



LEGISLATIVE AGENDA [2019]

SCHOOL FINANCE BUCKET

2019 Recommended Legislative Policies

With a \$31 million budget deficit last year, it is imperative that we aim to make the school finance system more equitable and adequate. We aim to work with the recommendations of the School Finance Commission where possible. Below are specific recommendations that would be in the best interests of SAISD and Texas students.

a. Increase the Basic Allotment (Weights)

The basic allotment has been fixed at \$5140 for the past three sessions. Raising the basic allotment is the fairest way to ensure all Texas students benefit from additional funding. All of the weights are connected to the basic allotment so SAISD students gain additional benefits whenever the basic allotment is increased. This type of increase provides us with the maximum amount of flexibility to be able to make critical investments that benefit our students.

b. Eliminate the Cost of Education Index in favor of raising the ratio of the weights

The Cost of Education Index (CEI) has not been updated since 1991. While SAISD receives a current weight of 1.14, which is slightly above the state average of 1.12, this number is significantly out of date. Instead of updating a complicated formula, it would be more equitable to raise the compensatory education weight from .2 to be higher and the bilingual weight up from .1. The CEI has \$3 billion available, so raising the weights can be done in a cost neutral way. For example, this funding could raise the Comp Ed weight to .25 and the bilingual weight to .15.

c. Create a density of poverty weight to recognize challenges faced in the most impoverished communities in the state

Additionally, there was compelling testimony that the compensatory education weight does not distinguish among levels of poverty. Instead of creating a tier system of winners and losers, ten states have added additional funding to the highest poverty districts based on census data. Therefore, the legislature should create an additional weight to be applied before the other weights to recognize this reality.

d. Lower Property Taxes; Find a new source of State Revenue

Nearly all Texans agree that property taxes are too high. If we could have found another source of revenue besides property taxes to raise additional revenue back in 2016, we would have done so. However, we had no other legal options. Therefore, we highly recommend that the state find a new, stable revenue source to help buy down property taxes as part of comprehensive school finance reform.

e. Restore Pre-K Funding Cuts

In 2015, the legislature partially funded an expansion of high-quality Pre-K. SAISD received nearly \$2 million in funding from this allocation. However, in 2017, the legislature stripped this funding away while maintaining the higher standards for Pre-K. At a minimum, the legislature should double their 2015 funding (as that was only for the 16-17 school year) to restore the proposed level of funding. With extensive need across the state, investing in high quality Pre-K should be a bipartisan priority this session in Austin.

f. Fund Special Education Increases Statewide

After the legislature ended the Special Education indicator in 2017, the state has seen an increase in the number of Special Education students. On this item, the legislature just needs to ensure that they maintain the current Special Education weights and allow all new students to receive the funding that students previously had received.

g. Creation of a Fund for Strategic Teacher Compensation

In the next session, we expect a significant push for a bill to incentive districts to come up with ways to increase in teacher pay in locally driven manner that is strategic. This push would create an additional funding incentive for innovative teacher pay systems like our Master Teacher initiative. Having state funding towards this initiative will help make the Master Teacher initiative more sustainable once TIF funding ends in 2021.

h. Fund Both One-Time and Ongoing School Safety Measures and Mental Health Services

After the tragedy in Santa Fe, there is a call for the legislature to support additional school safety measure. We support a one-time use of the Economic Stabilization Fund (ESF-or rainy-day fund) to support immediate campus improvements. At the same time, we know that investments in counselor, school psychologists, and other mental health needs are ongoing and essential towards student success and safety. Therefore, we urge the legislature to appropriate ongoing funding for additional mental health supports in all campuses across Texas.

i. Support additional outcome-based funding with equity components as measured by 3rd grade reading growth, 8th Grade Algebra I performance, and college readiness

The Outcomes working group of the School Finance Commission has suggested tying additional funding for low-income students and English Language Learners, who show significant growth on 3rd Grade Reading, 8th Grade Algebra, and college/career readiness metrics. Since these goals align with SAISD existing initiatives and

many of our students would qualify here, we strongly support these recommendations.

j. Explore creation of a Social Security offset (TRS)

SAISD is one of only 12 districts in the entire state of Texas to pay into Social Security and TRS entirely (Austin ISD is the other large district in this situation). It is expected that TRS rates will increase this session. Since our teachers are part of both Social Security and TRS, we are going to make the case for an exemption from the rate increase to help bridge the gap between Social Security districts and non-Social Security districts.

k. Expand Computer Science and Technology Applications courses by allowing them to receive weighted funding by bringing these courses under the Career and Technical Education umbrella

Computer Science is a high-demand, high-wage career. Business and Industry supports the investment from the state to expand Computer Science in our schools. School districts could expand these programs by funding technology applications and computer science programming like we currently fund CTE courses. In addition, school districts could utilize federal Perkins funding for startup, professional development, equipment and other enhancements, if Computer Science was brought under the CTE umbrella at the state level.

l. Move to an enrollment-based funding system

Texas funds its school based on attendance rather than enrollment or membership. This distinction punishes low-income campuses that tend to have lower rates of attendance than their more affluent peers. Funding based on weighted membership rather than attendance would remove another inequity in the current school finance system.

CHANGES TO SB 1882 / HB 1842

2019 Recommended Legislative Policies

a. Say that schools get a full 2 year pause if starting at IR3 or earlier

When writing the rules for SB 1882, TEA found themselves in a situation where for IR4 or higher campuses, they required one of the two years of the pause to be used on the current year before the contract went into effect. Therefore, we urge the legislature to create an option with a full forward- looking two-year pause for campuses at IR3 or lower. For campuses that have reached IR 4, they would only maintain the one-year pause that currently exists in the rules.

b. Include an ACE option under SB 1882

Superintendent Martinez testified in March in front of the School Finance Commission to urge them to allow the SB 1882 benefits to apply to the Accelerating Campus Excellence (ACE) model created by Dallas ISD. A number of other districts across the state have started to use this model, which creates additional teacher incentives for excellence and has a strong record of turning around the lowest performing campuses. The strategic teacher compensation fund could and should be funded through SB 1882 mechanism.

c. Ensure a funding stream for the bill

When the legislature passed SB 1882, they did not realize how large the benefits would be for this bill. Depending on demographics, SAISD will likely receive between \$1200 and \$1404 per student in an SB 1882 partnership. With this significant level of funding, it is essential that the legislature maintains a consistent funding stream to support the existing SB 1882. While we understand that benefits may be cut in the future to ensure sustainability, we hope to continue to have this generous funding stream for as long as possible.

d. In school restarts, eliminate the majority of grade levels served requirement and clarify the majority of student requirement.

Current Texas law bans a campus restart to replace a closed school. For example, current law would require a closed elementary school to become a middle or high school with a new model. Instead, it should be possible to slowly restart the elementary school (possibly Pre-K-1) and build it back up under the new model. To accomplish this goal, the legislature should eliminate the majority of grade level requirement and school closure along with creation of authorizing language on restart campuses.

INCREASING HIGHER EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

2019 Recommended
Legislative Policies

a. Protecting In-State College Tuition for all Texas HS Graduates

Currently, Texas law allows for every high school graduate in Texas, regardless of immigration status to gain access to in-state higher education tuition. Texas should maintain this system as it is beneficial to the future economic growth of our state.

b. Ensuring that the State covers the costs of dual credit courses, so the burden does not fall too heavily on ISDs or Community Colleges

Dual credit programs have become increasingly popular in the state. However, in many communities, including San Antonio, both the independent school districts and community colleges are struggling to come up with funds to support these programs. Therefore, if the state is interested in seeing an increase in dual credit programs, and ultimately savings in higher education, it should increase its funding of high-quality dual-credit programs.

c. Maintaining the Top 10% Rule

Texas has been a leader in ensuring equity in allowing its top students to be able to attend the top public universities in the state. At UT-Austin, this number is down to 6% due to space constraints. As a result, there have been calls to abolish the Top 10% rule. In order to give all Texans an opportunity to attend top schools, we believe this law should be maintained when possible.

d. Protecting Tuition Set-Asides for low-income students

It is not enough for students to just be admitted to our top Texas public universities. They must be able to afford to attend these outstanding institutions. The tuition set-asides guarantee a portion of every student's tuition goes towards financial aid to help ensure economic equity and diversity at these schools. We support maintaining the current system along with additional efforts to increase financial aid and keep tuition as reasonable as possible.

e. Support the adoption of a last-dollar promise scholarship program

In many communities across the country, including Dallas County, promise scholarship programs have been established. These programs help bridge the gap between existing scholarship and the cost of attending community college or in some cases, four-year universities. SAISD will support any initiative that would assist our students in being able to afford higher education opportunities, including a promise scholarship initiative.

ENSURE LOCAL CONTROL IS NOT FURTHER ENRODED

2019 Recommended Legislative Policies

a. Maintain District of Innovation/School Start Date Flexibility

In 2015, the legislature passed HB 1842 allowing for Districts of Innovation. This bill allows districts to be able to remove any restriction belonging to district and not charters with a two-third board vote. Most importantly to the district, these provisions include starting school before the 4th Monday in August. Maintaining the status quo on these bills is important towards ensuring that our students have maximum learning time before state assessments.

b. Oppose any threats to our immigrant students and their families

With the current climate in Texas, many in our community are terrified of further crackdowns on the immigrant community. We pledge to oppose legislation that would further marginalize our immigrant students and their families, including any legislation that would require citizenship tests to be educated in any type of public school in Texas or mandating ICE presence at schools.

c. Oppose any bathroom bills

The district is committed to protecting all students. The status quo of allowing transgender students to work with their campus administration to determine which bathroom the students should use is working well. Additionally, the district is opposed to legislating any type of formal discrimination towards students or staff based on their gender identity, gender expression, and/or sexual orientation.

d. Ensure that guns in schools remains a local decision

After the recent surge in school shootings in Texas, there have been some calls to move the School Marshall program from being optional to being mandatory. We believe that any arming of teachers in Texas should remain a local decision. The board is currently opposed to any effort to mandate or permit the carrying of weapons by anyone besides uniformed police officers on the district's campuses.

e. Oppose any new unfunded mandates

Too often, the legislature enacts a new provision in the education code without appropriating funding for it. Most recently, the cameras in the classroom initiative has been the largest unfunded mandate. The legislature should remove unfunded mandates when possible and fund other mandates that are necessary to operate schools. Additionally, the legislature should delete portions of the education code that are no longer being used, funded, and/or enforced.

ACCOUNTABILITY BUCKET

2019 Recommended Legislative Policies

a. Finalize Accountability Manual by September 30th of a School Year

This past school year, the accountability manual was not finalized until after the completion of the school year. That reality is not acceptable for the staff to understand what targets they should be aiming towards. Therefore, the legislature should ensure that the TEA finishes its accountability manual early in the school year (by September 30th) so the entire state understands what targets are in place for the coming school year.

b. Codify an internship/apprenticeship pathway within CTE

As the state is refining its approach to Career and Technical Education, it should follow the model of Colorado and various European nations in creating tangible paths towards apprenticeships and modernized internship models in high need fields. By codifying these pathways into the accountability system, it would incentivize more districts to offer this type of education that would help prepare students for future careers.



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