymakers?
- Mississippi
 - Colorado
 - Rio Grande
 - Ohio
28. How did Mr. Pickles, a 90-year-old radiated tortoise, a critically endangered species, stun his handlers at the Houston Zoo?
- He and Mrs. Pickles had three hatchlings: Dill, Gherkin and Jalapeño.
 - He escaped by digging out of the enclosure in which he'd lived for 36 years.
 - He mated with a common desert tortoise.
 - He tested positive for a respiratory infection only thought to infect mammals, one related to COVID-19.
29. Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas said he followed the advice of "colleagues and others in the judiciary" when he took what action?
- He resigned.
 - He leaked a court's opinion on race-based affirmative action in college admissions weeks before the official release.
 - He appeared on ABC News in an interview with Kate Shaw discussing the future of the American democracy and the role of the justice system.
 - He did not disclose lavish gifts and travel from a wealthy conservative donor.
30. Thanks to a new law governing what is "Swiss-made," Toblerone chocolate bars will soon be losing their most famous visual, an image of what?
- the Matterhorn
 - a bear
 - Mont Blanc
 - the Swiss cross
31. Two federal panels of addiction experts unanimously recommended that what medication, an overdose-reversing nasal spray, be made widely available without a prescription, a significant step in the effort to stem skyrocketing drug fatalities?
- Ivermectin
 - Motrin (ibuprofen)
 - Narcan (naloxone)
 - Benaryl (diphenhydramine)

32. **After Sen. Carol Alvarado, D-Houston, filed similar legislation, Republican Rep. Charlie Geren, R-Fort Worth, called for a constitutional amendment to do something industry leaders in North Texas have been attempting to get approved for years. What?**
- the legal use of marijuana use of any kind
 - term limits on U.S. senators, limiting them to two terms
 - the legalization of casino and sports gambling in Texas
 - the use of “excess tax revenues” only to fund public education
33. **Following other school districts in Texas, including Mineral Wells, Tioga, Chico, Rains and Alba-Golden, the Anna Independent School District school board announced it approved what change to the district’s academic calendar next year?**
- moving to a four-day week
 - moving all extracurricular activities to be outside the school day, reserving a four-class period day for all academics with two hours per class and an eight-hour school day
 - moving to a nine-week academic period followed by two weeks of break going year around
 - moving to four-quarters per year, allowing one-fourth of students to take one quarter off each year
34. **The Supreme Court heard a case of a student who sued his public school system for not providing a free public education tailored to each student’s specific needs. What disability did the student in the public school system in Sturgis, Michigan, have?**
- He was blind.
 - He was deaf.
 - He had diabetes.
 - He had a speech impediment.
35. **U.N. member states finally agreed in March on a treaty to protect what area against the loss of wildlife?**
- the moon
 - the area inside the Arctic Circle
 - the high seas
 - Antarctica
36. **U.S. President Joe Biden, who is already the oldest president in American history, announced his re-election bid. How old would he be at the end of his second term, if re-elected?**
- 82
 - 86
 - 90
 - 94
37. **While the Army will remain the manager of the land and continue to lead the efforts to clear it of dangerous munitions, U.S. President Joe Biden designated a new national monument. Where?**
- the Tall Grasslands in Fort Cavazos, home of the Golden-cheeked Warbler in Central Texas
 - Southern Pines Preserve in Fort Liberty in North Carolina
 - Castner Range in Fort Bliss just outside El Paso, Texas
 - the Civil War battlefield contained within Fort Walker in eastern Virginia
38. **Which tech company came under so much fire that its CEO, Shou Chew, testified in front of Congress and denied it has given any data to the Chinese government?**
- TikTok
 - WhatsApp
 - ChatGPT
 - Sina Weibo

39. North Carolina's legislature overrode a veto by Gov. Roy Cooper regarding requirements for purchasing a gun. What change did North Carolina make, following Texas, which took similar action in 2021?
- Only people 21 years old or older can purchase any firearm in North Carolina.
 - No one can purchase a semi-automatic or automatic weapon in North Carolina.
 - Anyone wanting to purchase a gun has to undergo a background check and wait seven days.
 - It is now legal to purchase a pistol without a permit in North Carolina.
40. Treasury Secretary Janet L. Yellen said in early May that the U.S. could run out of money to pay its bills by June 1 if Congress does not take what action?
- raise or suspend the debt limit
 - raise interest rates another quarter point
 - pass a balanced budget
 - raise the minimum tax rate from 10% to 17%

THE ESSAY

NOTE: Contestants who do not write an essay will be disqualified. Essay length is not a major grading factor as long as the essay is substantial and demonstrates a sincere effort to discuss the assigned topic. Cover as many corners of the issue as practical, including historical, political, economic, social and cultural, when relevant. Avoid including your personal opinions, as more than enough information on the subject has been published.

A focused, concise and specific essay beats a vague and rambling essay.

PROMPT

Public education advocates created a wish list of issues they wanted Texas legislators to prioritize. Topping that list was increasing state funding for public schools. But funding isn't the only education-related issue on the agenda of the Texas Legislature or the U.S. Legislature. While the establishment of education is one of the powers reserved to the states, members of both the executive and legislative branches at the national level have tried to make changes in various aspects of the educational system. In addition to funding, pick two issues at the state and/or federal level that relate to K-12 education in Texas. Discuss the political, economic, social and cultural aspects of all three issues (funding and two others of your choice) in a well-organized and informative essay.

DO NOT DISTRIBUTE TO STUDENTS BEFORE OR DURING THE CONTEST!

ANSWER KEY

ESSAY PROMPT

Public education advocates created a wish list of issues they wanted Texas legislators to prioritize. Topping that list was increasing state funding for public schools. But funding isn't the only education-related issue on the agenda of the Texas Legislature or the U.S. Legislature. While the establishment of education is one of the powers reserved to the states, members of both the executive and legislative branches at the national level have tried to make changes in various aspects of the educational system. In addition to funding, pick two issues at the state and/or federal level that relate to K-12 education in Texas. Discuss the political, economic, social and cultural aspects of all three issues (funding and two others of your choice) in a well-organized and informative essay.

- | | |
|-------|-------|
| 1. B | 21. A |
| 2. C | 22. B |
| 3. D | 23. D |
| 4. B | 24. C |
| 5. C | 25. B |
| 6. B | 26. D |
| 7. D | 27. B |
| 8. D | 28. A |
| 9. D | 29. D |
| 10. B | 30. A |
| 11. D | 31. C |
| 12. B | 32. C |
| 13. C | 33. A |
| 14. C | 34. B |
| 15. A | 35. C |
| 16. B | 36. B |
| 17. C | 37. C |
| 18. A | 38. A |
| 19. A | 39. D |
| 20. D | 40. A |

POTENTIAL DISCUSSION POINTS PREPARED May 6, 2023 might include, but should not be limited to...

- *Vouchers* — Under the pressure of mounting inflation and a post-pandemic decline in enrollment, public schools are now having to deal with the very real reality that the Texas Legislature will allow parents to divert previously public funds to support private education. The University of Texas at Austin survey found 46% of voters supported the idea, while 41% opposed it. The 5-point margin was unchanged since the pollsters last asked the question in April 2022, but the political landscape has shifted significantly since then. Gov. Greg Abbott has thrown his weight behind the proposal. The idea has historically faced opposition in the Legislature from Democrats and rural Republicans who are fiercely protective of public schools in their districts. Florida became the fourth state this year to enact a bill that would allow parents to receive taxpayer-funded vouchers to send their children to private schools, joining Iowa, Utah and Arkansas. Almost half of the country's state legislatures have passed or are considering passing legislature that could reshape the funding of public education by creating voucher programs.
- *Base funding* — House Bill 100, authored by Rep. Ken King, R-Canadian, would raise the basic allotment, which is the minimum money that schools get per student. That amount is \$6,160; under King's bill, it would increase to \$6,250 in 2024 and at least \$6,300 in 2025. HB100 was sent to the Senate in early May.
- *Teacher raises* — If HB1548 passes, Texas will grant teachers a \$15,000 pay raise, and school librarians, counselors, and nurses will also receive a \$15,000 annual raise, while other school employees could enjoy a 25% pay increase. State lawmakers looking at how to spend a \$32.7 billion budget surplus. While Texas and the rest of the country have dealt with teacher shortages for years, the pandemic exacerbated them. Texas ranks 28th in the nation for teacher pay, \$7,652 less than the national average, according to the latest National Education Association report.
- *Teacher shortage* — Nearly 1 in 5 new teachers hired in Texas last year went into the classroom without a state certification, Texas Education Agency data reveals. The sharp spike raises questions about the preparedness of thousands of educators who are entering the profession at a tumultuous time. State officials want to bolster educator quality, but Texas is struggling with teacher shortages in key areas. The shortage is often attributed to heated debates over critical race theory, plummeting standardized test scores, and a slew of difficulties that accompany post-pandemic remote learning.
- *Safety* — A bill, introduced months after the Uvalde school shooting, will allocate more funds to the state's school safety allotment, which is money given to districts to improve campus security. A separate school safety proposal (HB3) to require an armed district employee in every campus in Texas had proponents arguing it would make schools safer, and opponents saying adding more guns on schools would make the facilities more dangerous.
- *Religion in schools* — Public schools in Texas would have to prominently display the Ten Commandments in every classroom starting next school year under a bill the Texas Senate approved. This is the latest attempt from Texas Republicans to inject religion into public schools. In 2021, state Sen. Bryan Hughes, a Mineola Republican, authored a bill that became law requiring schools to display donated "In God We Trust" signs.
- *Parents' rights* — U.S. legislators have proposed to limit how teachers can discuss so-called divisive topics like race, gender, and sexuality. The Parents Bill of Rights Act would require local education agencies to publicly post the curriculum for each elementary and secondary school grade level and require schools to notify parents and guardians of a right to review the school's curriculum and budget. Backers of the bill say H.R. 5 has five core principles: Parents have the right to know what their children are being taught, to be heard, to see the school budget and spending, to protect their children's privacy and to keep their children safe.