

LOBBY WATCH



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Political Education:

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School Lobby's Civics Lesson Cost Up To \$6.3 Million

- Meanwhile a single corporation, SBC, spent even more.

Shirking responsibility for their failure to redress Texas' school-funding crisis earlier this year, top Texas leaders blamed the "educational lobby," or the many school administrators and educators who told lawmakers that the leadership's school plan earned a failing grade.

The education lobby reported spending up to \$6.3 million on 161 lobby contracts by the end of this year's special sessions.¹ This huge expenditure falls short of the up to \$6.9 million that *a single corporation* spent on lobbyists in this period. Yet few state leaders have denounced the SBC lobby (now called AT&T), which persuaded them to swallow a sweetheart special-session communications bill.

Districts

School boards made the education lobby's largest expenditures, spending up to \$2.9 million on 75 lobby contracts. The Texas Association of School Boards (TASB) dominated this lobby, spending up to \$650,000 on eight lobby contracts. The

Houston and Dallas school districts had the largest lobby expenditures by single districts. Many associations also lobbied on behalf of school districts with like characteristics (including big, regional, rural and growing districts).

Educators

Led by teachers unions—including the Texas Federation of Teachers, the Texas State Teachers Association and the Texas Classroom Teachers Association—educators spent up to \$2.3 million on 46 lobby contracts.

Other school interests

Ten other school interests put their respective spins on school debates, spending up to \$1.1 million on 40 lobby contracts. Leading the pack, Texas Businesses for Educational Excellence advocates stronger cost-accountability standards for schools.

A separate group, Texans for Educational Excellence (TEE), and Texans for Good Schools are pro-voucher groups tied to the wealthy funders James Leininger and Louis Beecherl. Texans for Good Schools operates out of Beecherl's Dallas office. Beecherl's long-time political operative, Bill Ceverha, is a TEE lobbyist.²

The two groups promoting private, state-funded charter schools hired nine lobbyists, who were opposed by one lobbyist for the

Education Lobby Spending

Interest	Max. Value of Contracts	Min. Value of Contracts	No. of Contracts
School Boards	\$2,925,000	\$1,325,000	75
Educators	\$2,280,000	\$1,115,000	46
Other	\$1,110,000	\$440,000	40
TOTALS:	\$6,315,000	\$2,880,000	161

School Board Lobby

Lobby Client	Max. Value of Contracts	No. of Contracts
	Sept. '05	
Texas Assoc. of School Boards	\$650,000	8
Houston ISD	\$420,000	9
Dallas ISD	\$255,000	8
Fast Growth School Coalition	\$245,000	6
Northwest ISD	\$170,000	9
Texas School Alliance	\$160,000	4
Austin ISD	\$100,000	3
Center for Equity and Adequacy in Public	\$100,000	1
El Paso ISD	\$100,000	1
South Texas Assoc. of Schools	\$100,000	3
Stafford Municipal School District	\$100,000	2
Arlington ISD	\$55,000	4
Abilene ISD	\$50,000	1
Carrollton/Farmers Branch ISD	\$50,000	1
Central Texas Coalition for Equitable	\$50,000	1
Lubbock ISD	\$50,000	1
Small Rural School Finance Coalition	\$50,000	1
Texas Assoc. of Mid-Size Schools	\$50,000	1
White Deer ISD	\$50,000	2
San Antonio ISD	\$35,000	2
Spring Branch ISD	\$25,000	1
Eanes Independent School System	\$10,000	1
Graham ISD	\$10,000	1
Round Rock ISD	\$10,000	1
Santa Gertrudis ISD	\$10,000	1
South Texas ISD	\$10,000	1
Texas Assoc. of Rural Schools	\$10,000	1
TOTALS:	\$2,925,000	75

Educator Lobby

Lobby Client	Max. Value of Contracts	No. of Contract
	Sept. '05	
TX Federation of Teachers	\$525,000	6
TX State Teachers Assoc.	\$500,000	11
TX Classroom Teachers Assoc.	\$400,000	8
Assoc. of TX Professional Educators	\$315,000	10
TX Retired Teachers Assoc.	\$150,000	1
TX Assoc. of School Administrators	\$130,000	5
Corpus Christi Federation of Teachers	\$100,000	1
TX Educational Diagnosticians' Assoc.	\$60,000	2
Assoc. of Charter Educators	\$50,000	1
TX Council of Administrators of Special Education	\$50,000	1
TOTALS:	\$2,280,000	46

Other School Lobby Interests

Lobby Client	Max. Value of Sept. '05	Contract Increase May-Sept.	No. of Contract
TX Businesses for Educational Excellence	\$360,000	44%	6
Texans for Educational Excellence	\$225,000	9%	5
Coalition of Effective Charters	\$160,000	45%	7
TX Charter Coalition	\$110,000	83%	2
Texans for Good Schools	\$80,000	0%	8
SeptStart, Inc.	\$50,000	0%	1
Teaching Commission	\$50,000	0%	5
Coalition for Public Schools	\$25,000	0%	1
Home School Legal Defense Assoc.	\$25,000	0%	1
TX Assoc. for the Gifted and Talented	\$25,000	0%	1
TOTALS:	\$1,110,000	20%	40

Coalition for Public Schools, which opposes state funding for private schools.

Charter schools are exempt from an executive order that Governor Perry issued in August requiring school districts to spend 65 percent of their operating funds on classroom instruction. Critics say that Perry issued this decree as retribution against the education lobby for blocking his school-funding plans.

New York's business-backed Teaching Commission promotes more training for teachers and linking teacher pay to merit rather than seniority. With funding from the tourism industry, SeptStart advocates a later starting date for schools.

Special-session bounce

The ideological school lobby accounted for most of the \$275,000 increase in education-lobby expenditures reported between the end of the regular session and the close of the second special session. Together, Texas Businesses for Educational Excellence and Texans for Educational Excellence increased their lobby spending up to \$125,000 during the special sessions.

The two pro-charter groups, which won the special gubernatorial exemption, posted the greatest relative increase in lobby spending, by spending up to \$100,000 more between them.

The only other education interest that increased its lobby expenditures during the special sessions was the Texas Classroom Teachers Association, which boosted its spending from \$350,000 to \$400,000.

Lobby TEA party

Eight elite education lobbyists reported maximum lobby incomes exceeding \$100,000 from one or more education clients. Many of these lobbyists wield revolving-door credentials.

Mega-school lobbyist J. David Thompson III of Bracewell & Giuliani did prior stints as general counsel of the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and chief staff lobbyist at the Texas Association of School Boards (TASB). Helping districts challenge Texas' school-finance system, he has litigated *Edgewood ISD v. Moreno* and *West Orange-Cove v. Neeley*. The latter case set the stage for the current crisis when state District Judge John Dietz ruled last year that the school finance system in Texas is unconstitutional.

Partners Daniel Casey and Lynn Moak are revolving-door veterans. Casey, who also did a stint as TASB's chief lobbyist, worked for the Comptroller's Office, Senate Finance Committee and Legislative Budget Board. Casey also co-wrote the book on school finance (*Basics of Texas Public School*

Top Education Lobbyists

Lobbyist	Employer	Previous Employment	Max. Value of Contracts	No. of Contracts
David Thompson	Bracewell & Giuliani	TEA, TASB	\$325,000	5
Lynn M. Moak	Moak Casey & Assoc.	TASB, Comptroller, Legislature	\$220,000	8
Daniel T. Casey	Moak Casey & Assoc.	TEA, Comptroller, Lt. Governor	\$210,000	7
Paul M. Colbert	Self	Texas House Representative	\$200,000	2
David Anderson	HillCo Partners	TEA	\$185,000	6
Catherine Clark	TX Assoc. School Bds	State Property Tax Board	\$150,000	1
Barry Telford	Self	Texas House Representative	\$150,000	1
Rusty T. Kelley	Public Strategies	House Speaker's aide	\$110,000	3

Finance). Moak is an ex-Deputy Commissioner of Education who worked in the Comptroller's Office, Lieutenant Governor's Office and at TEA.

As a state representative Paul Colbert helped launch student-assessment testing and the so-called Robin Hood school-finance system. Now a school-finance consultant, Colbert was an expert witness for plaintiffs in *West Orange-Cove v. Neeley*. Fellow ex-Representative Barry Telford parlayed a stint on the House Pensions Committee into a lobby gig at the Texas Retired Teachers Association.

Before becoming a HillCo lobbyist, David Anderson worked for textbook publishers and

served as the TEA's director of curriculum and professional development. Anderson also lobbies for the College Board and Teachscape, which sells teacher-development materials.

TASB Associate Executive Director Catherine Clark previously worked at the TASB-linked Texas Center for Educational Research and at the now-defunct State Property Tax Board.

Public Strategies Managing Director Rusty Kelley is Texas' top-grossing lobbyist. By the end of this year's regular session he reported that 61 clients were paying him up to \$3.7 million. Kelley was a top aide to ex-House Speaker Billy Clayton, who also became a lobbyist. •

¹ This excludes higher education lobby contracts.

² A state civil court judge ruled in May that Ceverha broke Texas elections law by failing to report \$600,000 in corporate contributions as the 2002 treasurer of Texans for a Republican Majority PAC. Ceverha filed for bankruptcy in October to dodge responsibility for \$196,660 in court-ordered damages and attorney fees. His bankruptcy filings state that sympathetic clients have been steering more consulting work his way to help him pay his legal bills.