

2023 Legislative Agenda

2023 Legislative Priorities:

- 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.
- Identify state revenue sources to sustain the finance system authorized through HB 3 and to continue buying down school district M&O tax rates.
- Ensure the Texas Education Agency's implementation of HB 3 aligns with legislative intent and make adjustments as necessary.
- Ensure that TRS continues the work it began following the 86th legislative session to increase access to affordable health insurance for public school employees.
- Require a complete recalibration of the accountability system in 2023.
- Ensure legislators recommend effective solutions and appropriate ongoing funding for threat assessments and identification, services and supports for students with mental health needs.

School Safety: *The Arlington ISD considers school safety to be its number one priority. The 88th Texas Legislature should:*

1. Increase funding for school districts to enhance their security. This should include increasing the school safety allotment. Lack of funding is often the largest barrier to implementing security enhancements and adding security personnel.
2. Differentiate between policy and practical applications. Allow most practical application decisions to be made at the local level. Many decisions are best made close to the facility, students, staff and parents.
3. Prioritize mental health by:
 - Working with school districts to create a platform that identifies students with mental health needs
 - Providing appropriate ongoing funding for identification, services and supports for students with mental health needs
 - Allowing school districts flexibility to determine how safety and mental health funds are spent in order to best meet local needs
 - Funding Multi-disciplinary Threat Assessment Teams for every school district so they are appropriately staffed and can effectively intervene to stop violence before it occurs.

School Finance: *The state's school funding model does not fully meet the state's education needs or account for recent challenges related to inflation and human capital. Legislation is needed 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. The 88th Texas Legislature should:*

School Funding:

1. Change the funding model to be based on enrollment, not attendance, as districts' expenses are based on enrollment, not attendance. Districts must provide staffing, facilities, technology, security, etc. for all students who enroll, regardless of their attendance.
2. Adjust the basic allotment for inflation. School districts' expenses have increased dramatically due to inflation and compensation, but the basic allotment and state funding have remained unchanged.
3. Increase existing allotments like the School Safety Allotment and Technology and Instructional Materials Allotment. Enhancing security necessitates additional funding, and additional funding for technology is required as districts like Arlington ISD increase technology access for students.
4. Reduce recapture. The 88th Legislature should not take actions that increase recapture for any district and should look for ways to reduce the burden of recapture on local communities.
5. Keep funding for public schools public. Reject legislation that diverts public funds to private institutions that are not accountable to the public for the use of those funds. Direct efforts to expand choice in education to public schools that are held accountable for their performance and are transparent in their use of taxpayer dollars.
6. Provide relief from existing unfunded state mandates and reject new unfunded state mandates.

Student Achievement:

1. Ensure all Texas public school students have access to an appropriate technology device and reliable internet connection.
2. Ensure the Texas Education Agency's implementation of HB 3 aligns with legislative intent.
3. 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.
4. Fully fund universal full-day pre-K.

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 that financial support for educational programs and property tax compression is equal.

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

Local Authority:

1. Recognize TEC § 7.003 as the statutory basis for governance and authority for decision-making in Texas. Preserve local control and flexibility to address the unique needs of local communities.
2. Reject legislation that expands required ballot language, mandates November election dates or requires a super majority for school bond and tax rate elections.
3. Amend the Texas Open Meetings Act to permanently allow local boards or individual trustees to attend meetings virtually through mechanisms found to be effective during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Human Capital: *School districts are all about people and require a large, diverse workforce to operate efficiently and effectively. In recent years, school districts have faced increasing difficulty filling all positions, from teachers and substitutes to bus drivers and food service workers. The state can establish policies and provide funding to help alleviate the staffing shortages. The 88th Legislature should:*

1. Fund a teacher certification loan program to support costs associated with teacher certification requirements for traditional and alt certification programs. The loan program should include a requirement that teachers must work in a Texas school district for five (5) of ten (10) years following certification program completion to have the state funded/guaranteed loan forgiven.
2. Ensure that TRS continues the work it began following the 86th legislative session to increase access to affordable health insurance for public school employees. Additional measures to control healthcare cost impact to educators include:
 - a. Increase the state monthly contribution to TRS Active Care by enrolled employee from \$75 to \$300.
 - b. Allow for pilot programs between TRS and interested districts to adopt plan designs with enhanced cost control measures and/or incentives.
3. State-funded teacher incentive programs, such as the Teacher Incentive Allotment (TIA), should be based on transparent, dependable and straightforward measures that give all teachers access to incentive pay and support participation among all Texas districts.

Unfinished Learning: *The unfinished learning caused by the COVID-19 pandemic is real. Arlington ISD has addressed it head on, and our students are making tremendous progress. Still, there is work to be done and the State can help further the progress school districts have already made. The 88th Legislature should:*

1. Sustain additional funding to support extended learning opportunities for students once ESSER III funds end.
2. Provide funding to incentivize, recruit and retain highly qualified classroom teachers.

3. Revamp the accountability system to reduce an over-reliance on STAAR testing in elementary and middle school grade bands as a measure for successful schools.
4. Prioritize funding to provide mental health services to students and families.
5. Fund universal pre-K for all 4-year-old students to accelerate access to research-based early childhood learning.
6. Expand attendance-based funding beyond seat time.

Parental Rights: *The Arlington ISD believes parents are critical partners with the school district in the education of their children and encourages active parental involvement in both creating and implementing its educational programs. The 88th Texas Legislature should:*

1. Maintain the rights of parents already established by Texas Education Code (TEC) Chapter 26. No further action is needed as the current rules effectively guarantee parental rights in the education of their children.