EXECUTIVE SUMMARY – CULTURE OF VOTING

Taxpayer funded organizations may promote voter registration and communicate election schedules. The use of taxpayer funds for electioneering is prohibited. However, there is always a temptation to use public funds to engage in subtle (or overt) electioneering for the “right” causes. Moreover, when taxpayer funded organizations form a state-wide association, those temptations to use public money can become reality. Such an organization has been formed.

TASB, Texas ISDs, ATPE and numerous education establishment groups have created a state-wide program under the guise of “civic responsibility.” The program is called “Culture of Voting.” It specifically calls on school districts to inject themselves into the political process, using taxpayer funded resources to influence elections. They promote strategies targeting administrators, staff, teachers, PTA organizations and students. The overall goal is to create a block of over 1 million potential voters. Voting in mass, that would influence state-wide races. Locally, the combined voter block has the mass to approve TRE and Bond Propositions. All it takes is registration, indoctrination and mobilization.

TASB has promulgated a suggested resolution (HERE or see Attachment A). 209 Districts have already signed up for “Culture of Voting” and 58 have already passed enabling resolutions. Their Boards and Administrators are committing to implement this register, indoctrinate and mobilize program which includes such tactics as directing employees and students to highly politicized web sites run by TASB and ATPE, voter pledge “cards,” district assemblies, use of school buses to shuttle employees to the polls, time-off with pay, organizing non-profit PTAs, etc.

The following actions are recommended to stop the unlawful use of taxpayer funds for electioneering:

- **Texas Attorney General** investigate to determine if the State Election Code has been violated
- **The Commissioner of Education** direct the 209 ISD Boards of Education to rescind resolutions and cease implementation of TASB’s Culture of Voting program and, further, establish policies limiting election activities to encouraging voter registration and communicating election dates.
TASB Culture of Voting

Voter registration drives and communication of election schedules are supported by Texas grassroots organizations. But when taxpayer funded organizations promote actions beyond that limited charter, the temptation to use public funds to engage in subtle (or overt) electioneering can become irresistible. Moreover, when taxpayer funded organizations form a state-wide association and formal structure, those irresistible urges to use public money to influence elections can become reality.

Such an organization of Texas ISDs and the education establishment has been created. They are implementing a state-wide program under the guise of “civic responsibility,” but which specifically calls on school districts to use taxpayer funded resources to influence elections. The effort also appears to attempt to influence how staff, teachers, PTA organizations, students and student parents vote in elections.

The program is called “Culture of Voting.” It is being orchestrated by the Texas Association of School Boards (TASB), the Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE) and a large consortium of “independent” and “non-profit” organizations.

TASB’s strategy is simple: There are over 600,000 teachers and employees of Texas ISDs which, when coupled with spouses, represents a block of over 1 million potential voters. Voting in mass, that would influence state-wide races. Locally, an ISD is typically the largest employer in a given city. When PTA/PTOs are factored in, the combined voter block has the mass to carry any TRE or Bond Proposition. All it takes is registration, indoctrination and mobilization.

TASB’s has promulgated a suggested resolution (HERE or see Attachment A) which outlines the specific steps that the ISD Boards and Administrators should take to implement this “register, influence and mobilize” program. That is what “Culture of Voting” is about. The draft resolution crosses the line from “civic responsibility” and engages in multiple instances of electioneering activities.

1. The preamble to the resolution prescribes the case for going beyond registration and election dates.
   a. It states that it is the Board’s responsibility to “create a culture of voting.....for the benefit of students.” This should be categorically rejected. It is the Board’s responsibility to ensure students are educated in civic matters, not tie “responsible citizenship” to specific political or policy positions.
   b. Another section of the preamble is directed at influencing a specific voting outcome. It infers that all employees and students should uniformly vote not just “pro-education,” but pro-public-education. Two phrases (“the institution of public education is best protected by...an informed electorate” and “greatest safeguard of a free society”) undermine the non-partisan and civic responsibility message the resolution is nominally trying to impart. An “informed citizen” should be “informed” by more than just the education establishment’s political message.

2. Electioneering on taxpayer funds is strictly prohibited. But TASB’s resolution calls for two actions which are overt electioneering:
   a. First, the resolution directs school employees to “participate in voter pledge programs” and directs them to TexasEducatorsVote.com. This web site is clearly partisan.
Although it has no identified ownership, its home page URL is masked to hide the actual TASB source. Moreover, it is supported by a plethora of education establishment “partners” (Attachment B). Every reference cited is a member of the education establishment. No non-partisan references are cited, let alone organizations with opposing opinions.

b. Second, the resolution directs school employees to “use third party tools to learn about candidates’ positions on public education (such as TeachTheVote.org).” This site is an expressly partisan political web site that carries the disclaimer: “Political Ad Paid For By The Association Of Texas Professional Educators”

c. Both sites contain multiple links to ATPE’s web and Facebook sites. Neither TASB or ISD Boards should be promoting a private association, let alone one with a clearly partisan political message.

3. The resolution promotes actions the Districts should take to influence election outcomes – actions that necessarily entail the expenditure of resources (i.e., taxpayer funds) in furtherance of specific political outcomes. The resolution recommends four activities for increasing voter participation. None of these should be encouraged by TASB or authorized by any Board.

a. “District-wide (or campus-wide) assemblies” should not take time away from the classroom. And the administration definitely should not be used to encourage a particular political position.

b. Administrative procedures which allow “paid time out of the classroom” to vote should not be authorized. Early voting and election day voting hours are usually available until 7:00 PM, well after a school employee’s regular duty times.

c. The District should not incur the costs of using District busses to shuttle district employees to and from the polls. In the Frisco ISD for example, that would entail shuttling 7,000 employees from the approximately 75 locations to polling locations in two counties. (Note, the FISD District is already short 30 bus drivers)

d. PTA’s are non-profit 501.c.3 organizations and should not be encouraged to violate their IRS status by engaging in partisan political activity.

As of this date, there are 209 “participating” districts and 58 of these have passed Culture of Voting resolutions (Attachment C). This calls into question their political impartiality and fiduciary responsibility. However, the most egregious actions originated with the Texas Association of School Boards. TASB’s Culture of Voting Resolution being adopted by ISD Boards encourages districts to engage in electioneering activities and calls for expending taxpayer funds in support of those activities.

Moreover, TASB, which is supported by dues from taxpayer funded Districts has apparently colluded with PACs and other associations to create and end-to-end electioneering model: register employees, indoctrinate employees by encouraging participation and membership with “friendly” web sites, shuttle employees to the polls and then recognize them with a “spiff.” TASB’s orchestration of this entire “Culture of Voting” should be a matter of grave concern to ISD Trustees, Texas Education Agency, the Commissioner of Education/TEA, the Legislature, and most importantly, the citizens of Texas.

The following actions are recommended to stop the unlawful use of taxpayer funds for electioneering:

- **Texas Attorney General** investigate to determine if the State Election Code has been violated
- The **Commissioner of Education** direct the 209 ISD Boards of Education to rescind resolutions and cease implementation of TASB’s Culture of Voting program and, further, establish policies limiting election activities to encouraging voter registration and communicating election dates.
ATTACHMENT A – TASB RECOMMENDED RESOLUTION

RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF
____________ INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

WHEREAS, the Texas Election Code Sections 276.001 and 276.004 protect an employee’s right to vote;

WHEREAS, exercising one’s right to vote is a civic duty that should be encouraged and promoted;

WHEREAS, the Board of Trustees of ____________ ISD seeks to create a culture of voting and encourage all District employees to model responsible citizenship for the benefit of students;

WHEREAS, public education and the educated citizenry created by public education are the greatest safeguards to the State of Texas and the continuation of a free society; and the institution of public education is best protected by a robust and informed electorate;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED,

1. That the Board of Trustees of ____________ ISD supports a culture of voting and seeks to encourage maximum participation by District employees and eligible students in the elections process.

2. That the Board of Trustees of ____________ ISD authorizes the administration to take steps necessary to ensure maximum participation by District employees and eligible students in the elections process, which may include:

   Creating District communications that inform employees and eligible students of the importance of voting;
   – Creating District communications that inform employees and eligible students about when and where they may vote;
   – Creating District communications that encourage employees to participate in voter pledge programs (such as TexasEducatorsVote.com);
   – Creating District communications that encourage employees to use third party tools to learn about candidates’ positions on public education (such as TeachTheVote.org);
   – Conducting campus or Districtwide assemblies that promote a culture of voting;
   – Implementing administrative procedures that provide time during the early voting period for employees to vote;
   – *Where feasible, providing District transportation to and from polling places;
   – Implementing no cost incentives to promote voter participation, such as permitting employees with an “I Voted” sticker to wear jeans; and
   – Encouraging District and/or campus coordination with volunteer organizations, such as the PTA/PTO or retired educators groups, to encourage and facilitate the District’s efforts to create a culture of voting.

[*If the district will allow nonschool use of district-owned vehicles, consult with the district’s attorney and insurance carrier and ensure such use is permitted by district policy at CNB(LOCAL).]

ADOPTED this _______ (date) day of ________________________ (month/year), by the Board of Trustees.

__________________________________________, Presiding Officer

__________________________________________, Secretary
• **Association of Texas Professional Educators** *(Membership organization, advocacy, member services & professional resource aggregator)*

• **Teach the Vote** *(ATPE PAC. Focus is providing public education views and platforms of every candidate running for the Texas Legislature & SBOE)*

• **Center for Public Policy Priorities** *(Non-profit - Focus is “broaden budget and tax policy through public education. Board consists of former State Reps, political consultants, lawyers, etc”)*

• **Equity Center** *(Board is 100% School Superintendents – focus is equitable and adequate school finance)*

• **Fast Growth School Coalition** *(Membership organization. Board is comprised of ISD Superintendents. Focus: “advocates for investment in the state’s fastest growing school districts” (approx 300 ISD members))*

• **Friends of Texas Public Schools** *(Status not given. Board represented by those profiting from school spending. Advisory Board is 30 ISD Superintendents)*

• **League of Women Voters Texas** *(Non-Profit – Education focus “influences public policy through education and advocacy”)*

• **Make Education a Priority** *(Status not provided. Focus is engagement, governance & policy makers. Org is sponsored by VLK Architects, one of the Friends of Texas Public Schools, above”)*

• **Pastors for Texas Children** *(Non Profit. Focus is “supporting our free, public education system, to promote social justice for children, and to advance legislation that enriches Texas children, families, and communities.” Board is ministers and former teachers)*

• **Texas Association of Community Schools** *(Non profit 501(c)(6). Board is 100% Superintendents. Focus is advocacy for districts with one high school)*

• **Texas Association of Future Educators** *(Status not provided, Board page not working)*

• **Texas Association of School Boards** *(Status not provided. Directors are 36 ISD Superintendents. Focus is advocacy and service aggregator for districts. FISD Trustee is Reg 10 Director)*

• **Texas Association of Secondary School Principals** *(Membership organization. 48 Principles comprise the Board. Focus is advocacy for legislative programs, professional development and public relations. Centennial Principal is Reg 10 Director)*

• **Texas Council of Administrators of Special Education** *(Membership non-profit. 13 ISDs on Board. Focus is advocacy and empowering special education professionals)*

• **Texas Elementary Principals and Supervisors Association** *(Membership org. 57 Principles comprise regional and state boards. Focus is advocacy and professional development. Reg 10 representative is president of the state board)*

• **Texas Retired Teachers Association** *(Membership org. Board not listed. Focus is on advocacy and being an action organization for retired teachers)*

• **Texas School Public Relations Association** *(Membership org. 16 ISDs on Board. Focus is promoting public schools through effective communications. TSPRA does not lobby.)*

• **Texas Rural Education Association** *(Membership org. Board consists of 29 ISD reps. Focus is advocacy and improving teaching and learning in the rural schools)*
Texas ISDs participating in the program. Bolded ISDs Have Passed Culture of Voting Resolutions  

- Abernathy ISD
- Alamo Heights ISD
- Alvarado ISD
- Anson ISD
- Austin ISD
- Azle ISD
- Beckville ISD
- Belton ISD
- Benjamin ISD
- Big Sandy ISD (ESC 6)
- Big Spring ISD
- Birdville ISD
- Blackwell CISD
- Bland ISD
- Blooming Grove ISD
- Boling ISD
- Booker ISD
- Bowie ISD
- Bridge City ISD
- Buckholts ISD
- Bullard ISD
- Burton ISD
- Calallen ISD
- Celina ISD
- Central ISD
- Channing ISD
- Cherokee ISD
- Chico ISD
- Childress ISD
- Chillicothe ISD
- Chilton ISD
- City View ISD
- Claude ISD
- Clear Creek ISD
- Cleveland ISD
- Clyde CISD
- Colmesneil ISD
- Comanche ISD
- Cooper ISD
- Coppell ISD
- Crosby ISD
- Cross Roads ISD
- Cumby ISD
- Dalhart ISD
- Decatur ISD
- DeKalb ISD
- Del Valle ISD
- Denison ISD
- Denton ISD
- Dumas ISD
- Eanes ISD
- East Central ISD
- Edgewood ISD (ESC 7)
- Edgewood ISD (ESC 20)
- Edna ISD
- Elgin ISD
- Eula ISD
- Fabens ISD
- Ferris ISD
- Floresville ISD
- Floydada ISD
- Forestburg ISD
- Forney ISD
- Frenship ISD
- Frisco ISD
- Galveston ISD
- Garrison ISD
- Godley ISD
- Goliad ISD
- Graford ISD
- Graham ISD
- Granbury ISD
- Grapevine-Colleyville ISD
- Groesbeck ISD
- Gruver ISD
- Hamlin ISD
- Hallsville ISD
- Harleton ISD
- Haskell CISD
- Hawkins ISD
- Hemphill ISD
- Henrietta ISD
- Hereford ISD
- Hermleigh ISD
- Higgins ISD
- Hillsboro ISD
- Holliday ISD
- Huffman ISD
- Hunt ISD
- Huntington ISD
- Idalou ISD
- Iowa Park CISD
- Ira ISD
- Jarrell ISD
- Karnes City ISD
- Kaufman ISD
- Kemp ISD
- Kenedy ISD
- Kirbyville CISD
- Krum ISD
- La Feria ISD
- La Joya ISD
- La Pryor ISD
- Lake Worth ISD
- Lamesa ISD
- Latexo ISD
- Lefors ISD
- Lindale ISD
- Linden-Kildare CISD
- Lipan ISD
- Lockhart ISD
- Lone Oak ISD
- Los Fresnos CISD
- Louise ISD
- Lovejoy ISD
- Lubbock-Cooper ISD
- Lytle ISD
- Mabank ISD
- Mansfield ISD
- Marshall ISD
- Martin’s Mill ISD
- Maypearl ISD
- Melissa ISD
- Merkel ISD
- Mildred ISD
- Midway ISD (ESC 12)
Millsap ISD
Mineola ISD
Moody ISD
Moran ISD
Mount Pleasant ISD
Muenster ISD
Navasota ISD
Nederland ISD
New Deal ISD
Northside ISD (ESC 20)
Oakwood ISD
Oglesby ISD
Olney ISD
Olton ISD
Ore City ISD
Paducah ISD
Palestine ISD
Palmer ISD
Palo Pinto ISD
Pampa ISD
Panther Creek CISD
Paris ISD
Peaster ISD
Perryton ISD
Petersburg ISD
Pflugerville ISD
Plains ISD
Plemons-Stinnett-Phillips CISD
Point Isabel ISD
Prairie Valley ISD
Premont ISD
Princeton ISD
Pringle-Morse CISD
Quinlan ISD
Rains ISD
Ralls ISD
Ramirez CSD
Ranger ISD
Reagan County ISD
Rosebud-Lott ISD
S&S CISD
Salado ISD
San Rayburn ISD
San Elizario ISD
San Saba ISD
Sanger ISD
Scurry-Rosser ISD
Sealy ISD
Seymour ISD
Shallowater ISD
Sherman ISD
Sinton ISD
Snyder ISD
Southwest ISD
Splendora ISD
Stafford MSD
Stamford ISD
Stratford ISD
Sulphur Bluff ISD
Tahoka ISD
Tarkington ISD
Thall ISD
Tolar ISD
Tom Bean ISD
Trent ISD
Troup ISD
Uvalde CISD
Van ISD
Vega ISD
Veribest ISD
Vernon ISD
Walnut Bend ISD
Walnut Springs ISD
Waskom ISD
Waxahachie ISD
Weatherford ISD
Wells ISD
Westhoff ISD
White Deer ISD
White Oak ISD
Willis ISD
Wills ISD
Wills Point ISD
Wimberley ISD
Winnsboro ISD
Winona ISD
Yorktown ISD
Note 1 – Schools listed on the TexasEducatorsVote.org as of October 23, 2017