

TSTA's Capitol Team

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TEXAS STATE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION

www.tsta.org • 877-ASK-TSTA

Legislative Priorities FOR THE 86TH LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Contact your elected state lawmakers and demand they support our public schools. Now is our time to speak out and stand together for all Texas schoolchildren.



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School Funding

Increasing state funding for public education remains a top TSTA priority. Texas pays about \$2,300 less per student per year than the national average, ranking us 36th among the states and the District of Columbia. The state's share of the Foundation School Program has dropped to 38 percent, leaving the remaining 62 percent to be paid by local property taxpayers. The Legislature must increase state funding to provide all students and teachers the resources for success. More state funding also is the most effective way to provide relief from property taxes. The comptroller has forecast an increase of \$9 billion in general revenue for the next budget cycle and has projected a record \$15.4 billion balance in the Rainy Day Fund. TSTA believes this is enough money for legislators to increase state funding for public education and provide relief from school property taxes.

Teacher Pay

With average teacher pay in Texas lagging about \$7,300 behind the national average, TSTA believes every teacher deserves a raise. About 40 percent of Texas teachers are forced to spread themselves thin with extra jobs during the school year to meet their families' needs, according to TSTA's most recent survey on teacher moonlighting and morale. TSTA opposes any

"incentive" or "merit-based" pay plans that would single out only selected teachers for extra pay.

Educator Health Care

Since 2002, the Legislature has refused to increase the state's \$75 monthly contribution to each school employee's health insurance, even though rising health care costs continue to erode the take-home pay of thousands of educators. The state must make a larger contribution. Legislators also need to address an estimated shortfall of \$238 million in TRS-Care without raising retiree premiums or deductibles.

School Safety

Arming teachers is not a solution to gun violence in schools. Instead, lawmakers must provide more state funding to hire more school counselors and improve mental health services for students. More state funding also is necessary to update security in school infrastructure and hire more professionally trained campus law enforcement officers.

Vouchers

Whatever they are called — vouchers, education savings accounts, tax credit scholarships — they would divert tax dollars to private schools and undermine public schools, where the vast majority of Texas students will continue to be educated.

Charter Schools

Corporate-style charter chains are another effort at school privatization. These charters operate under privately selected governing boards in faraway cities, are often managed by for-profit companies and are taking millions of dollars from our school districts each year. SB1882 from the 2017 session needs to be amended to slow down the surrender of struggling campuses to these charter chains.

Standardized Testing

Parents and educators detest the student stress, lost learning time and wasted tax dollars inflicted by STAAR testing. TSTA urges the Legislature to abolish or drastically cut back on this testing program.

A-F Grading System

The new letter grading system for school districts and individual campuses is closely related to testing because grades will be determined by STAAR scores. Standardized test scores are an incomplete, misleading way to measure student success, and they unfairly discriminate against districts and schools with large numbers of low-income students. Many districts that received Ds and Fs when the first letter grades were handed out last summer had large enrollments of low-income students.

The pattern is likely to be repeated when individual campuses are assigned their first letter grades later this year. TSTA urges the Legislature to repeal or modify the A-F law.

TRS Retirement

Because trustees lowered the expected rate of return on investments in the TRS pension fund from 8 percent to 7.25 percent, the Legislature will have to approve an additional \$786 million, at least, in annual funding to enable an increase in retiree monthly pensions. TSTA believes the Legislature should make a significant increase in the state's share of funding. We also will continue to fight proposals to convert TRS' defined-benefit pension fund into a riskier (for educators) defined-contribution plan, such as a 401(k).

Special Education

Following a public outcry over an arbitrary cap on special education enrollments imposed years ago by the Texas Education Agency, the Legislature in 2017 enacted a law prohibiting TEA from ever imposing such an enrollment limit again. It denied thousands of children the educational services to which they were entitled, and it violated federal law. TEA has been trying to address some special education issues, but the issue of inadequate funding still must be addressed by the Legislature.