

Denton Independent School District

2021 Legislative Priorities Summary

The MISSION of the Denton ISD: Empowering lifelong learners to be engaged citizens who positively impact their local and global community

Our MISSION is measured by five GUIDING STATEMENTS of OUTCOMES:

1. Our faculty and staff feel recognized and appreciated
2. Our students are reading on grade level by the end of the 3rd grade
3. Our 9th grade students are mastering Algebra I
4. Our students are engaged in extra and co-curricular activities
5. Our graduates are meeting the College and Career Readiness Standards

In pursuit of these outcomes we advocate for legislation which:

1. Supports legislation making public education funding a priority and protects House Bill 3.
2. Supports full funding for the expansion of high-quality Pre-Kindergarten programs state-wide.
3. Supports legislation to address the mental health needs and school safety of our children and teachers.
4. Supports an assessment and accountability system that values student growth and achievement over standardized, high-stakes one day testing.
5. Supports adaptive and creative local solutions for recruiting and retaining high quality educators in our school districts.
6. Supports legislation minimizing the diversion of public funds for vouchers, tax credits, education savings grants, or any other funding mechanisms diverting funds to private schools.
7. Supports legislation recognizing the needs of rapidly growing districts, of districts in areas of the state with low property values, and supports legislation to design a school finance system to provide adequate and equitable resources.
8. Supports governance allowing for local control of the school district.
9. Supports the ability for local taxpayers to preserve their right to involvement in state policy making by maintaining the ability to have lobbyists serve and lobby for taxpayers.

School Finance:

Supports legislation making public education funding a priority.

Advocates for the state to fulfill its promise and make appropriate budget appropriations to assure long-term sustainability to House Bill 3 (86th Session) so that this legislation may have a long-term meaningful impact on student achievement to promote educational excellence for all Texas students. Denton ISD advocates for truth in taxation as it relates to the implications of rising property values and the corresponding decline in state funding for public education. School funding issues have been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic and additional costs borne by local school districts.

Funding for High-Quality Pre-K Programs:

Supports full funding for the expansion of high-quality Pre-K programs state-wide.

Research indicates the greatest opportunity to impact achievement gaps and improve outcomes for all students over their lifetime is to provide students access to a high-quality Pre-K program. Denton ISD strongly encourages comprehensive legislative support to bring these youngest students into the public education system.

Mental Health and School Safety:

Supports legislation to address the mental health needs and school safety of our children and teachers, such as a state-funded organizational framework that will create a network of effective support in our public schools to address the mental health needs and school safety of our children and teachers.

Students and educators must feel safe and be mentally healthy in order to learn and meet their full potential. Students are experiencing greater anxiety, fear, depression, and a lack of coping skills; school counselors, social workers and school psychologists across the nation are seeing an increase in suicide ideation. The academic needs of students cannot be separated from their social, emotional, and behavioral needs and vice-versa. The Covid-19 pandemic has made teacher, employee and student mental health a predominant concern of local school districts.

Assessment and Accountability:

Supports an assessment and accountability system that values student growth and achievement over standardized, high-stakes one day testing.

Advocates for 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 measures what each community deems important in promoting college and career readiness. Denton ISD opposes A–F ratings which do not accurately reflect school efficacy and often exaggerates school inequity. In addition, suspending the statewide testing during the Covid-19 pandemic would allow school districts and teachers to focus on providing the best possible instruction to students rather than focusing on STAAR testing.

Teacher Recruitment and Retention

Supports adaptive and creative local solutions for recruiting and retaining high quality educators in our school districts. Denton ISD supports legislation that will help elevate the teaching profession by incentivizing education degrees and providing additional funding for TRS Care and ActiveCare, along with insuring defined retirement benefits for teachers through TRS. Staffing shortages have become exacerbated by the current Covid-19 pandemic.

Charter Schools, School Choice, and Vouchers:

Supports legislation that minimizes the diversion of public funds for vouchers, tax credits, education savings grants, or any other funding mechanisms diverting funds to private schools. Opposes the fiscal waste of maintaining two separate educational systems. Supports equity in providing educational options to all students, regardless of socio-economic status. Students and parents often have the ability to choose among public schools. Texas should not allow charter expansion into areas served by high-performing schools. Denton ISD supports the requirement that all public accountability and transparency provisions be equally applied to charter schools thereby enabling a more efficient and equitable public charter school system. In particular, during a time when the state has limited funding and additional costs due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the state should not waste funds on a dual education system.

Facilities Funding:

Supports legislation that recognizes the needs of rapidly growing districts, of districts in areas of the state with low property values, and supports legislation to design a school finance system to provide adequate and equitable resources. Denton ISD is categorized as a destination, Fast Growth School District. Many districts have large amounts of

deferred maintenance due to the cumulative impact of historically inadequate school finance and debt funding formulas. In addition, Denton ISD advocates for legislation which will secure future funding for the New Instructional Facilities Allotment.

Local Control/Governance and Taxation:

Supports governance allowing for local control of the school district. Local control allows decision making to occur in collaboration with local taxpayers, parents, students, communities and constituents. Given the transition to the Every Student Succeeds Act, Denton ISD advocates for increased opportunities for school districts to implement local initiatives such as Districts of Innovation, and for prevention of measures that reduce or remove governance of districts from locally elected school boards. Denton ISD advocates for innovations in school district taxing authority allowing local school trustees more flexibility to raise and lower taxes within voter-approved limits. Denton ISD further supports any legislation which would diminish the tremendous burden of unfunded mandates placed upon local districts. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the ability to make local decisions has been particularly hampered as districts were challenged by ever-changing guidance from the state.

Taxpayer Advocacy:

Supports the ability for local taxpayers to preserve their right to involvement in state policy making by maintaining the ability to have lobbyists serve and lobby for taxpayers. Denton ISD recognizes that ensuring that state elected officials are provided with correct information directly from constituent organizations has saved the state of Texas and local school districts millions of dollars over the years. Accordingly, Denton ISD opposes any legislation which would allow only special interest groups and for-profit organizations the ability to access lawmakers and the law-making process. Denton ISD continues to advocate on behalf of local taxpayers, parents, students, communities, and constituents. During this Covid-19 pandemic, it has become even more important for the state to understand the challenges faced at the local level.