

Business leaders in Texas pursue active roles, higher standards in education

CORPUS CHRISTI (AP) — In February 1990, more than 1,800 Corpus Christi business leaders and officials from five area school districts met for 2.5 days on the quality of the region's education.

The result was a 60 percent jump in the number of business partners for area schools and proliferation of volunteer groups dedicated to some critical needs for children, including accredited day care.

Now community leaders are working to pull those efforts together into a single entity — the Bay Area Consortium for Educational Excellence.

Experts say such involvement by business and community volunteers will be greater than ever in the state this school year, which began Monday in many Texas cities.

The reason is the sweeping school finance reform law passed by the Legislature this spring, which is shifting state funding from property-rich districts to those that are property-poor.

In districts where state funds are being cut, teachers and administrators are looking to the community to help fill some gaps. In districts that are receiving more

money, some community and business leaders have pressed for new standards of accountability for educators.

"They're not only more involved," said Darvin Winick, chairman of the coordinating committee of the Texas Business and Education Coalition. "They're coming in from the periphery to the heart of the matter — how do you organize, how do you manage, what do kids need to know."

The business-supported Tax Research Association in Houston two months ago recommended nine reforms for the Houston Independent School District that include higher salaries, year-round schools and fewer administrators.

The group also defined several goals for elementary school performance, including having 95 percent of students reading at their grade level by 1997. Only 54 percent of fifth graders in the state's largest district read at fifth-grade level last year.

In Dallas, a commission appointed by school board members last month proposed major reforms. The commission called for a more balanced view of students' multicultural heritage, greater control of schools at the campus rather than district level and said

business should pitch in to a \$2.5 million incentive fund to reward teachers and administrators whose students show achievement.

The Dallas school board will consider the recommendations next month.

The education committee of the Texas Association of Business is nearing completion of a comprehensive study of public education in the state. The committee will make recommendations on such topics as year-round schooling and relations between the state education agency and school districts.

Such efforts reflect growing sophistication in communities about education, Winick said.

"It is the maturing of the reform movement," he said. "Education is very complex. It's taken the business community and other activists six or seven years to focus on what they want to do."

The 41,000-student Corpus Christi Independent School District is one of dozens in the state where the foundation for such involvement was laid in the early 1980s.

Seven years ago, the district began encouraging businesses to adopt a school. Now, each one of

its 60 schools has at least one business partner and many have several.

Students learn people other than teachers and parents care for their progress, said Henry Santana, who oversees the district's community involvement programs.

"They see these bankers come in with their suits. Bankers always wear suits. And the kids are real impressed," Santana said.

The district's programs have grown. For the past three years, the school system and city parks department sponsored after-school programs for so-called "latchkey" children, who would otherwise be going home to an empty house.

A mentorship program started last year. Volunteers were even allowed to take students out of school for activities.

Many of the volunteers belonged to organizations being pulled together by the new Bay Area Consortium for Educational Excellence. Its leaders will set goals at an October retreat.

"There are no miracle cures. It's not a short-term focus we're looking at," said Deirdre Norton, a former teacher and organizer of the consortium.

Defense contractor makes improvements on plane

FORT WORTH (AP) — General Dynamics production officials have made several improvements in the F-16 program since an Air Force general complained that the Fort Worth plant was in a "negative spiral."

Air Force Gen. Ralph Graham, director of the F-16 program for the government, complained in a letter to Herb Rogers, who was the division's general manager, that he was deeply concerned about the plant's performance.

Graham said each day brought "new revelations of defective engineering" on important new programs coming on line, including the production of a new version of the F-16 for the Israeli government and a technologically advanced F-16 for the Air Force. He also said that the Fort Worth plant was in a "negative spiral."

Robert Schwalm, the division's vice president for production, has pushed for drastic actions at the GD plant since last May, including temporarily shutting down part of the production operations.

The improvements have pleased the Air Force brass, the Fort Worth Star-Telegram reported Sunday.

"Now GD is taking some very hard actions," Graham said in a recent interview. "They are doing things on the production line that are flat-out painful."

"It's hard for them to do because they are making it some airplanes are going to come out a little bit late," Graham said. "But some of the things they are doing are in the long term going to have a very positive impact."

Schwalm was moved to Fort Worth from GD's Land Systems Division near Detroit in April 1990. Before Graham's letter in May, Schwalm had realigned management of the plant's production process and put in place systems to monitor individual areas. For the first time it allowed GD to note quality and efficiency problems early in the process.

But Air Force officials wanted more drastic action from the company, according to GD insiders the newspaper didn't identify, and June they received it.

Schwalm decided to shut down the portion of the plant that produces the center fuselage of the F-16 to concentrate on finding ways to better perform tasks such as putting together the aircraft main landing gear doors.

Schwalm's focus has been on creating an organizational structure in the plant that is "simple and accountable." His challenge, however, has been to do that in a plant that employs tens of thousands of people who were facing the possibility of being laid off because of defense budget cutbacks.

La Quinta drops shareholder protection plan

SAN ANTONIO (AP) — La Quinta Motor Inns Inc. said it has dropped its poison-pill defenses and extended the contract of Sam Barshop, its 61-year-old founder and top officer, by five years.

The actions, announced Monday, were taken at a La Quinta board meeting Friday. They indicate the board no longer considers San Antonio-based La Quinta a candidate for sale or breakup.

"I think the appropriate response to that is the company no longer is actively being marketed," said Alan L. Tallis, an executive vice president with La Quinta.

The so-called shareholder rights plan was a sticking point with the motel chain's two largest shareholder groups, the Bass-Taylor group of Fort Worth and Industrial Equity (Pacific) Ltd. of La Jolla, Calif.

Both groups control 14.9 percent of the company. Now each will be able to accumulate larger positions.

The corporate defenses were erected in September 1990 and almost immediately came under attack by the two shareholder groups.

Mexico sells largest bank to group for \$3.18 Billion

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Mexico on Monday sold a controlling interest in the country's largest bank to a group of investors for \$3.18 billion.

Roberto Hernandez Ramirez and his Grupo Regional bid the equivalent of \$6.29 a share for Banamex, which has a market value of about \$3.95 billion, the Treasury Department said.

The winning bid covers 31 percent of all shares along with an option to buy another 20 percent, the Treasury said. The government owns 70.72 percent of Banamex stock.

The 120-year-old bank is considered the biggest prize in the privatization of the Mexican banking system. The Salinas administration has been selling off banks and other state-owned enterprises as part of its free-market reforms.

Hernandez is a former head of the Mexican stock exchange. The Treasury Department said there are 800 investors in the investment group, which owns a major stock brokerage and an exchange house with offices in Mexico City, Cuernavaca and Monterrey.

most of the 461,861 wild birds flown into the United States for the pet trade in 1989 died either in transit or soon after their arrival.

American Airlines and Delta Air Lines in the last two weeks became the latest carriers to stop the practice. Both said they acted after being targeted by a massive letter-writing campaign against the wild bird shipments.

American shipped about 4,000 wild birds a year and Delta shipped about 3,000. The shipments were a negligible source of revenue, they said.

The most popular imported wild birds are parrots, finches, cockatoos and mynahs. Senegal, on the west coast of Africa, is the greatest single exporter.

The birds that make it alive range in cost from about \$12 for a parakeet to \$15,000 for a large hyacinth.

More common among the exotic birds are macaws, which are priced between \$1,000 and \$1,500.

Airline rules hurt wild bird sales

ATLANTA (AP) — The pet bird business says it's being unfairly harmed as a growing number of airlines stop shipping wild birds for commercial use.

Seventeen airlines have now stopped shipping the birds under pressure from animal rights groups. And the pet industry, faced with fewer sources of the birds, is crying foul.

"It's very hurtful," said Willie Lawson, a Miami pet wholesaler. "They're driving me out of business. They really have us by the throat."

But animal rights groups, including the Humane Society, say the conditions under which the wild birds are transported are harmful and often fatal.

"There's no good way to ship a bird if it's a wild bird," said Dr. Teresa Telecky, an associate director of the Humane Society.

"They're captured in the wild and are easily stressed animals," Ms. Telecky said about 14 per-

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