

State of Texas
Texas Senate

P.O. Box 12068
AUSTIN, TEXAS 78711-2068
(512) 463-0107
FAX (512) 463-8810



11451 KATY FREEWAY, SUITE 209
HOUSTON, TEXAS 77079
(713) 464-0282
FAX (713) 461-0108

Paul Bettencourt
DISTRICT 7

Paul.Bettencourt@senate.texas.gov

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Contact Information
Lauri Saathoff | (512) 463-0107
Lauri.Saathoff@senate.texas.gov

Educator Misconduct Reform, SB 7 by Senator Bettencourt, Passed Unanimously 31-0

*Top Ten Priority of Lt. Governor Patrick receives approval from the Texas Legislature
Heading to Governor's desk for his signature*

Austin – The Texas Senate today concurred with the Texas House on Senate Bill 7 by Senator Paul Bettencourt (R-Houston) to strengthen educator misconduct laws in Texas and prevent educators who engage in inappropriate relationships with students from being able to jump from school district to school district without facing any consequences. SB 7 won unanimous approval from the Texas Legislature. All 30 Senators co-authored the bill and unanimously passed it from the Senate in March, and on May 9, Representative Ken King (R-Canadian) sponsored the bill in the House and guided it to a unanimous 146-0 House vote. Educator misconduct was one of Lt. Governor Patrick's top 10 legislative priorities during the 85th Legislative Session.

“The House and Senate both unanimously passed Senate Bill 7, making clear that this behavior of teachers preying on students for sexual relationships will not be tolerated. SB 7 gives TEA more tools to pursue and investigate these cases in order to protect the integrity of the teaching profession and, more importantly, protect the students in all of the schools in Texas,” said Senator Bettencourt.

Data shows that the Texas Education Agency received 449 reported cases of inappropriate student-educator relationships from April 2015 through April 2017, which is a 65% increase in just a two-year period. According to testimony before the Senate Education Committee, in some cases school districts simply quashed subpoenas and “passed the trash,” allowing teachers who engaged in this misconduct to quietly transfer to another school district with no consequences rather than protecting the students in their charge. This growing problem includes instances in local districts, such as Houston ISD and more around the state, but the problem is statewide, per testimony to the committee.

SB 7 has broad support from educator groups, school board groups and the education community. Key bill points include:

- Automatic revocation of teaching certificate if offender receives deferred adjudication for an educator misconduct offense or any offense that would require them to register as a sex offender.
- Expanding reporting requirements to include not only superintendents, but principals as well, with penalties for failing to report.
- Expanding TEA's investigative authority from intra-district to inter-district relationships.
- An educator certificate may be revoked if they assist a person in obtaining employment at a school and they knew that person had engaged in sexual misconduct.

House amendments clarified the teacher preparation training, the specific reporting role of principals and superintendents, allows felons to be fired by school districts immediately, and allows for pension revocation.

“Senate Bill 7 stops crimes against Texas children and is on its way to the governor's desk for his signature,” Senator Bettencourt stated. **“SB 7 recognizes the scourge of inappropriate teacher-student relationships and is a very big step forward to stamping them out!”** he added as the SD 7 Senator.

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