



Priorities for the 87th Legislative Session

Recognize and respond to the pandemic's impact on public education

The coronavirus threatens to disrupt public education well into the future and present widespread challenges for schools until a vaccine is developed and widely distributed. It is important to learn from this experience and equip schools to manage any future public health crisis they may face.

Funding has historically been based on Average Daily Attendance (ADA) in order to provide an incentive to make sure students are attending school. But educators have proven over the last year that they do not need such an incentive to do what's best for students. A school's funding should be based on its enrollment rather than attendance, especially when there is so much uncertainty surrounding public health. Schools should not be financially penalized for proactively encouraging students who may be infected to stay home. Enrollment is also a better reflection than ADA of the true cost of education.

Prioritize students when making difficult budget choices

The Legislature will likely face a multi-billion-dollar budget shortfall resulting from the COVID-19 slowdown of economic activity and the drop in oil prices. Coalition school districts understand balancing the budget will not be easy. However, legislators can take a number of steps — some of them temporary — to mitigate the impact on public school students in Texas.

The cost of property-tax compressions approved by the 86th Legislature is projected to grow substantially. The Legislature should delay further compression in property-tax rates until the state's economic outlook improves. Similarly, any reduction in funding for the Foundation School Program should include an expiration date to ensure funding levels return to those envisioned by House Bill 3 as soon as possible.

Prevent increased recapture in any form

A key goal of HB 3 was to decrease the burden of Robin Hood recapture on local communities. In some districts recapture was eliminated completely, and many others saw a meaningful reduction. However, the bill increased recapture for some districts (due largely to the elimination of the use of prior year values). The 87th Legislature should not take actions that increase recapture for any district. It is also critical that recapture districts continue to make payments in August, as allowed by HB 3.

Preserve local control and flexibility

Local school districts need the flexibility to address the unique needs of their communities. The Legislature should consider increasing local discretion by suspending costly mandates in House Bill 3, such as teacher incentive pay, that limit local school boards' discretion in the use of limited funds. Additionally, districts should keep authority over the amount retained in their fund balances and legislators should not reduce state entitlements based on that amount.

Keep the funding for public schools with public schools

Public tax dollars for education should only fund public — and publicly accountable — schools. Efforts to expand choice in education with public dollars should come within public schools that are held accountable for their performance and are transparent in their use of taxpayer dollars.