

# TSTA Priorities for the 87th Legislative Session:

# COVID RESPONSE

## School Funding

Increasing funding for public education remains a top TSTA priority. The state must protect investments made in House Bill 3 (2019) and protect public education as the economy recovers from recession. It is imperative that Texas not use the pandemic as an excuse to deprive students and teachers the resources for success.

TSTA urges the 87th Texas Legislature to:

- Permit the use of the Economic Stabilization Fund (Rainy Day Fund) — as it was intended — in order to fund COVID-related expenditures and avoid cuts to education
- Ensure federal stimulus dollars are used to increase public education funding
- Pause all charter growth, a significant and elective cost to the state that is at the direct expense of district public schools
- Expand local control regarding instructional delivery decisions that are in the best interest of students and staff during a declared state of disaster
- Eliminate unnecessary corporate tax breaks and use the revenue to fund public schools

## Accountability

Standards-based reforms in education have resulted in the overuse of narrow test data in making quality determinations about schools, teachers and students. The state's A-F grading system is an unfair and misleading way to measure schools. The use of students' scores on standardized tests as a way to evaluate teachers is flawed, and the STAAR test is nothing more than a measure of how well a student can take a test. In order to be responsive to teachers and students as they have had to adjust to new instructional approaches and the devastating impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is especially imperative that Texas discontinue — or at minimum suspend — meaningless systems of accountability.

TSTA urges the 87th Texas Legislature to:

- Eliminate high stakes for students, schools and teachers related to the STAAR exam, including grade promotion and graduation, sanctions and performance evaluations.
- Eliminate high stakes for teachers related to performance evaluations, including the use of student outcomes based on standardized tests
- Eliminate high stakes for students related to grade promotion and high school graduation requirements
- Suspend formal evaluations of educators during the 2020-21 school year

- Suspend the administration of the STAAR exam during the 2020-21 school year

## Learning Loss

Without question, students will suffer learning loss as a result of the extended absence from pre-pandemic schooling. Educators have moved mountains to maintain quality instruction in remote and socially-distanced classrooms, but many students do not have access to online learning or have difficulty engaging given the devastating effects of the pandemic. Although it is imperative that we continue to prioritize the health of our school communities, the instructional options currently available to educators are a stopgap and fall far short of best practice. Texas must acknowledge the lasting impact the COVID-19 pandemic will have on student learning and ensure added supports for students.

TSTA urges the 87th Texas Legislature to:

- Provide for additional funding and salary supplements that would support supplemental instruction
- Limit class size across all grade levels according to research-based student-to-teacher ratio recommendations
- Limit class size based on the number of inclusion students in a classroom
- Eliminate standardized testing beyond the federal requirement

## Special Populations

Students with special needs have been especially impacted by school closures and remote learning. Schools must be provided resources to effectively address the needs of these students hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic without facing blame for circumstances beyond their control.

TSTA urges the 87th Texas Legislature to:

- Provide for additional funding and salary supplements that would support the efficient and immediate delivery of compensatory services and supplemental instruction
- Allow for temporary measures to efficiently account for services and/or evaluations that were interrupted, reduced, delayed or suspended for students who receive special education services
- Hold schools and teachers harmless for special education services missed or academic regression due to disengagement during a declared state of disaster

