



INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

Page | 1

The Denton ISD supports the efforts of the Texas Association of School Boards, the Texas Association of School Administrators, and other educational agencies in the development of Core Principles.

Additionally, the Denton ISD has identified the following legislative priorities that reflect its local needs and concerns:

- 1. The Denton ISD directly opposes Vouchers, School Choice, Taxpayer Savings Grant Programs, and the expansion of Charters** – *There is no conclusive evidence that vouchers improve the achievement of students who use them to attend private school. Nor is there any validity to claims that by creating a competitive marketplace for students, vouchers force public schools to improve. The absence of public accountability for voucher funds contributes to rampant fraud, waste, and abuse in current voucher programs across the country. Vouchers do not reduce the cost for public education, in fact, the costs increase by requiring tax payers to fund two school systems. Vouchers do not give parents real education choice, as private schools can pick and choose which students are admitted, such action will widen the achievement gap rather than close the achievement gap. The public disapproves of vouchers. Since 1966, vouchers or voucher related measures have been placed before voters in 13 states 22 times. Voters have rejected public funds to private schools every time. In those 22 elections, nearly two out of three voters cast “no” votes. The effectiveness of charter schools is sketchy at best and public schools in Texas are collectively out-performing charter schools in all academic areas.*
- 2. Make Education Funding a Priority** – *All Texas school districts are reeling from the 5.4 billion dollar cut to public education in the last legislative session. It is the recommendation of the Denton Independent School District that the state make appropriate budget adjustments to reinstate funding levels to both the Foundation School Program (FSP), and the Education Programs outside the FSP. However, if school districts will be required to finance this loss of funding, it is recommended that they be allowed to increase taxes without a Tax Ratification Election in an effort to meet mandated spending levels for current educational programs, provide*



INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

Page | 2

intervention to students in need of assistance, and meet the demands of a more rigorous assessment system.

- 3. Provide Adequate Funding for Early Childhood Programs** - *The need urgently exists for a more comprehensive approach to provide services to prekindergarten students. Eligibility requirements for prekindergarten should be broadened so that more children are eligible for state funding. Funding should be provided to support full day service, including facilities for students with additional developmental need. In order for students to graduate high school post-secondary ready they must first be school ready. As a further consequence, the transportation allotment needs to be adjusted to support student transportation needs.*
- 4. Provide Adequate State Funding for Programs Positively Impacting Student Achievement** – *As a result of decreased funding by the State of Texas, funding sources such as the Student Success Initiative (ARI/AMI) were eliminated, Without additional funding, the opportunity and achievement gap will only widen for socio-economically disadvantaged students. In addition, additional funds should be allocated to ensure high school graduates are post-secondary ready. .The state should financially support effective dropout prevention programs, effective use of virtual coursework, and effective career and technology programs leading to certification.*
- 5. Review and Upwardly Adjust Weighted Funding for Special Programs** - *The weighted allotment system for Special Education, Bi-lingual, and English as a Second Language (ESL) programs is beneficial to eligible school districts. There is a specific need for review and adjustment of the weighted funding for all these special programs. These students are currently served in a variety of settings and programs. Adjustments to weighted funding are necessary due to the population shift of students in our state.*
- 6. Amend the “50-Cent Bond Test” the Attorney General Uses to Approve Voter-approved Bond Issues** - *The District supports legislation to amend the “50-Cent Bond Test” to provide the necessary bonding capacity to allow school districts to cost-effectively construct voter-approved school facilities to meet the demands of a growing student population and to address the increasing school construction costs, unfunded facility mandates and declining state funding assistance faced by school districts.*

- 7. Increase Transportation Allotment** - *The district supports legislation that updates funding and increases services to students for school-provided transportation. This update would occur each legislative session and reflect actual transportation costs, i.e. include increased allotments and improved means of fund distribution for hazardous routes and special program services (special education, bilingual education, magnet programs, and career and technology programs). This legislation also would change the current two-mile regular education requirement for transportation services to one mile.*

UIL travel allotment should also be considered. The district supports legislation that requires the University Interscholastic League (UIL) to place local district schools in a geographically advantageous alignment, to reduce transportation costs. Under the current UIL alignment policies, the first criterion considered is school size. The district also supports subsidizing local school districts whose travel budgets are adversely affected by district realignment. The district supports any activity of the UIL to help alleviate economic and travel burdens faced by local districts related to UIL activities based on the bi-annual district placement.

- 8. The Denton ISD supports the efforts of the Fast Growth Schools Coalition in the six areas of interest by advocating for legislation to**

- a) *Modify or eliminate the “50-cent debt test” that is used by the Attorney General to evaluate new bond issues before bonds are approved for issuance.*
- b) *Increase the guaranteed yield for the Existing Debt Allotment (EDA) and Instructional Facilities Allotment (IFA) so that more students are beneficiaries of the program.*
- c) *Create a fast growth allotment within any changes to the existing school finance and formula systems.*
- d) *Ensure that a full range of fast growth issues are considered as the Instructional Materials Allotment (IMA) is implemented by TEA and further refined by legislators.*
- e) *Fund the New Instructional Facilities Allotment (NIFA) in the 2014-15 biennium and establish funding levels that maintain the pace of escalating start-up costs.*
- f) *Maintain the use of prior-year state property values that are determined by the Comptroller’s property value study.*



INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

Page | 4

9. The Denton ISD supports efforts to modify to improve the Assessment and Accountability system. *The district supports repealing the statutory requirement that end-of-course exams (EOC) count for 15% of a student's grade. We support developing alternative assessments for English Language Learners at the secondary level. We support reducing the number of STARR exams in grades 3-8. We support a system that ensures accountability ratings are reflective of overall student achievement at campus and district levels and not limited to the lowest performing students. We support the work of the Texas High Performing Schools Consortium in making recommendations regarding digital learning, learning standards, multiple authentic assessments, and local control.*

10. The Denton ISD supports the continuation of the current defined benefit pension program for TRS eligible employees.

*The TRS fund is one of the **healthiest and most stable** funds in the **world**. Without any changes, the fund could make payments through the year 2075. A few quick facts;*

- *1 out of 20 Texans is a member of TRS*
- *In 2011, TRS paid \$7.2 billion in retirement benefits. 95% of that went directly to retirees who live in Texas.*
- *95% of TRS members do not pay into social security.*
- *Defined benefit plans (TRS) help recruit and retain high quality Teachers as compared with defined contribution plans.*
- *In 2008, the annual TRS administrative cost was \$24 per member, which was well below the peer average of \$63 for the same year.*
- *TRS benefits provided for 98,900 jobs across Texas in 2011.*

The Defined Benefit Plan is critical to the assurance of lifetime annuity payments for members of the Teacher Retirement System. The DB plan generates a predictable, steady retirement income which is the sole guaranteed income for most Texas retirees. DB plans are pooled which allow for the averaging of risks over a large number of participants. DB plans fund benefits through the average life expectancy of the group. With pooled funds, management fees are lower than maintaining, hundreds or thousands of individual accounts.

Pension assets can be diversified for optimal returns throughout an employee's lifetime. When on a reliable DB Plan pension, retirees are a vital, continuous source



INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

Page | 5

of spending in their communities. Given the growth of retirement insecurity, we should be looking at ways to ensure all Americans have access to adequate and secure pensions.