

Potential jurors hear details of Jasper murder Better pay, better TAAS scores

JASPER, Texas (AP) — A black man was alive while chained to the back of a pickup truck and dragged for several miles, then his shredded body was left outside a black cemetery "as some form of a message," a prosecutor told prospective jurors as the first defendant's trial began Monday.

Jasper County District Attorney Guy James Gray briefly outlined the details of James Byrd Jr.'s vio-

lent death last June to the 122 potential panelists in the capital murder trial of John William King.

King, 24, sat attentively with a 50,000-volt electric belt tied around his waist as Gray spoke.

If convicted, he could be sentenced to life in prison or lethal injection.

King, a onetime member of a racist prison gang and an avowed

white supremacist, is the first of three men to be tried in the Byrd murder. The capital murder trials of Shawn Allen Berry, 23, and Lawrence Russell Brewer, 31, have not been scheduled.

King denies killing Byrd, saying he stood by innocently as Berry committed the murder over a soured drug deal.

The process is expected to take two to three weeks.

CARRIE BENNETT
The Battalion

An increase in teacher salaries would improve student scores on the Texas Academic Assessment Skills test, a state-mandated exam required for students to graduate from high school, according to a study done by the Texas Education Excellence Project.

The study was conducted from 1991 to 1997 in all Texas school districts.

Kenneth J. Meier, a political science professor at Texas A&M and the director of TEEP, said the study's original focus was on the effects of increased teachers' salaries on minority and low-income student test scores.

"State legislators have been discussing education policy options and devoting part of the large budget surplus to education, so the focus changed to include both decreasing class size and increasing teacher salaries," Meier said.

According to a press release, researchers studied a one-time \$1,000 increase in teachers' salaries and found an increase in average TAAS scores by 2.12 percentage points over a five-year period and an increase in low-income students' scores by 3.7 percent.

Bob Wrinkle, professor of political science at the University of Texas Pan-American, acted as co-director for the study.

"Higher teacher salaries result in higher TAAS scores, and the effects of higher salaries are most pronounced for low-income students," he said.

The researchers also found a decrease in class size by one student would improve average TAAS scores by one percent and would increase low-income students' scores by two percent.

"There is a clear relationship between class size and student performance on the TAAS. As classes get smaller, student performance improves, especially when we examine the results for students in the low-income cate-

Study Results

- Researchers predicted an increase in teacher salaries would produce a 2.12 percentage point increase in average TAAS scores over a five-year period.
- Reducing the student-teacher ratio by one student would increase average TAAS scores 1.2 percentage points over a five-year period.

gory," Wrinkle said.

Researchers say salaries and a decrease in class size would help recruit a number of qualified teachers because of the increase in teachers' preference for smaller classes and the increase in their salaries.

"Reducing class size is crucial in attracting more qualified teachers because they find smaller classes more attractive options than larger classes," Wrinkle said.

Meier says the effects of the proposed policy changes should be studied over time to see the immediate and long-term effects they will have on education in Texas.

"The effects of higher salaries and changes in class size on student performance should be assessed over a period of several years because it takes time for policy changes to take effect," Meier said.

"Investments pay off in the long run because of the currently reaping the benefits of the reforms implemented over the last 15 years."

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