Texas Association for the Gifted & Talented

TAGT SUMMARY OF 2015 LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITY

The Texas Association for the Gifted & Talented (TAGT) connects and empowers educators and parents to meet the unique needs of gifted and talented learners through awareness, advocacy and action. With the guidance of the TAGT Advocacy Committee and approval of the Board, our organization established 2015 Policy Goals for the 84th Legislative Session. These goals were designed to strengthen programs, services, and funding for gifted and talented education. TAGT Policy Goals are designed to include policy and implementation at all levels (Legislative activity, TEA, SBOE), when appropriate.

As a service to members, TAGT is providing this summary of legislation passed during the 2015 Legislative session that supported the Association’s stated goals.

TAGT maintains an active presence at the Capitol through Policy Consultant Marty DeLeon and TAGT staff, whose efforts guide our association to support and protect gifted education and in keeping gifted education on the minds of legislators and key educational figures.

For a summary of the 84th Legislation Session and the impact on education, please view the PowerPoint at http://www.txgifted.org/legislative-summary. For an analysis of 2015 Policy goals and accomplishments, see below.

2015 TAGT POLICY GOALS & ACCOMPLISHMENTS

TAGT was successful in preventing HB 2040 from making it to the House Floor out of committee. HB 2040 proposed eliminating the 6 hours of annual professional development required of teachers who provide services to gifted and talented students, and only require these 6 hours of training once every 5 years. TAGT members testified against this bill in the public education committee based on the following points:

- HB 2040 is a step backwards. It reverses more than 20 years of policy designed to encourage awareness and understanding of the academic and social/emotional needs of gifted and talented student.
• HB 2040 runs counter to the accountability requirements of gifted and talented services contained in House Bill 5. It sends a message that these students are unworthy of having their needs met. HB 5 was designed to inform parents and community members that all students, including those that are gifted, are receiving appropriate services by well-trained educators.

• Professional development for these educators is critical; gifted and talented students already are the only special population in which teachers are not required to hold specific certification.

TAGT 2015 POLICY GOALS:

1. Provide Resources to School Districts Necessary to Support the Effective Implementation of Provision 46 of House Bill 5 as it Relates to G/T Programs

In 2013, the 83rd Texas Legislature passed House Bill 5, an extensive education bill that reduces the number of end-of-course tests that students must pass in order to graduate and provides students more opportunities to pursue career and college pathways. Also, included in the law is a provision that requires school districts to evaluate and assign a performance rating to nine programs annually, and educational programs for gifted and talented students is one of the areas specifically named in the law. Therefore, TAGT opposes any changes to this statutory provision supports strategies and resources that will support the effective implementation of this provision at the local level.

Other than HB 2040, which would have indirectly affected the positive gains in HB5 for gifted students, there were no proposals considered in the 2015 Legislative session affecting gifted and talented language in HB5 and its implementation.

2. Restore State Funding to Public Education

In 2011, the 82nd Texas Legislature reduced public education spending by $5 billion; therefore, a goal of most education associations, including TAGT, was to see funding restored in the 83rd session. In 2013, Senate Bill 1 restored $3.4 billion to public education for 2014-2015. However, it will continue to be a goal of TAGT to support the increased funding for education to restore cuts and account for growth.

When the Legislature adjourned on June 1, 2015, lawmakers only put in $1.5 B new dollars for public education when there was $6.4 B still available in the state budget. Lawmakers chose to postpone on
improving funding for public schools because they are still waiting for a Texas Supreme Court decision on school finance. Lawmakers seemed more interested in reform efforts and taking governance away from ISDs than making a meaningful commitment to providing additional funding for schools.

3. **Protect the GT Weight/Allotment** (Funding dedicated for gifted education)

   TAGT will continue to advocate for the preservation of the funding specifically dedicated to gifted education for G/T services to remain viable in public schools.

   *There were no proposals considered in the 2015 Legislative session to eliminate or reduce the G/T weight and allotment.*

4. **Encourage TEA to Collect, Disaggregate and Report Data about Gifted Education Programs**

   TAGT believes the Texas Education Agency must gather data in a simple and straightforward manner about the gifted and talented programs and services school districts offer. This data should include information regarding academic performance, identification procedures and program evaluation. This is not to evaluate or rank school districts, but to provide data about the services offered as part of districts’ gifted programming. This will create greater transparency for taxpayers and for parents who need the information to make informed decisions about their children’s education.

   *TAGT is continuing to work closely with TEA and the Commissioner’s Advisory Council on Gifted Education to identify and utilize data that will improve services for all gifted students statewide. HB 5 has had varied impact on gifted programs across the state. In some districts, the renewed focus has provided greater opportunities for gifted students. As a result of HB 5, TEA is gathering information regarding G/T services; the next step is determining how best to use this information to improve G/T services.*