



My five cents...

A monthly column from Sen. Robert Nichols

by Sen. Robert Nichols, Senate District 3

For immediate release
August 25, 2022
word count: 754

Contact: Shelby Conine
Tel: 512-463-0103

It is back-to-school season and fall is right around the corner. I hope all of our students, teachers, administrators, and parents had a safe and rewarding return to school.

Here are five things happening around your state:

1. NASA High School Aerospace Scholars program recruitment open

Recruitment has opened for NASA's High School Aerospace Scholars program. The program is a STEM learning experience for Texas high school juniors to engage with NASA. The year-long program begins in the fall with an online learning experience centered on space exploration, Earth science, technology, and aeronautics. The top students are then invited to a five-day virtual summer experience. The summer experience is mentored by NASA scientists and engineers and students work in teams to plan a mission to the Moon and Mars. High achieving teams are then invited to a two-day residential experience at the Johnson Space Center in Houston. Applications open August 29 and close October 20. Students can earn elective credit for school through the program. For more information and to apply please visit www.nasa.gov/has.

2. T.L.L. Temple Foundation award \$2.2 million to Texas Success Center

The T.L.L. Temple Foundation awarded \$2.2 million over the next five years to the Texas Success Center, a subsidiary of the Texas Association of Community Colleges, to improve postsecondary and employment outcomes in rural East Texas. The grant is part of the foundation's Talent Strong East Texas initiative which aims to upskill East Texans by strengthening, scaling, and expanding guided pathways into postsecondary degrees or credentials that lead to high-demand, high-wage jobs for the region. These grants will ensure that more East Texans have access and opportunity to succeed in a postsecondary setting. Upskilling the workforce of East Texas is critical to maintaining a healthy, vibrant economy. I applaud the Temple Foundation for their generosity and the Texas Success Center for their important work.

3. ALERRT Travel Assistance, bullet-resistant shield grant program announced

This month, Governor Abbott announced that the Governor's Public Safety Office is accepting applications from law enforcement agencies for Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response

Training (ALERRT) travel assistance and the Bullet-Resistant Shield Grant Program. In June of this year, \$3 million was set aside for law enforcement agencies to offset travel expenses to attend ALERRT training and another \$50 million was transferred for bullet-resistant shields. ALERRT is considered the gold standard for active shooter training and easing the burden for departments to send officers to training ensures the state has more highly-trained officers on duty. This summer alone ALERRT trained over 3,000 officers, delivered dozens of classes, and has scheduled more than 100 additional classes for this fall. Applications for travel assistance are open to ISDs, institutes of higher education, local governments, and other education institutions that employ peace officers. Applications should be submitted after registration for an ALERRT course is confirmed. Applications close August 31.

Applications for grant funding to equip law enforcement officers with bullet-resistant shields are also now open. Applications may be submitted by ISDs, local governments, the Texas Department of Public Safety, and other education institutions that employ peace officers. The deadline for priority consideration is September 16. All officers that receive these grant-funded shields must have received ALERRT training within the past two years or have committed to attend ALERRT training within in the next two years.

4. Stephen F. Austin State University exploring joining a university system

The Board of Regents at SFA is considering whether the university should formally join one of several university systems in the state. Four different systems across the state have expressed an interest in acquiring the university including University of Texas System, Texas A&M University System, Texas Tech University System, and Texas State University System. SFA is one of the last unaffiliated universities in the state. If they join a larger university system, only Texas Southern will be left unaffiliated. SFA has developed an online portal for community input and plan to make a decision ahead of the next legislative session beginning in January. Legislative action would be required for SFA to join a university system.

5. Four East Texas teachers inducted in Agriculture Teachers Hall of Fame

Four East Texas teachers have been honored by the Agriculture Teachers Association of Texas for their exemplary careers and achievements over their many years of service. Larry Poe, George Stephenson, Perry Fenley and the late Hayne Daniel were all inducted into the Agriculture Teachers Association of Texas Hall of Fame. We thank them for their outstanding influence and impact on East Texas students over their careers!