

# Alvin Independent School District News

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301 E. House Street • Alvin, Texas 77511

## History of Texas Education

Although it has seen its share of changes throughout the years, a free, public education has long been the heart of Texas. In fact, the Texas Declaration of Independence in 1836 listed the failure of the Mexican Government “to establish any public system of education, although possessed of almost boundless resources” among reasons for severing political ties with Mexico.

In 1840, the first Anglo-American public school law in Texas was enacted and provided for surveying and setting aside 17.712 acres of land in each county to support free public schools. Five years later, the state’s constitution dedicated one-tenth of the annual state revenue as perpetual funds to support free public schools.

In 1854, a new school law set aside as a permanent school fund \$2 million of the \$10 million in five-percent U.S. Indemnity Bonds received in settlement of Texas’ boundary claims against the United States.

Following the Civil War and Reconstruction, the new state constitution of 1876 set aside 45 million acres of public domain for school support and directed that the income from the new Permanent School Fund be invested in bonds.

In 1884, the school law was again rewritten. The office of the state superintendent was recreated, the state *ad valorem* was affirmed and the Permanent School Fund was to be invested in county and other bonds to increase income.

A year later, a system of accreditation was created when high schools sent selected test papers for examination by University of Texas faculty. If the papers were found satisfactory the school was to be considered affiliated with the University and those high school graduates were admitted without examination.

Over the years, a series of additional laws gradually granted cities and towns more freedom in the development and administration of its schools, resulting in the formation of independent school districts. By 1900, there were 526 districts; today there are 1,034.

In 1911, a rural high school law was passed, establishing county boards of education and permitting creation of rural high schools and the consolidation of common school districts. The effort to make common or rural school districts equal to independent or urban districts was heightened by the passage of a law in 1917 authorizing state purchase of textbooks. Expansion of rural aid to school, including state supports for teacher salaries, gradually helped improve the education provided to children on the state’s farms and ranches.

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The drive to improve public education gained momentum in 1949 with the passage of the Gilmer-Aiken laws. These laws created the Foundation School Program to apportion state funds to local school districts. The new legislation also reorganized the administration of public education, created and elected a 21-member State Board of Education that appointed a Commissioner of Education and reorganized the administration of state public school policy through the Texas Education Agency.

The school finance system first came under attack in 1968 when Demetrio Rodriguez of San Antonio filed a class-action lawsuit against seven San Antonio area school districts and the state of Texas, contending that the “Texas method of school financing violated the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution” and that wealth-based discrimination created inequality in the local education system. While a Texas District Court ruled in favor of the plaintiff, the U.S. Supreme Court reversed the decision in 1973, ruling that “reliance on property taxes to fund public schools does not violate the Equal Protection Clause” and that the state is not required to provide equal funding to each school district.

The Edgewood School District in San Antonio again filed a state court lawsuit to change the funding formula in 1984. The summer of 1984 marked the beginning of a new era in Texas education. That year, meeting in special session, the Texas Legislature enacted a landmark education reform bill that revamped virtually every aspect of the state’s public education system.

House Bill 72 grew out of recommendations of a special Select Committee on Public Education headed by Dallas businessman H. Ross Perot. Most of the committee’s recommendations, many of them tempered by compromise, were incorporated into the reform bill. The legislation provided a pay raise for teachers, revised the state’s funding system to funnel more money to property-poor school districts and improved equity among districts across the state, and required students to pass every course with a minimum grade of 70 in order to be eligible to participate in extracurricular activities.

Other major provisions included requiring high school students to pass a basic test before getting a diploma; requiring schools to follow a uniform grading scale; development of a statewide teacher evaluation system; a prohibition against social promotion; capping class sizes in the early grades; and mandatory pre-kindergarten programs for economically disadvantaged or limited English proficient four-year-olds.

Although HB72 significantly revamped the state’s school funding system, the Texas Supreme Court struck down the funding plan as unconstitutional in 1987 and directed lawmakers to devise a new system. The Court also struck down two subsequent funding plans developed in 1990 and 1991. Finally in 1993, lawmakers devised a third plan that passed the Court’s muster. The new plan, part of Senate Bill 7, prohibited school districts from having more than \$280,000 of property wealth per student and required them to choose from one or more of five options to reduce their wealth to that level.

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Those options included: voluntarily consolidating with another district; detaching property and annexing it to another district; purchasing attendance credits from the state; contracting to educate students in other districts; or consolidating tax bases with another district.

With the passage of Senate Bill 1 in 1995, the minimum salary for a teacher was increased, and new goals encouraging more parental involvement, safe campus environments, and the implementation of technology in an effective manner were set for Texas public schools. Senate Bill 1 also decreased the student suspension time under the no pass/no play rule, in which students who fail a class are benched from extracurricular activities, from six weeks to three weeks.

Senate Bill 1 also increased local control and provided opportunities for local ownership in the education process by the legislation's provisions for charter school and home rule education. A little more than a year after the bill's passage, all 20 charter school slots, the maximum allowed under current legislation, were awarded by the State Board of Education.

In 1997, the Legislature authorized the State Board of Education to award an additional 100 charter school slots, and an unlimited number of charter schools for at-risk students. Although one of the original 20 charter school slots was later revoked when the proposed school failed to open, the Board awarded 41 new charter slots in March of 1998 and another 85 in September 1998. As of 2001, 193 charter schools had been authorized, with 159 in operation.

In 1999, the Legislature increased state funding for public education by \$3.89 billion, the largest funding increase in the state's history. Included in that amount was funding to provide a \$3,000 salary increase for teachers, counselors, librarians and school nurses. The basic, per-pupil allotments sent from the states' Foundation School Program to local school districts also was increased from \$2,396 per pupil to \$2,537 per pupil. In addition, lawmakers provided \$500 million in equalized state funds to help school districts pay off bonds issued for construction of school facilities, and earmarked \$300 million for kindergarten, pre-kindergarten, Head Start and ninth grade dropout intervention/ prevention programs.

Lawmakers also toughened testing and promotion requirements. The Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAKS), the state's student testing program, was expanded by adding a ninth grade test and moving the exit level test required for graduation from the 10th grade to the 11th grade. When fully implemented in 2002-2003, the new tests made up an assessment system that annually tests students in grades three through 11. Students who entered kindergarten in the fall of 1999 also will be required to pass the third grade TAAS or risk being required to repeat third grade.

Since its implementation, average TAKS scores have risen in virtually every tested subject and grade level. And on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), minority students in Texas have made such great progress in improving test scores, they're now outperforming their peers in most other states.

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In 2007, the legislature passed Senate Bill 1031, which eliminated TAKS tests at the high school level and substituted end-of-course (EOC) exams in English/Language Arts, Math, Science and Social Studies, starting with 9<sup>th</sup> grade students in the 2011-12 school year. Third through eighth-graders, however, would continue to take the TAKS test. .

Our most recent legislative session in 2009 focused mainly on student and school accountability, as well as promoting better communication rift between secondary school and college. One of this session's hallmark bills, House Bill 3, was known as the "school accountability" bill, set to take effect in the 2011-12 school year. The bill works to take the emphasis away from one-time test results by basing a district or campus's accreditation on three-year test score averages; removing the requirement for 3<sup>rd</sup> graders to pass the TAKS in order to move to the next grade; and altering the protocol for "failing" schools.

HB3 also intends to increase students' "college readiness" by using EOC exam scores and research provided by TEA every three years to ensure students are properly equipped for college-level courses; adopt uniform course placement standards for higher education institutions; and offer grants to universities that partner with at least one school district and one business entity to develop courses in high-demand math and science occupations.

With the legislature's goal to bring Texas into the list top 10 states with the best education system, the next 10 years will surely bring many exciting changes and improvements from the Capitol. And in the years in between, we will continue to celebrate the exemplary institution that is Texas Public Schools.