



Priorities for the 87th Legislative Session

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

The coronavirus has disrupted learning in numerous ways over the course of a year. While educators have made heroic efforts to ensure learning continues, the significant time spent away from the classroom has caused “learning loss” for many students. Legislators can help students stay on track by investing in locally driven efforts to address learning loss.

In addition, 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, as it is also a better reflection than ADA of the true cost of education.

Prioritize students when allocating state resources

Due to the durability of the Texas economy and the availability of billions in federal stimulus dollars, public schools are not facing the funding cuts that were once feared. Still, the full funding of House Bill 3, passed in 2019, will continue to require significant resources invested in both public education and property-tax compression. Given the many disruptions students have faced over the last year, from COVID-19 to the February 2021 winter storms, it is important to continue making meaningful investments in public education.

Legislators should also be mindful of the rapidly growing cost of the property-tax compression that was included in House Bill 3. In the current session and in the future, compressing property tax rates should not come at the cost of investing in students.

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. As the state distributes federal COVID-19 relief dollars and other resources to schools, it is critical that local school districts have the discretion and flexibility to use those dollars to meet the specific needs and priorities of their communities. One-size-fits-all mandates do not serve a diverse state well. 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.