

Stricter policies adjust no-pass, no-play rules

AUSTIN (AP) — A new school year wouldn't mean a new slate for students participating in extracurricular activities under a bill by Senate Education Committee Chairman Teel Bivins.

Under his bill, a student failing a course during the last six-week grading period of the school year would be suspended from extracurricular activities the following fall.

It would apply even if a student ends up with a passing grade for the course overall.

Suspensions under the no-pass, no-play rule currently aren't held over from one school year to the next. But Bivins, R-Amarillo, said he wants to "keep the focus on academics."

Under the current rule, failing students' suspension from extracurricular activities is as short as three weeks, if they can bring up their grades to passing in that time. Students can practice or rehearse during the suspension period.

The bill, which includes the three-week suspension period, "might ensure that those students during the summertime not only practice band or debate ... but also do a little work in the summertime to get ready to get their

grades in good shape in the first six weeks of the next school year," Bivins said.

If a student does well in summer school, Bivins said his intention is that would keep them from being suspended in the fall.

In addition, he said, "Once they know what the rules of the game are, it will be I hope an incentive for them to work harder in the springtime."

"I thought everything was going well, and I thought everyone was pretty happy with the results."

Eddie Joseph
Texas High School
Coaches Association

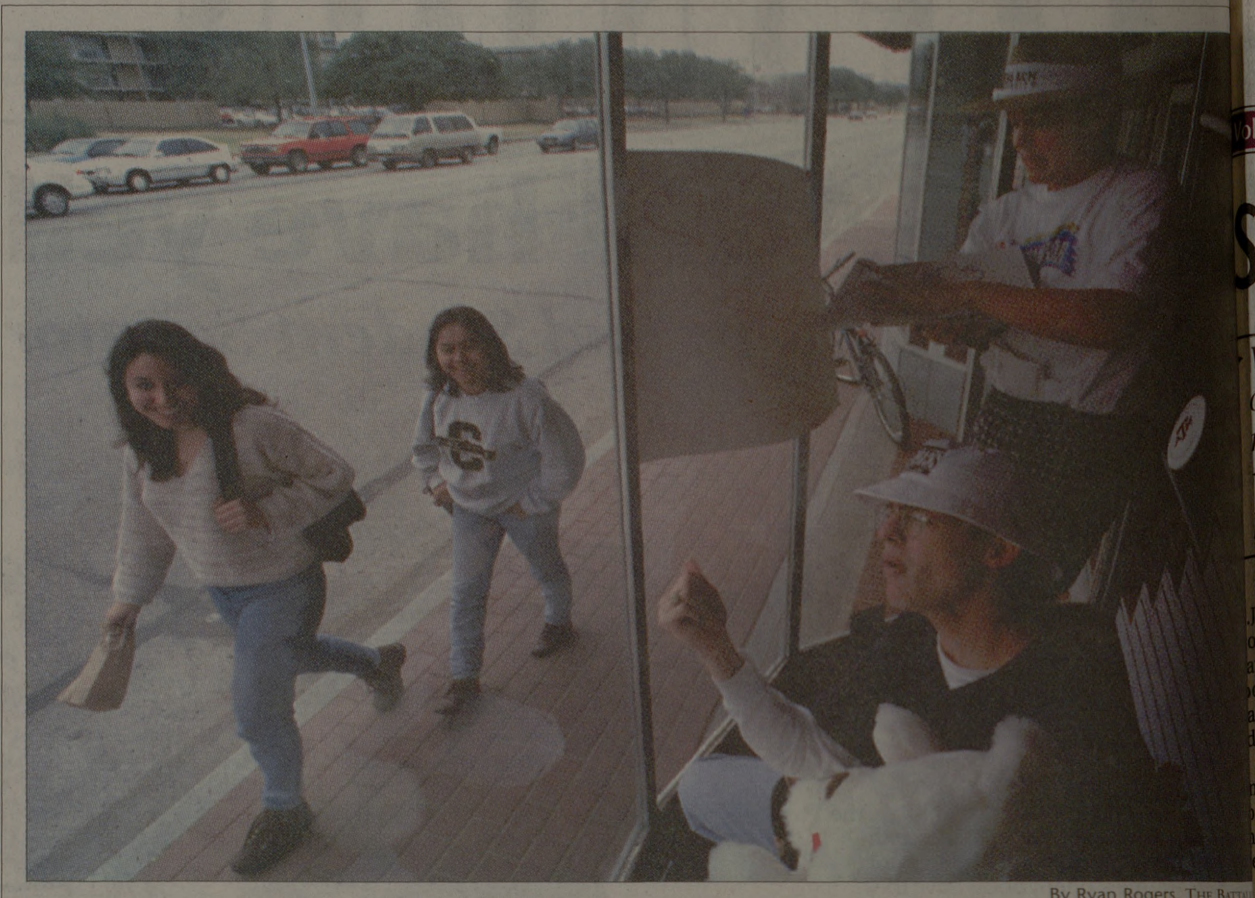
The bill is opposed by Eddie Joseph of the Texas High School Coaches Association, who said, "Obviously, the object is to pass the course."

Joseph said a student could do well in the other grading periods, then hit a slump or traumatic event and make a 69 in the final six weeks, but still pass the class. A passing grade is 70 out of 100.

"When the springtime comes, all youngsters have a hard time staying focused on what they're there for," he said.

Joseph said he was surprised at the move to change the no-pass, no-play requirement in light of the 1995 modifications.

"I thought everything was going well, and I thought everyone was pretty happy with the results," he said.



Strike a Pose Jon Kocian, a senior chemical engineering major, and Pete Chalfant, a senior environmental design major, pose as human mannequins at the Loupots on University Drive Tuesday afternoon.

Documents show shortcomings in child support program

WASHINGTON (AP) — Sixteen years ago, the federal government agreed to pay states to develop computer systems to track deadbeat parents. Taxpayers have spent \$1.5 billion since then but only a dozen states have operational systems.

The money, most of it spent in the past two years, went to computer companies, state workers and numerous consultants. There were consultants to design the systems, to write bids, to build software and even to police other consultants, an Associated Press review of audits and other documents shows.

The purpose was to modernize the collection of overdue support money — a figure that has grown to \$35 billion owed to 29 million children.

When officials are asked why more has not been accomplished, fingerprinting abounds:

—State officials say they received bad advice and systems that didn't work.

—Vendors say technical difficul-

ties and changing federal requirements are to blame.

—Federal officials say some states didn't manage the projects properly.

—And congressional auditors contend the federal agency overseeing the effort did little to hold states accountable.

"A lot of energy is being spent on trying to figure out whose fault this is," said Elisabeth Hirschhorn Donahue, an attorney for the National Women's Law Center, a nongovernmental outfit that tracks child support policy.

The computers are expected to deliver big payoffs. They'll store all case data, process and distribute payments, connect to tax and welfare agency computers and share information with other states.

The last is a crucial component because one-third of all child support cases involve out-of-state parents.

A year and a half after the federal deadline passed for states to computerize their collection systems, only three

states have met all federal requirements.

Washington developed its own system, without using consultants, for \$30 million. After a false start with one vendor, Virginia jointly developed a system with a contractor for \$21 million. Wyoming maintained strict control over the consultants it hired and built a system in three years for under \$10 million. All three states have relatively small caseloads.

Nine states have been given conditional federal certification, meaning their systems meet most of the requirements but need minor adjustments to gain final approval.

Many other states have spent tens of millions of dollars on contractors but only have partial systems, at best, to show for it.

When the federal deadline for completing the systems passed in 1995, Congress extended it two more years, and hundreds of millions of dollars of additional federal aid has flowed to these states.

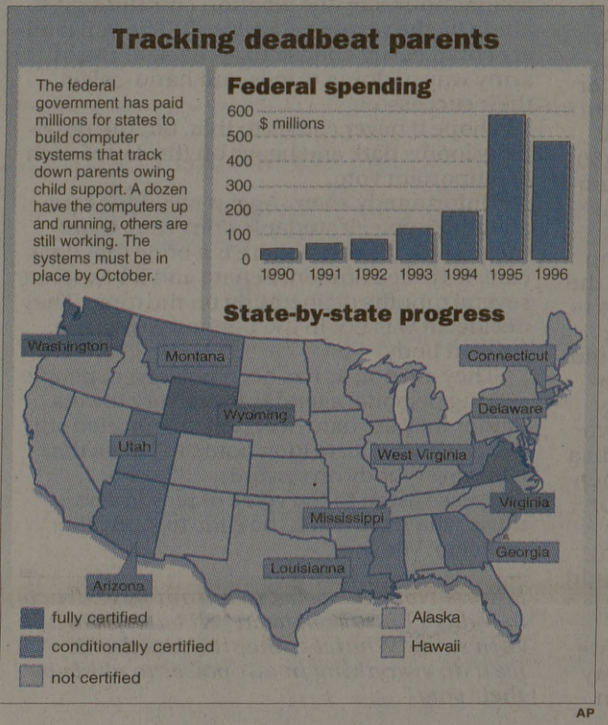
"No one is denying that the much more to do," said David R. deputy director of the Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Child Support, agency that oversees the effort.

Michigan serves as a case in point. With one of the largest child support caseloads at 1.4 million, the state has spent \$116 million in federal and state funds to build a computer system. The system is riddled with technical flaws and does not meet federal standards.

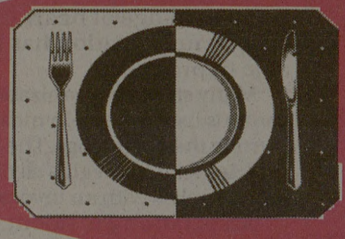
State auditors found Michigan gave several consultants noncompetitive contracts that essentially allowed them to earn full payment even if they only worked 60 percent of the hours promised.

Some contractors lacked the know-how, so the state paid \$1 training at a cost of \$100,000 for and lost time on the job, auditors

Some sessions had nothing with technology.



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