

SUPERINTENDENTS OF CENTRAL TEXAS LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

The superintendents of Central Texas represent a very diverse group of 60 public school districts. We range in size from 12 to over 83,000 students. Moreover, the socio-economic status of our area varies from extreme poverty to affluent, sometimes within the same district. As such, we are very aware that attempts to satisfy all of the wants and needs for every school district is an impossible task. However, in order to make our voices heard and illustrate our support of public education, we have developed an ambitious set of priorities. With each priority, we have developed a strategy that we hope will lead to legislation.



The signatures below represent the superintendents of Central Texas that support the priorities.

FUNDING

TEA has submitted a legislative appropriation request for the 2020 – 2021 Biennium that shows a drop in state general revenue funding for public education of more than \$3.5 billion¹. At the same time, schools are facing an increasing demand for safety and mental health support. An exceptional item requested by TEA includes \$54 million dollars in FY 2020 for mental health supports, positive school culture programming, facility safety upgrades, enhanced emergency response coordination, and technical support for Safe and Healthy Schools Self-Assessment rubric.

- We believe every school district needs access to additional state funding to help support their local needs for school safety and mental health. This funding should be flexible and allow local leaders to address their own specific needs and not create future unfunded mandates. Therefore, an increase in state funding or through an allotment will allow schools to have adequate dollars moving forward to fully invest in these programs with local solutions.
- We believe that every dollar that is collected in school property tax must be returned dollar for dollar to public education and not into the state general fund; increases in property values should not be used to reduce the state's contribution to school funding.
- We believe strongly in the funding of universal full day Pre-K and that Pre-K facilities funding should be made available to meet the increase in Pre-K student population.

ASSESSMENT/ACCOUNTABILITY

The SBOE and TEA have increased the number of testable standards while going through a process of streamlining the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). Within the 22 tested subjects, the number of standards has grown from 924 to 995 standards. With the state's accountability system relying heavily on one exam, it is critical that students have sufficient time to master "essential" standards of the TEKS. Additionally, through the creation of the A-F Accountability system, the state has reiterated the importance of college, career and military readiness through the 60x30 initiative.

- We strongly support the recommendation of the Texas Commission on Next Generation of Assessments and Accountability to assess only the "essential" standards or "readiness" standards².
- We strongly support the elimination of high-stakes testing, end of course exams and support the recommendation from the Commissioner of Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board in the use of the TSI Assessment (TSIA) in 10th grade to assess college readiness.

¹ Texas Education Agency 2018 Legislative Appropriations Request

² Texas Commission on Next Generation Assessments and Accountability Report (August 2016)

ATTRACTING AND RETAINING PROFESSIONALS

It is increasingly difficult to attract and maintain highly qualified, competent professionals to teaching. Between 40-50% of teachers leave the profession within the first five years³.

- We propose a \$5000 Texas Guaranteed Student Loan forgiveness for five years of service in Texas public schools (“five for five”). This money should be available to those teachers who stay in the classroom but are not eligible for federal loan repayment programs.
- We ask for creative solutions to solve staffing shortages and needs at the local level, like the “Bus Driver Exemption.”
- We support keeping the Teacher Retirement System (TRS) a “defined benefit” and ask that the system be made viable for incoming and current participants.
- We support increased state contributions to TRS Care and Active Care so that employees’ and retired teachers’ expenses do not increase and the system maintains structural integrity.

SCHOOL CHOICE

Vouchers, credits, education market place, “savings accounts,” etc. do not create school choice nor do they uphold the Texas Constitution “to establish and make suitable provision for the support and maintenance of an efficient system of public free schools.” They are merely a way to divert public money to private sources that are neither publicly accountable nor open enrollment.

- We support the notion that any use of public tax payer money or public funding for educational purposes must meet the five dimensions of publicness (i.e. what’s public about public schools):
 - Public purpose: Must equip children with the skill and ability to be a responsible and contributing member in a complex society.
 - Public funding: Must be accountable for funds, following the same funding and reporting requirements as public schools.
 - Public access: Must accept every student that walks through its doors (i.e. no waiting lists, no application process).
 - Public accountability: Must comply with the same testing and accountability standards as public and charter schools.
 - Public curriculum: Must teach the state required standards.
- We believe in a Democratic representation of local voters for public oversight for any school receiving public funding within their school district.

LOCAL CONTROL/GOVERNANCE

Poor governance is a detriment to student learning. Last session, board members were given the duty to provide oversight of academic achievement and leadership for maximizing student performance⁴. Additionally, school districts face growing mandates and requirements from the state and federal levels.

- We support the creation of a mechanism for local school boards to first sanction and then remove school board members who do not complete the required training for board members within the Texas Administrative Code⁵.
- To encourage local control and reduce unnecessary burdens, the District of Innovation Program should be expanded to help school districts meet the demands of their students and local community.

³Texas AFT, How the Teacher Shortage Could turn in to Crisis (April 2016)

⁴Texas Education Code, §11.1515

⁵Texas Administrative Code, §61.1