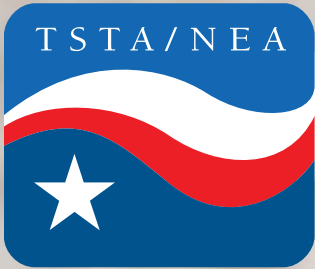


Texas State Teachers Association

Legislative Priorities for the 87th Legislative Session



School Funding

Increasing state funding for public education remains a top priority. The Legislature must maintain funding levels enacted last session in HB3 — and do more! HB3 was a down payment on catching up for years of cuts and underfunding, and students and educators need more resources as a result of the pandemic.

Education funding is an emergency for which legislators should tap into the Rainy Day Fund. The commitment to increase public school funding and provide relief from school property taxes is a moral imperative in Texas that must be continued and secured.

Teacher Pay

Even with raises ordered by the Legislature in 2019, average pay for all Texas teachers still trails the national average by more than \$6,500. Texas teachers with more than five years' experience are paid on average \$4,300 less. Many teachers still take extra jobs during the school year to meet their families' basic needs. Until all Texas teachers are on par with the national average, TSTA opposes any "incentive" or "merit-based" pay plans that single out only a few 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 and ensure that educators and retirees do not see increased premiums or deductibles.

School Security

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, for-profit virtual schools — vouchers 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, are often managed by for-profit companies — many of which are out of state — and take more than \$3 billion a year from our school districts. SB1882 from the 2017 session must be repealed to stop the surrender of struggling campuses to these charter chains. Texas must put a moratorium on this diversion of tax dollars, which taxpayers cannot afford, especially now.

Standardized Testing

Parents and educators detest the student stress, lost learning time and wasted tax dollars inflicted by STAAR testing. Standardized test scores are an incomplete, misleading way to measure student success, and they discriminate against low-income students and English language learners. The STAAR program must be abolished or drastically curtailed.

A-F Grading System

The A-F grading system for school districts and individual campuses is closely related to testing because grades are largely determined by STAAR scores. Schools in low-income communities are

saddled with a disproportionate number of Ds and Fs as a result. These students need more resources, not stigmas. The Legislature must repeal or modify the A-F law.

TRS Retirement

The Legislature must keep its commitment, made in SB12 in 2019, to the long-term plan to increase the financial stability of the Teacher Retirement System pension fund. This includes increasing the state's contribution to the fund to 8 percent by 2022. The average TRS retiree's monthly pension is \$2,096 and must be improved. Our retirees deserve a long-overdue, true cost-of-living adjustment. TSTA also will continue to fight proposals to convert the defined benefit plan to riskier defined contribution plans.

Special Education

Texas must address longstanding issues in special education that go back years, beginning when TEA set an arbitrary cap on special education enrollments. The Legislature must provide the necessary resources, including enough teachers, for the improved delivery of special education services to all the children who need them. Without additional funding, our most vulnerable students will become even more vulnerable.

TSTA's Capitol Team

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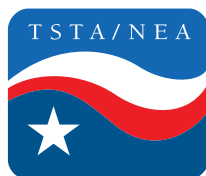
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