



## 2017 Legislative Priorities Summary

### Objectives:

- Enhance local control for local elected trustees to their local communities
- Advocate for adequate funding mechanisms for Texas Public schools
- Advocate for efficiency and transparency at the state and local level
- Communicate the importance of local accountability

### Priority 1 School Choice:

*The Denton Independent School District adamantly opposes the diversion of public funds for vouchers, tax credits, education savings grants, or any other funding mechanisms diverting funds to private schools. The DISD currently offers many choices for students and parents to consider within the current school choice framework. Students and parents often have the ability to choose among public schools. In addition, Texas should consider public accountability and transparency provisions to charter schools allowing for a more efficient public charter school system.*

### Priority 2 Assessment and Accountability:

*An effective, efficient and equitable state academic accountability system is necessary to carry out the mission and objectives of the Texas public education system. **The Denton Independent School District supports an assessment and accountability system that values student growth and achievement over standardized, high-stakes one day testing.** A system designed to rank and sort schools is not accountability, nor does it demonstrate growth in student learning. The DISD 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. Oppose A–F campus and district ratings.*

### Priority 3 School Finance

***The Denton ISD supports legislation making public education funding a priority.** For more than 30 years, the Texas school finance formula has remained substantially unchanged. It is the recommendation of the Denton Independent School District that the state make appropriate budget adjustments to the school finance system by developing a simplified and sustainable plan, which provides resources promoting educational excellence for all Texas students.*



#### **Priority 4 Facilities Funding**

*The population of students enrolled in public education has increased by more than two million over the last 20 years. The Denton Independent School District is categorized as a destination, Fast Growth School District. Eighty percent of students new to Texas enroll in approximately 80 school districts across Texas. The construction cost index, and state and local building codes have increased significantly during this time; however, the funding formula weights in the Existing Debt Allotment and Instructional Facilities Allotment formulas have remained frozen. Districts have large amounts of deferred maintenance due to the cumulative impact of the inadequate school finance and debt funding formulas. **To recognize the needs of rapidly growing districts and districts in areas of the state with low property values the DISD supports the legislature in designing a school finance system to provide adequate and equitable resources.***

#### **Priority 5 Local Control/Governance & Taxation**

***The Denton Independent School District supports governance allowing for local control of the school district.** Local control allows decision making to occur in collaboration with local communities and constituents. Given the transition to the Every Student Succeeds Act, DISD advocates for increased opportunities for school districts to implement local initiatives, such as Districts of Innovation, and prevention of measures that reduce or remove governance of districts from locally elected school boards. DISD advocates for innovations in school district taxing authority allowing local school trustees more flexibility to raise and lower taxes within a voter-approved limit.*



### **School Choice:**

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The Texas Legislature should:

1. Oppose any legislation that diverts public funds to private institutions.
2. Grant autonomies to districts that implement effective school choice including, but not limited to the following;
  - a. Exempt districts from requirements of the Public Education Grant (PEG) designation;
  - b. Allow charter and ISD partnerships to voluntarily be created with approval by duly elected school boards and appointed charter school boards to ensure they are right for the community and that adequate resources exist to properly support the partnership;
  - c. Review and revise statutory requirements for in-district charters to create greater flexibility for boards of trustees to establish charters; and
  - d. Continue to support local control of local school trustees by encouraging designations of District of Innovation.
3. To protect the financial integrity of every school district and its taxpayers, and to ensure “public funds” are prudently used for the long-term benefit of all students the legislature should enhance oversight to existing and future charter schools. The legislature should:
  - a. Amend the approval process for a new charter school campus;
  - b. Eliminate the ability of a charter to open a new campus without Commissioner approval;
  - c. Upon the request of a charter to open a new campus, provide a 60-day comment period for school districts to provide the Commissioner with potential academic, financial, and/or student implications that may result;
  - d. Require a charter’s student retention rate to be at least 80% in each of last 3-years;
  - e. Require an independent “demand survey” be conducted to demonstrate sufficient interest exists prior to a charter opening a new campus;
  - f. Require a charter to operate a new charter campus for a minimum time period to protect the interests of attending students;
  - g. Provide 2-years of “transition funding” to a school district that has a student transfer to a charter;

- h. Level the playing field by adjusting the funding of charter schools to correlate with the grades served by campus and the funding levels of the competing school districts;
- i. Designate TEA to process the student admissions at each charter campus to ensure charters operate as “open enrollment” schools and remain available to all students;
- j. With public education policy and parental perception impacted by the “wait lists” of charter schools the legislature should:
  - 1. Implement procedures to ensure “wait lists” are accurately reported to TEA on an annual basis pursuant to a consistent uniform definition of a “wait list” student; and
  - 2. Enhance documentation provided to parents and school districts when a student is not accepted into a charter school.
- k. If a school district has an “academically acceptable rating” in each of the last 3-years, limit the number of students that may attend a charter within a school district to 5.0% of the school district’s current enrollment;
- l. Limit the statewide enrollment of charter schools (by grade) to no more than 10.0% of the total students enrolled in Texas public schools to be consistent with the limitation on the number of charters authorized by the Legislature in year 2013;
- m. Require a charter that is currently operating a campus within the boundaries of a school district to annually provide the following information to a school district’s Board of Trustees in a public meeting:
  - a. 5-year student enrollment history (by grade) for each existing campus within a school district, including number of students and capacity at each grade level;
  - b. Projected student enrollment (by grade) at each campus operating within a school district;
  - c. Number of current students (by grade) attending a campus that reside within a school district’s boundaries – No names may be provided to protect the privacy of students; and
  - d. An estimate of the State funding received by the charter for each student residing within the boundaries of the school district and the average “expenditures per student” for each campus within the school district.
- n. Enhance the information available to parents/students by requiring a charter to post the following for each charter campus within the boundaries of a school district:
  - a. Course offerings/programs available;
  - b. Accountability ratings;
  - c. Expenditures per student;
  - d. Teacher certification and years of experience; and
  - e. Student retention rate by grade.



### **Assessment and Accountability:**

**An effective, efficient and equitable state academic accountability system is necessary to carry out the mission and objectives of the Texas public education system. The Denton Independent School District supports an assessment and accountability system that values student growth and achievement over standardized, high-stakes one day testing. A system designed to rank and sort schools is not accountability, nor does it demonstrate growth in student learning. The DISD 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. Oppose A–F campus and district ratings.**

The Texas Legislature should require an accountability and assessment system to:

1. Focus on measuring and rewarding student growth rather than punitive sanctions;
2. Advocate that the student assessment program for grades 3-8 be limited to only those assessments required to meet ESSA requirements:
  1. reading in grades 3–8;
  2. math in grades 3–8; and
  3. science in grades 5 and 8;
3. Support the reduction of the length of state assessments and of the number of field test items;
4. Advocate for the restructuring of the statewide student assessment program for grades 3–8 and the high school End-of-Course (EOC) exams, so that it assesses only high-priority learning standards (readiness standards could be used on an interim basis);
5. Be developmentally appropriate;
6. Reduce testing redundancy;
7. Provide a fair and understandable system for illustrating school performance that does not rely on simple labels such as A through F ratings or any system designed to rank and sort Texas public schools;
8. Oppose measures to increase the number of EOC exams required for graduation purposes;
9. Advocate for eliminating the requirement that students enrolled in dual-credit courses must take and pass comparable EOCs;
10. Advocate for extending the number of days used to determine school year enrollment for English Language Learners who are unschooled asylees or refugees from 60 to 120 consecutive days;
11. Advocate for the removal of grade advancement requirements that are tied to the state standardized assessments in reading and math for grades 5 and 8;

12. Advocate for the continuation of Individual Graduation Committees with authority to allow students to graduate when the students have successfully completed all required curriculum requirements, but have failed no more than two EOCs; and
13. Advocate for a public school accountability system that ensures ratings are reflective of overall student performance at campus and district levels and not limited to the lowest performing students.



## School Finance

The Denton ISD supports legislation making public education funding a priority. For more than 30 years, the Texas school finance formula has remained substantially unchanged. It is the recommendation of the Denton Independent School District that the state make appropriate budget adjustments to the school finance system by developing a simplified and sustainable plan, which provides resources promoting educational excellence for all Texas students.

The Texas Legislature should design a school finance system to provide adequate and equitable resources by:

1. Updating outdated formulas and weights to fund the true cost of education;
2. Recognizing the funding challenges associated with rapid declines in property and/or student enrollment;
3. Recognizing the economic challenges encountered by small rural and remote districts faced with the Additional State Aid for Tax Reduction (ASATR) funding cliff;
4. Increasing the basic allotment used in the Foundation School Program formula. Furthermore, add provisions to the state law to require that the basic allotment be adjusted for inflation each biennium;
5. Providing access to equal revenue per student for the same tax effort at the 95th wealth percentile;
6. Adjusting Tier 1 funding weights for special programs to reflect current accountability requirements and program costs. In particular, funding weights should be increased for economically disadvantaged, bilingual/ESL, career and technical, special education and gifted and talented programs to appropriately account for the incremental costs to provide these programs;
7. Providing weighted career and technical funding for career and higher education exploration courses for all eighth-grade students;
8. Providing flexibility to spend State Comp Ed funds on students who do not meet any of the state's 13 at-risk criteria, but are economically-disadvantaged;
9. Providing relief from current unfunded state mandates and not add additional unfunded mandates (see sample list of unfunded mandates at Exhibit A);
10. Providing tax relief to property owners and assist school districts in providing relevant learning environments by increasing the guaranteed yield of \$35 per student for Existing Debt Allotment and Instructional Facilities Allotment;
11. Restoring funding to local districts to offset the 1.5 percent TRS Supplemental Contribution imposed on districts by the 83rd Texas Legislature;

12. Increasing access to affordable health insurance for public school employees equal to that provided for state agency employees. Options include combining the state employee and TRS Active Care plans, providing equal funding for health insurance and permitting districts to opt out of TRS Active Care;
13. Updating the transportation funding formula to address the current and increasing costs of transportation and maintaining vehicles to increase student safety; and
14. Coordinate the E-rate efforts of schools and districts to maximize the discounts available and provide funding for the 10% state match offered by the Federal Communications Commission.





#### Facilities Funding:

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funding formulas. To recognize the needs of rapidly growing districts and districts in areas of the state with low property values the DISD supports the legislature in designing a school finance system to provide adequate and equitable resources.

The Texas Legislature should design a school finance system to provide adequate and equitable facilities by:

1. Increase the awards under the New Instructional Facilities Allotment (IFA) program for campus start-up costs from \$250 to \$1,000 per ADA:
  - a. The current New Instructional Facilities Allotment (NIFA) grant of \$250 per ADA falls well short of what is needed to open a new campus. This would increase the appropriations from approximately \$26 million to \$104 million per year. This program provides assistance to all districts opening campuses, Chapter 41 and Chapter 42, high-wealth and low-wealth, and urban, suburban, and rural as well as charter schools.
2. Increase the \$35/ADA Yield for both the Existing Debt Allotment (EDA) and Instructional Facilities Allotment (IFA) Programs:
  - a. The guaranteed yields for these programs have not been updated since 2000. When these programs began, over 91 percent of the students enrolled in public schools were eligible for some state support. Over the last sixteen years that percentage has diminished to 43 percent of students eligible for state assistance. If the yield were increased to provide state funding to 88 percent of the students (\$78.64/ADA), the average I&S tax rate reduction for districts receiving state funding would be significant, approximately \$0.07 per \$100. Recommendation: Begin phase-in of EDA and IFA yield increase to at least the 88<sup>th</sup> percentile. By increasing the yields from \$35/ADA to \$45.50/ADA, the tax rate reduction statewide for school districts would be approximately \$0.02. The state should also use state savings due to local value growth each year to increase the program yields. During the 2015-16 school year the state is anticipated to spend approximately \$100 million less on the EDA and IFA programs due to this local value growth.
3. Provide voters and school boards the flexibility necessary to effectively manage fast-growth school districts tax rates:

- a. Not only does consideration need to be given to fast-growth school districts that need to exceed the \$0.50 debt due to rapid enrollment growth and construction needs, but more emphasis on total tax rate management needs to be considered by the Legislature.
- b. Recommendation: Fast growth communities need new flexible tax rate management tools that allow locally-elected school boards and voters to prudently and effectively manage the school district's total tax rate. Flexibility and tax rate management is key to successfully planning and implementing school district facility plans and operational needs.



## Local Control/Governance & Taxation

The Denton Independent School District supports governance allowing for local control of the school district. Local control allows decision making to occur in collaboration with local communities and constituents. Given the transition to the Every Student Succeeds Act, the DISD advocates for increased opportunities for school districts to implement local initiatives, such as Districts of Innovation, and prevention of measures that reduce or remove governance of districts from locally elected school boards. The DISD advocates for innovations in school district taxing authority allowing local school trustees more flexibility to raise and lower taxes within a voter-approved limit.

The Texas Legislature should support governance allowing for local control of the school district by:

1. **Teacher and Principal Evaluations:**

Opposing state-required teacher and principal evaluations be tied to student scores on high-stakes standardized tests. Whether student test scores are factored into a teacher's/principal's evaluation should be a local decision.

2. **Achievement School Districts:**

Opposing the creation of Achievement School Districts. Such interventions should not be considered until the state has an assessment system that is valid and reliable and an accountability system that uses factors other than standardized test scores to determine if a school is failing.

3. **Parent Trigger:**

Opposing any parent trigger or similar legislation that removes authority from locally elected school board members who are directly accountable to all students, parents, local taxpayers, and local businesses.

4. **Local Debt (ballot language):**

Opposing any legislation that expands ballot language, does not provide accurate information, or that seeks to confuse voters and is inconsistent with ballot language required of other local subdivisions and the state. School districts communicate, seek input, and educate local communities on bond information extensively prior to elections.

5. **Transparency**

- a. Minimizing duplicative reporting requirements by the Texas Education Agency through the meaningful use of existing PEIMS data;
- b. Modernization of practices for posting public notices to reach a higher number of constituents and to reduce costs, such as posting on the District's website; and,
- c. The use of automated financial and academic reporting and forecasting tools, such as Forecast5 that highlight a district's academic and financial performance.