A Simple Ask for the 90th Legislature: Hold the Mandates

When the 90th Texas Legislature convenes in January, lawmakers will again have the chance to shape what happens in Texas classrooms. Our ask is simple. Before adding anything new to the list of things school districts must do, take a hard look at what's already required, what it costs, and how it's working.

Texas school districts already operate under a long and growing list of state requirements that drive up the cost of educating the more than 5 million schoolchildren enrolled in Texas public schools. The 89th session added many more, and a lot of them came with no dedicated funding, or not enough. Additionally, many of the changes from that session are still being implemented, a process that takes time and resources.

To be clear, most of these laws were written to solve real problems. But good intentions don't pay for the additional educators, administrators, and resources it takes to comply with the requirements. Districts do, and their budgets have already been stretched by inflation and other cost pressures beyond their control.

What's already on the plate

Here's a look at just a few of the items required during the 89th session. Beyond the funding concerns related to these changes is the amount of time and effort necessary to implement these major initiatives with success:

- **Special education funding overhaul.** Legislators created an intensity-of-service funding model for special education services that established tiers of funding for students based on the level of care and specialized instruction required to provide a free appropriate public education. Some districts will see an increase in special education funding, while others may see a decrease depending on the services they are providing for their students. The new system will require more intensive evaluation and reporting to accurately apply the tiers to student needs.

- **State assessment changes.** The current STAAR assessment system will be phased out and replaced with the Student Success Tool starting with the 2027-28 school year. The new assessment system will feature three tests provided at the beginning, middle, and end of the school year. Schools will be prohibited from administering practice tests to students and there will be limited changes to end-of-course administrations aside from the English II EOC being eliminated. School leaders and educators must have time to adequately adjust to the new system, which includes faster reporting of student performance.

- **New teacher certification requirements.** With a TEA-approved plan, all teachers of foundation curriculum subjects will need to be appropriately certified for the courses they are teaching by the beginning of the 2029-2030 school year. Without a plan, school districts that are not charters may not employ a teacher of record for a foundation curriculum course if they are not appropriately certified. Districts will need time and resources to find or certify the required educators before the deadline and further certification requirement changes could complicate that process.

- **Upcoming 2028 state accountability refresh.** The state's five-year schedule for refreshing its accountability system has a significant overhaul scheduled for 2028. The new system will take into account the new Student Success Tool slated to start in the 2027-28 school year and changes to the college, career, and military readiness domain. These changes will impact district operations, staffing, and planning.

Taken one at a time, each of these may seem manageable. But districts will require time to develop plans to not only comply with the new requirements but to see how they integrate with current programs and other statutory requirements.

What we're asking of the 90th Legislature

- **Evaluate how changes will impact students and teachers.** New laws can disrupt students already participating in school programs or can divert teachers' attention away from the classroom.
- **Consider cost and workload first.** Every bill that touches public schools should be weighed for its financial and administrative impact on districts before it moves forward.
- **If it's required, fund it.** A new mandate should come with dedicated funding that covers the full cost of putting it in place. Shifting dollars that are already spoken for isn't funding.
- **Give the last round time to work.** Many requirements from the 89th session are still being phased in. Let districts implement those changes well before changing the rules or adding new ones.
- **Look for what can come off the list.** Before adding something new, consider which outdated or overlapping requirements could be streamlined or removed.

Give schools room to do the work

Texas school leaders aren't asking to do less for students. They're asking lawmakers to keep in mind that every new requirement pulls from the same limited dollars and staff time that support classrooms. Giving schools room to manage what's already on their plate isn't lowering the bar. It's giving them a fair shot at clearing it.

Trustees and superintendents can make that case better than anyone, especially with local numbers. Show your legislators what these requirements cost your district in dollars, staff time and classroom priorities that get pushed aside. Reach out before the session starts and keep the ask simple: Fund what's required. Give recent changes time to work. Remove what no longer serves students.

The 90th Legislature has a real chance to strengthen public schools, not by adding new requirements, but by helping districts deliver on the ones already in place. This session, hold the mandates. Keep the focus on students.