



## 2021 Legislative Agenda

### 2021 Legislative Priorities:

- A. Allocate state funds to ensure that public education is not disrupted due to financial hardships created by the global health crisis after considering the impact of any federal funding provided directly to districts to meet those needs
- B. Identify state revenue sources to sustain the finance system authorized through HB 3 and to continue buying down school district M&O tax rates
- C. Ensure the Texas Education Agency's implementation of HB 3 aligns with legislative intent and make adjustments as necessary
- D. Ensure that TRS continues the work it began following the 86<sup>th</sup> legislative session to increase access to affordable health insurance for public school employees.
- E. Require a complete recalibration of the accountability system in 2021 to effectively adjust for the impact of COVID-19
- F. Ensure legislators recommend effective solutions and appropriate ongoing funding for threat assessments and identification, services and supports for students with mental health needs
- G. Identify effective solutions and establish an ongoing appropriation for threat assessments and identification, and for services and supports for students with mental health needs
- H. Ensure the clear direction about governance and authority for decisions in Texas public schools as established in the limitation on authority section in Texas Education Code § 7.003 that states "An educational function not specifically delegated to the agency or the board under this code is reserved to and shall be performed by school districts or open-enrollment charter schools" is respected in all proposed legislation

***Accountability: An effective, efficient and equitable state academic accountability system is necessary to carry out the mission and objectives of the Texas public education system. Texas' current academic accountability system provides confusing information to parents about the performance of their child's school and ratings correlate directly to poverty. The state accountability system should be a tool that helps local school boards and educators improve student performance. The 87<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature should:***

1. Require a complete recalibration of the accountability system in 2021 to effectively adjust for the impact of COVID-19, rather than implement a one-year stop gap measure prior to the recalibration originally scheduled for 2022.
  - A. Track and report the correlation of poverty on campus and district accountability ratings
  - B. Expand opportunities for districts to earn College Career Military Readiness

outcomes points

2. Leave the authority to address low performing schools with the locally elected board of trustees. Local authority still depends on state standard academic measures; however, it allows the local board of trustees to determine the best response to the results of those state measures
3. Remove the high-stakes SSI retention provision for students assessed in grades 5 and 8
4. Modify accountability rules to include non-test based indicators in addition to STAAR results for calculating elementary and junior high school ratings
5. Make the provisions for individual graduation committees permanent

**Mental Health and School Safety: *Public safety is a priority for the Arlington ISD. The 87<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature should:***

1. Work with school districts to create a platform that identifies students with mental health needs that pose a threat to public safety
2. Provide appropriate ongoing funding for identification, services and supports for students with mental health needs
3. Provide appropriate funding and assistance for threat assessments
4. Allow school districts flexibility to determine how safety and mental health funds are spent in order to best meet local needs

**School Finance: *Legislation and an appropriation that provides funding for public education to fully meet the mission and objectives described in Texas Education Code, Section 4.001 and the 60x30TX higher education plan impact three areas critical to public education – student achievement, qualified education workforce and local control. The 87<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature should:***

***Student Achievement:***

1. Allocate funds to cover the incremental costs incurred by school districts due to COVID-19, including costs to operate both in-person and remote instructional programs, sanitize schools daily and implement health safety protocols
2. Ensure that all Texas public school students have access to an appropriate technology device and reliable internet connection
3. Ensure the Texas Education Agency's implementation of HB 3 aligns with legislative intent. Make adjustments as necessary
4. Reject legislation that imposes financial responsibility or penalty on school districts to cure the state's prior policy limiting the identification of students for special education services, and provide adequate funding to meet the incremental needs of special education students

***Tax Relief:***

1. Identify state revenue sources necessary to sustain the school finance system improvements authorized by HB 3 and to continue the buy down of school district M&O rates
2. Ensure financial support or reductions for educational programs and local tax rate

reduction is equal.

3. Reject legislation that utilizes school district fund balances to meet the state's obligations to fund public education.

**Qualified Workforce:**

1. Ensure that TRS continues the work it began following the 86<sup>th</sup> legislative session to increase access to affordable health insurance for public school employees. Additional measures to control healthcare costs in future years include:
  - A. Implementing managed care solutions in which employees take more ownership in managing their health and healthcare costs;
  - B. Implementing a robust wellness plan that incentivizes personal healthcare management;
  - C. Actively engaging member districts in annual plan design; and
  - D. Requiring providers to offer competitive, consumer-driven plan designs to maintain their contracts.

**Local Authority:**

1. Recognize TEC § 7.003 as the statutory basis for governance and authority for decision-making in Texas
2. Review administrative rules established by the Commissioner of Education to ensure alignment with legislative intent, and limit the authority of the Commissioner of Education to unilaterally establish administrative rules, guidelines, and procedures
3. Reject legislation that expands required ballot language, mandates November election dates or requires a super majority for school bond and tax rate elections
4. Provide relief from existing unfunded state mandates and reject new unfunded state mandates.

**School Choice: *The Arlington ISD is a district that offers choice for students and parents. The 87<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature should:***

1. Reject any legislation that diverts public funds to private institutions that are not accountable to the public for the use of those funds
2. Expand flexibilities available through the district of innovation regulations
3. Require more transparency and accountability for existing charters
4. Limit unfettered expansion of state charter school campuses without the oversight on expansion amendments by elected officials.
5. Authorize ISD's to establish virtual instruction/distance learning exclusive of the restrictions on ISD authority in TEC Chapter 30A, State Virtual School Network to better address student learning as evidenced by the experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020.

**Pre-kindergarten: *Access to quality pre-K positively impacts academic readiness and performance. The 87<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature should:***

1. Fund universal full-day Pre-K
2. Fund Pre-k through ADA rather than the early education allotment