





AUSTIN ISD LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

88th Legislative Session

AUSTIN
Independent School District



austinisd.org/legislature

AUSTIN ISD BOARD OF TRUSTEES

The Board of Trustees of the Austin Independent School District has identified its priorities for the 88th Legislature, which will convene in January, 2023. The emphasis is on public school funding – an issue in which our community has expressed a deep interest. These priorities focus on funding reforms that will increase the state's funding for all school districts and lessen the reliance on recapture dollars.

We believe that the most effective solutions for school funding begin with an increase to the basic allotment.

That would both increase funds available to all districts in the state and decrease the burden of recapture. Texas ranks in the bottom ten nationally in per student funding, spending $4000 less per student than the national average, while educating about 10 percent of all K-12 students in the U.S.

Mission

We prepare every student with the knowledge and skills to thrive in college, career, and life.

Vision

We are Austin's home for inclusive learning: high expectations for all children, high outcomes for every student.

Recapture

The Austin ISD Board of Trustees supports the original intent of recapture as a system to more equitably fund public education across the state of Texas. The focus of our priorities surrounding recapture is not to eliminate the system, but rather to support significant reforms to a system that is now almost three decades old and no longer working as intended.

When recapture began in 1994, 34 school districts paid the state $127 million in recapture. Over time, the state has increased its reliance on local property taxes to fund public education. Today, recapture is the fourth largest revenue source for the state of Texas. In school year 2021-2022, the amount of recapture paid by the 160 recapture districts in Texas will exceed $3 billion.

Many of the 160 "property wealthy" school districts educate a majority of economically disadvantaged students. Recent property tax appraisals have bumped Austin ISD's recapture payment to $855 million. Austin ISD educates nearly 52 percent economically disadvantaged students at schools that support more than 90 languages.

AUSTIN ISD LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES FOR THE 88th LEGISLATURE



We Support

Parental and family involvement in their children's education in ways that honor parents as partners, respect parents as experts in their children, support teachers and school districts as experts in educational pedagogy and policy, and recognize the role of locally elected school boards who are closest to the community and accountable to voters.

The establishment of a comprehensive accountability system that looks beyond high-stakes, multiple-choice exams to meaningful assessments that have value for students, parents, and teachers as well as flexible measures that local communities value.

Bond and tax rate election ballot language that is clear, transparent, and understandable and revision of currently required language that misleads voters, such as "THIS IS A TAX INCREASE" if the proposed bond will not increase the property tax rate.

We Oppose

Vouchers, tax credits, taxpayer savings grants, tuition reimbursements or any other programs that divert public tax dollars to either privately run schools or charter school districts that are exempt from the state and federal accountability and admissions requirements applicable to public schools.

Any unfunded mandates and infringements on local control, including measures that erode local discretionary money and measures that seek to limit school districts' ability to have representation before the Texas Legislature and the executive branch of government.

Legislation regarding bond elections that increases ballot language requirements, limits dates upon which elections may be held or creates additional requirements for voter-approved tax rate elections and bond elections, such as voter turnout thresholds.

Any measure that would make Interest and Sinking (I&S) funds approved by local voters in a bond election subject to recapture.

ACCOUNTABILITY & ASSESSMENT

Create a statewide workgroup to develop a new accountability system that appropriately measures all factors of an effective education and makes use of the options and flexibility offered by ESSA.

Reduce the number of required state STAAR and EOC tests to those required under federal law.

Local discretion in instructional planning and repeal of the accelerated learning committee requirements (HB 4545, 2021).

Local discretion in instructional planning and for the repeal of the one-size-fits-all 30 hours of supplemental accelerated instruction that must be administered to every student who fails any STAAR or EOC exam (HB 4545, 2021).

Require the State of Texas to seek a waiver from the federal government to exempt students who take an end-of-course exam (EOC) in middle school from taking the same EOC in high school.

An accountability system that includes a college career military readiness (CCMR) indicator for middle school.

Require the Texas Education Agency to use a minimum of three years of statewide growth in setting growth targets for Closing the Gaps, rather than using the 2022 statewide rate.

Require the Texas Education Agency to hold districts harmless for 2023 state accountability ratings, rather than apply ratings and sanctions to a year in which both the STAAR test and the accountability system are undergoing a significant redesign. This would also allow the TEA to have two full years of post-COVID-19 STAAR results with which to set targets for 2024-2027.

ACADEMICS AND STUDENT SUPPORT

Require universal vision and hearing screening for public school students in high school, as well as the resources to conduct the screenings.

Reduce the use of exclusionary discipline and keep students in school whenever possible instead of disciplinary placements in alternative programs or juvenile justice facilities.

A study to determine whether the current law providing transportation funding for students living more than two miles from campus should be adjusted.

Support an equitable education environment that values diversity of race, culture, gender, learning ability and socioeconomic background in an environment that welcomes all students and provides a physically and mentally safe environment.

Oppose the ability of the state to restrict programs in school districts that promote acceptance and respect for all students such as social, emotional learning and “No Place for Hate.”

PARENT AND FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

Support parent and family involvement legislation as it currently exists in Chapter 26 of the Texas Education Code, which gives parents and guardians a long and clearly enumerated list of rights in Texas public schools.

Support the right of families to opt out as the preferred method of supporting a family that objects to materials, lessons, programs, events or other services provided by a local public school or district.

Oppose measures that support parent and family involvement that would give one or a small number of families control over the resources or information available to other families’ students, or that would allow a request from an individual family or small number of families to divert scarce resources of time and money from classroom, campus and district funds intended to serve all students.

CHARTER SCHOOLS

Oppose the further expansion of publicly funded charter schools, including increases in the number of campuses under existing charters, unless charter schools are subject to the same accountability and transparency laws and regulations as community-based public schools, including those related to: special education requirements, public notices, school discipline, financial dealings (leases, mortgages, bond debt, contracts) transportation, bilingual programs, policy notices, employment contract policies, parental rights, lobbying and political expenditure restrictions, student data privacy, efficiency audits, lunch programs, and nepotism.

Include in all legislation related to parental rights the same rights for charter school parents that parents of students in community-based public schools are entitled to, including due process rights relating to student discipline and expulsion.

Provide taxpayers more detailed information about prospective charter schools and their expansions, including the planned location, cost to the state and local school district, the academic and financial record of the school, and a meaningful process for taxpayers to provide their support or opposition to said charter in their community.

Improve transparency, notice, input, and consideration of the state and local district impact before a charter can be approved or expanded.

Tie the charter school "small and midsize allotment" to the same 5,000-student cap as the district small and midsize allotment.

Authorize the State Board of Education to exercise veto authority over charter expansions approved by the Commissioner of Education.

Require charter schools to accept all students who wish to enroll, including students with a documented history of discipline problems.

Require the Commissioner of Education, before granting an expansion, to consider, at a minimum, whether a charter holder has achieved the representations and goals included in its initial charter application.

FUNDING

Basic Allotment

An increase in the basic allotment with the goal of matching the national average in per student funding by 2030.

Adjust the basic allotment each biennium based on the rate of inflation.

All revenue in excess of entitlement funds should flow directly into the basic allotment.

Recapture

A requirement that all recapture dollars be spent on education, ending the practice of the state supplanting its investment in education with recapture dollars.

Restoring the discount for early payment of recapture.

Counseling

Increase funding for counselors to provide students more robust college and career counseling by reducing the counselor to student ratio.

Adequate funding to provide students greater access to mental health counseling by providing funding for more school based counselors and mental health professionals.

Increase funding to hire staff to perform non-counseling duties, allowing licensed counselors to serve more students with mental health needs.

Cost of Education

A study that identifies the true cost of educating all students, including the cost of complying with state mandates.

An adequate and equitable school finance system that raises per pupil funding to the national average.

Educating children is a partnership between the state and local school districts. The state should increase its share of funding to at least 50 percent of the cost of maintaining and operating public schools.

Reinstate the cost of education index to account for the cost-of-living differences among regions in the state.

Other

Full funding for state-wide, universal, high-quality, full-day prekindergarten programs to include facilities.

Oppose any effort to divert local school property tax revenues for non-public education purposes.

Funding school districts on the basis of enrollment rather than attendance.

Oppose providing funding or bonuses to school districts under the Foundation School Program on the basis of students' performance on a statewide test.

A study to determine whether the current law providing transportation funding for students living more than two miles from campus should be adjusted.

Ensure that all federal funds for Texas schools reaches Texas schools as intended, and without interference or delay from the state.

GOVERNANCE

Support local control of school finances and oppose measures that erode local discretion.

Oppose legislation or measures that seek to limit school districts' or administrators' ability to have representation before the Texas Legislature, state agencies, and the executive branch.

Prioritize local control in all legislation to ensure those closest to the community and voters are held accountable.

Oppose any efforts to usurp or diminish the role of the elected State Board of Education in setting curriculum standards and adopting instructional materials.

SAFETY

Increase the school safety allotment and expand the allowable uses of the allotment to include mental health services.

Require the Texas Department of Public Safety to make available to school districts information regarding Texas firearm storage laws and best practices to be distributed to all families at the beginning of each school year.

TEACHER RETENTION

Oppose legislation that undermines the professionalism of teachers, such as eliminating the requirement that teachers have college degrees or mandating a statewide curriculum that narrows educators' ability to adapt lessons in response to local needs.

Provide a property tax exemption for teachers.

Oppose onerous administrative requirements on teachers to post class materials and activities online.

TEACHER RETIREMENT SYSTEM

Continuation of the current defined benefit pension program for TRS members and advocate for an annual cost-of-living adjustment for all retirees if a study of the fund determines it will not negatively impact the actuarial soundness of the fund.

Increased state funding to assist with increased healthcare costs associated with TRS-ActiveCare and TRS-Care.

WHO REPRESENTS US?



Below are the legislators who represent the communities Austin ISD serves.

To find details on the legislator who serves a specific address, visit fyi.capitol.texas.gov

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HOW TO GET INVOLVED



IN-PERSON VISIT:

Meet your representative or senator.

Ask your legislator to attend a group meeting in your community.

CALL THE OFFICE:

Calls are more effective than emails.

Be sure to provide your address.

TESTIFY:

Testify at a Committee Hearing

ATTEND A TOWN HALL MEETING:

Show up, speak, ask questions.

Notes:

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