

# Stakes now higher for comptroller

Office awaiting Abbott’s nominee will have big role in starting school voucher program

By Edward McKinley and Benjamin Wermund  
AUSTIN BUREAU

Gov. Greg Abbott in the next few weeks is expected to choose a new state comptroller, who will have an outsized role in Texas’ rollout of private school vouchers.

The next comptroller is tasked with everything from

marketing the program, which gives students around \$10,500 a year to put toward private education, to running a lottery to determine who gets the funds.

Glenn Hegar is stepping down from the job this month after being named chancellor of the Texas A&M University System. Abbott can appoint his replacement, and with the legislative session just wrapped up, his

pick will avoid a Senate confirmation battle.

The stakes will be unusually high — for Abbott and his pick.

“Personnel is policy. Having the right people in the right place means you get the policy implemented in the way that you want,” said Brandon Rottinghaus, a political scientist at the University of Houston. “The controversy about vouchers is the potential for there to be a spiraling cost and for it to be applied in an unfair way. The governor has to put someone in

place who will watch those numbers carefully.”

Abbott has yet to hint whom he will choose to carry out his signature issue. The statewide position is up for election next year, and several Republicans are already campaigning for the job. They include Christi Cradick, chair of the Texas Railroad Commission, and Don Huffines, who served in the Texas Senate and ran unsuccessfully for governor in 2022.

Many others are likely angling to run — or to catch the

governor’s eye and get an early entry in the role.

“It’s not the most visible of the statewide elected agencies,” said Jaime Puente, an education policy expert with Every Texan. “But now, it’s going to be unavoidable.”

Under the \$1 billion statewide voucher program signed into law last month, students will have access to state-funded education savings accounts they can put toward private school tuition, tutoring, books or

*Vouchers continues on A5*



Audrey Nath, a Wharton Dual Language Academy parent, coordinates with parents to drop off necessities at schools. Photos by Raquel Natalicchio/Houston Chronicle

# Rallying to meet a need

By Nusaiba Mizan  
STAFF WRITER

Houston ISD parent Audrey Nath sorted through boxes of donated baby wipes, socks and underwear for students in her Montrose home.

She conferred with a list scrawled on the back of her child’s Spanish worksheet and noted aloud what she was packing for specific schools: Briargrove Elementary School, Memorial Elementary School, Benavidez Elementary School.

As she sorted through the items, she held up a pack of hair ties and recounted what one school nurse told her: the nurse was ripping off the bottom of plastic gloves and using those as hair ties to put people’s hair up. “She was like, ‘They don’t call me Nurse Mac-

Parents coordinate donations to Houston ISD schools after wraparound specialists slashed



Packages put together by Nath, who coordinates with parents to drop off necessities at schools.

Gyver for nothing!’ ”

Nath worked with other district families on Tuesday to drop off student necessities, including food, clothing and hygiene products to nearly 20 HISD campuses by the last day of school. These families are taking it upon themselves to collect for schools after the district in April cut all campus-level wraparound resource specialists who provided low-income students and families with free resources such as school supplies, food and clothing. More than 200 wrap-around specialists were cut the school-year prior.

Najah Callander, HISD’s deputy chief of family and community partnerships, wrote in a letter that HISD made the decision “after careful consideration” to maxi-

*HISD continues on A3*

# Congress eyes end of rule on silencers

Texas has fought requirement to pay fee, register devices

By James Osborne  
WASHINGTON BUREAU

Four years after the Texas Legislature passed a bill attempting to get around a federal registration requirement on gun silencers, Congress is weighing whether to do away with it altogether.

House Republicans included a provision in their budget bill that would stop the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives from requiring gun owners to register and pay a \$200 fee when purchasing a silencer. Now the Senate will decide whether to keep the language, as Republicans seek to pass President Donald Trump’s “one big beautiful bill” by July 4.

The issue has divided politicians in Washington three years after Republicans agreed to the most significant gun control legislation in decades in the aftermath of the Uvalde school shooting. Powerful gun rights groups are rallying their supporters behind the silencer change, while gun control advocates warn that it would make mass shootings more deadly by dampening the sound of gunshots and making it harder for police and bystanders to spot the danger.

Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas, who led the bipartisan effort to strengthen the nation’s gun laws, praised the provision.

“Firearm silencers should not be subject to overregulation and unconstitutional taxes that hamstring Texans’ freedoms and pocketbooks,” Cornyn, who is facing reelection next year, said in a statement. “I’m proud to see the House stand up for law-abiding gun owners, eliminate senseless red tape, and proudly defend our Second Amendment rights.”

*Silencers continues on A5*

# Is HISD helping its top students get into Ivy League universities?

By Claire Partain and Megan Menchaca  
STAFF WRITERS

As a middle school student, Jhonny Almeida chose to attend Houston ISD’s Sterling Aviation Early College High School because, even then, he knew he wanted to be an aerospace engineer.

Almeida earned his pilot’s license through the school’s aviation magnet program, which offers hands-on flight simulation

and training, an associate’s degree from Houston Community College and two separate internships with the Houston Airport System, which manages the city’s airports.

Most students at Sterling do not attend college, data shows, but as one of Sterling’s top graduates, Almeida set his sights on attending Texas A&M University, one of the state’s top higher education institutions. Then, he said his adviser told him he should aim for greater heights.

Maybe even the Ivy League.

“My college adviser told me, ‘Jhonny, you’re really smart. Do something more,’” he said. “I was like, ‘OK, OK, fine. After two years of badgering, I looked into other colleges and I applied.”

Almeida was accepted into Stanford University, which has one of the nation’s top aerospace engineering programs, per U.S. News. As an incoming sophomore, he serves as a leader with

*Ivy League continues on A6*



Milby High School students walk through the hallway past university flags, none of which represent Ivy League schools. Elizabeth Conley/Houston Chronicle