

Invest in Texas Public Schools: Our Future Depends on It

For most Texas school districts, this school year isn't business as usual.

With stagnant state funding and double-digit inflationary price increases, more districts than ever are struggling with deficit budgets and a grim outlook for the future.

Many classrooms are crowded. Too many schools have no librarians. Even bus routes are being eliminated, forcing parents to scramble to get their kids to and from school and to wait in longer-than-usual car lines.

Some districts are deciding to close and consolidate campuses and significantly cut programs. Many districts have asked their local taxpayers for additional help through Voter-Approval Tax Rate Elections to raise more revenue.

Not surprisingly, an increasing number of educators — who have been forced to do more with less for years now — are considering leaving the profession. The funding crisis is fueling their concerns.

According to the recently released Charles Butt Foundation 2024 Texas Teacher Poll, "the share of Texas public school teachers in 2024 who call lack of funding one of the biggest problems facing their community's public schools has more than doubled since 2022, rising to become one of the three leading concerns."

Texas schools can no longer do more with less.

Yet this is exactly what they've been doing since 2019, when the basic allotment — the base level of per-student funding each district receives — was last adjusted, despite inflation and price increases.

In fact, per student funding in Texas ranks among the bottom 10 states and is below the national average by more than \$4,000 per student. At the same time, compensation for teachers is also falling short of the national average by nearly \$9,000.*

Unlike most problems, there's an easy answer to this shortfall: Invest in Texas public schools.

As lawmakers prepare to head into the 89th legislative session, Texas students and teachers need our leaders to prioritize public schools.

Investing in our schools is about investing in the economic success of the state and creating a stronger workforce and more prosperous future.

After all, Texas only boasts the eighth-largest economy in the world because it has quality public schools graduating students ready to compete and succeed in a global marketplace.

Funding schools is investing in the future of Texas.

Back in 2019, when lawmakers passed House Bill 3, there was a commitment among lawmakers to invest in our public schools. That sweeping school finance bill provided more money for classrooms and increased teacher compensation, among other things.

We applaud the bipartisanship and collaboration that led to the passage of that historic bill and ask that our leaders once again show their support for public schools and their critical role in the success of our state. Across the state, schools serve as the lifeblood of their communities.

Simply put, a strong Texas needs strong, vibrant public schools.

There's a lot of ground to make up. Because of inflation, school districts today have less purchasing power than what was intended when lawmakers passed HB3.

The state's Legislative Budget Board shows that in inflation-adjusted dollars, funding has dropped \$590 per student over the past 10 years.

Here's what lawmakers can do:

- Adjust school funding levels to return to what was intended when HB 3 was passed in 2019 and create a mechanism to account for inflation moving forward.
- Use enrollment, not average daily attendance, to calculate school funding.
- Increase school safety funding to cover cost of mandates passed in 2023, which include an armed security officer at each campus during the school day.
- Implement recommendations from the Texas Commission on Special Education Funding and close the more than \$2 billion gap.

This session, lawmakers will have an opportunity to make prudent investments that reflect Texas's long-term vision for strong public schools. As decisions are made on how to best use public tax dollars, there doesn't need to be a long debate.

Prioritize public education. Invest in the future of Texas. **Fund our schools.**

*Source: NEA Rankings & Estimates, September 2024