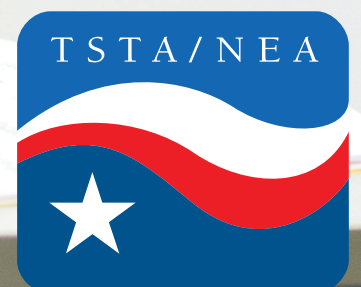


Texas State Teachers Association
Legislative Priorities for the
88th Legislative Session



School funding

More education funding remains a top TSTA priority, and with a \$27 billion surplus and \$13.6 billion balance in the Rainy Day Fund, as forecast by the state comptroller, this is an excellent time for legislators to increase classroom resources. Increasing state funding for public schools also is the best way to provide relief from local school property taxes, but the net result must be more money for schools, not a scheme to reduce overall school funding.

Educator pay

We demand the extra funding include pay increases for teachers and school support staff. Despite the raises approved by lawmakers in 2019, average teacher pay in Texas is still \$7,500 less than the national average, and some support staffers are hardly paid livable wages. TSTA opposes “incentive” or “merit-based” pay plans that single out only a few teachers for extra pay. If lawmakers are serious about addressing the teacher shortage, they will raise the compensation for all teachers and provide funding for better pay for their support staff as well.

Vouchers

State tax dollars must not be diverted from public to private schools. TSTA continues to oppose vouchers and related schemes — including education savings accounts, tax-credit scholarships and for-profit virtual schools — that use tax dollars to pay private school tuition for selected students while undermining public schools where the vast majority of Texas students are educated.

A COLA for retirees

A cost-of-living adjustment for retired

educators is long overdue, and TSTA demands that lawmakers appropriate state dollars to pay for one. Another 13th check is not enough. Most retired educators in Texas are ineligible for Social Security, and many cannot live on TRS pensions that average only \$2,174 a month. They need a COLA. We also will continue to fight any attempt to replace the Teacher Retirement System’s defined-benefits’ pension with a riskier defined-contributions’ plan, such as a 401(k).

Health care for educators and retirees

The state has not increased its \$75 monthly contribution to ActiveCare health insurance premiums for school employees in more than 20 years, even though the cost of health care continues to increase, cutting deeply into pay for teachers and support staff. We renew our call for a larger state contribution. School districts are required to pay at least \$150 a month toward ActiveCare premiums, and that isn’t enough either. A TRS consultant has recommended that the combined state and required district contributions, now \$225 a month, be more than doubled to \$600. We also will work to increase state contributions to TRS-Care for retirees.

Freedom to teach without political interference

We are continuing this fight, following the enactment two years ago of the so-called anti-critical race theory law. This law is an attempt to discourage educators from teaching the truth about controversial issues, such as racism, and celebrating the diversity of our school communities. TSTA will continue to demand educator freedom to teach the whole truth about our history and culture,

including issues that make some people uncomfortable.

School book bans

These harmful intrusions into the classroom are motivated in large part by people who choose to fear rather than celebrate the growing diversity of our culture and school communities. We will continue advocating for educators' rights to choose age-appropriate learning materials for their students without political interference.

Charter schools

Corporate-style charter chains, governed by privately selected boards and often managed by for-profit companies, are taking more than \$3 billion a year from our school districts — often for unneeded campuses. We need a moratorium or a limit on the expansion of charter schools in Texas. To that end, we will work to protect the authority of the State Board of Education, which is elected, to veto new charter schools approved by the appointed education commissioner. And we will work to protect the ability of traditional school districts and other local officials to block unneeded charters in their communities.

Virtual schools

We will work to restrict virtual instruction to only high-performing school districts and require academic prerequisites for fulltime virtual students. We also will demand that funding for virtual schools be based on course completions, not enrollment or attendance.

STAAR testing and accountability

TSTA will continue working to restrict high-

stakes standardized testing, which wastes tax dollars and classroom time without fairly and adequately measuring student success. STAAR testing also discriminates against low-income students and English language learners. Schools in low-income communities are stigmatized with a disproportionate number of Ds and Fs on the state accountability scale. The Legislature must repeal or modify the A-F law.

Teacher training and certification

We are working to improve teacher training, certification requirements, mentoring for new teachers and professional development opportunities.

Special education

The Legislature must address longstanding issues in special education, including lingering fallout from an illegal, arbitrary cap that the Texas Education Agency once set on special education enrollments. Lawmakers must provide the necessary resources, including funds for enough teachers, to improve the delivery of special education services to all the children who need them.

School safety, COVID and gun reform

We oppose arming teachers. Instead, we will support workable school safety measures and continue advocating for reasonable gun reform to protect our students, educators and school communities from assaults. We also will seek freedom for schools to follow safety guidelines issued by local health experts — without political interference from Austin — should we encounter more COVID-19 surges endangering the health and safety of school communities.

TSTA's Capitol Team

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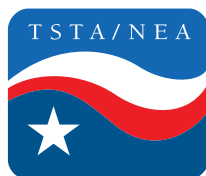
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