

IDRA Texas Legislative Priorities 2021



Fair Funding for Strong Public School Education

Every public school should have the resources it needs to provide an excellent education to all students.

- Fund public schools based on the promises of House Bill 3 made during the last session.
- Revise the property tax changes in HB 3 to make similar local tax effort result in similar levels of funding for schools.
- Remove the tax rate cap from 2019 and protect sources of tax revenue that fund public schools. Also establish new funding streams to alleviate property tax pressures and assist school district COVID-19 responses.
- Avoid cuts to education by leveraging existing and new sources of state revenue and extending hold harmless provisions through spring 2021.
- Work with the federal government for additional, supplemental stimulus money to go to schools.
- Prioritize funds for education programs that serve students most impacted by the pandemic and historically marginalized in schools: emergent bilingual students (English learners), students receiving special education services, and students from low-income households.

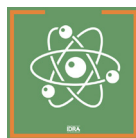


End Harmful Discipline to Create Safer Schools

Students need safe and welcoming school environments to learn that put students on the pathway to college and life success.

- End abusive punishment techniques in schools, like corporal punishment.
- Eliminate invasive monitoring systems and the presence of police officers and armed personnel in schools to ensure school safety measures do not create harmful learning environments or push students into the school-to-prison and deportation pipeline.
- Adopt the Texas CROWN Act and protect against racial and gender biases in school district dress codes, including discriminatory bans on hairstyles.

- Promote disciplinary policies that keep students in their regular schools and classrooms whenever possible instead of disciplinary placements in alternative programs or juvenile justice facilities.
- Require that schools meet the recommended student-to-mental health professional ratios (including counselors and social workers) and allow the school safety allotment to be used for these personnel expenses.
- Enhance discipline data reporting requirements to include data on discretionary referrals for code of conduct violations, English learner designation, homelessness status, and grade level. In addition, have the Texas Education Agency provide a data report to the legislature on a quarterly schedule.
- Raise the ages of juvenile court jurisdiction. Both the upper and lower ages should be increased so that 10- to 12-year-old children are not criminalized, and 17-year-old youth are not pushed into the adult criminal justice system.



Grow & Sustain School District Health

Policies on school accountability, governance, quality and improvement should avoid a patchwork of private interventions in public schools and focus on districts' local communities.

- Prioritize ways to support struggling districts before or instead of implementing state takeover procedures, including focusing on campus-level assessments, allowing for supportive models (such as full-service community schools) and developing community-based options for governance and accountability systems.
- Suspend the normal administration of STAAR for 2020-21, allow interim assessments to be used as formative assessments for diagnostic purposes to determine how students are learning.
- Halt high-stakes consequences for students associated with STAAR test performance, such as grade promotion and high school graduation. School accountability must not harm students now or ever.

- Develop alternatives to our current state test assessments. Meaningful assessment systems allow more holistic assessment of students' knowledge and skills. This could include tests that enable students to demonstrate bilingualism and biliteracy and portfolio-based assessment.
- Reduce the number of state end-of-course exams in Texas by eliminating that English II and U.S. History exams that are not required by federal law (ESSA).



Excellent Education for Emergent Bilingual Students

English learners have the civil right to access excellent educational opportunities that ensure English mastery while honoring and supporting their home languages and cultures.

- Change statutory language for “English learners” to “emergent bilingual” students to prioritize importance of bilingualism over an English-only focus.
- Create a statewide plan for equitable education for emergent bilingual students.
- Require school districts to spend at least 90% of their bilingual education funds on direct costs for emergent bilingual students in the classroom.
- Increase funding for emergent bilingual education in all types of instructional programs not just for specific programs like dual language.
- Support expansion of dual language programs, which currently serve only one in five emergent bilingual students.
- Increase the number of certified bilingual education teachers at all grade levels and address ESL-certification shortages.
- Support school districts to identify ways to address teacher shortages without relying on waivers that allow under-qualified teachers to serve emergent bilingual students.
- Support development of a paraprofessional pipeline and grow-your-own programs to encourage people to become bilingual education teachers in their communities.
- Collect and report data on the number of students who graduate bilingual or multilingual through the Seal of Biliteracy. In districts where it is offered, the Seal of Biliteracy designates students who have become bilingual and biliterate across academic subjects.

- Create a state broadband and technology plan that serves the needs of emergent bilingual students and engage families and community stakeholders throughout the plan.
- Pause accountability requirements for assessments for spring 2021, such as Texas English Language Proficiency System (TELPAS) tests. Use TELPAS as a formative assessment to collect quality data about student learning and progress.



College Preparation & Access that Expands Opportunities

All students should be prepared for success in college so they can determine their own futures.

- Revise high school graduation pathways and requirements to ensure all students receive rigorous curriculum, including Algebra II, for college readiness.
- Develop data monitoring systems for TEA to collect and report high school endorsement data.
- Promote policies that provide additional supports for counselor-student ratios, counselor compensation and required training.
- Continue to graduate students who prove their well-rounded academic qualifications to independent graduation committees (IGCs).
- Protect funding public colleges and universities and college grant programs, including the TEXAS Grant and Texas Educational Opportunity Grant programs.
- Maintain the Top Ten Percent Plan without changes. The Top Ten Percent Plan enables Texas students graduating in the top 10% of their class to gain automatic admission to public colleges. The plan has increased postsecondary access significantly to Black and Latino students across Texas.
- Protect and expand access to higher education for undocumented and DACA-recipient students by keeping in-state tuition eligibility and increasing their access to state and institutional financial aid.
- Require institutional faculty diversity plans that are connected to funding.
- Allocate federal and state funding for college student emergencies and crises.
- Provide accelerated learning opportunities and other support to ensure that all COVID-19-era students are college-ready.



A Comprehensive Equity Approach to Addressing COVID-19's Impact on Schools

Responding to the impact of COVID-19 on schools requires taking a critical look at many systemic inequities and listening to the communities most impacted by the pandemic.

- Create a statewide broadband plan for rural and urban communities. The plan should address education needs to close the digital divide for students of our most vulnerable populations – students with disabilities, English learner (emergent bilingual) students, students from low-income families, and students of color – across K-12 schools and higher education.
- Increase financial support and training resources for digital literacy programs to support access, connectivity, and academic and social engagement of students in either virtual or in-person learning environments.
- Provide support for student and educator physical, mental and emotional health.
- Support continued distance-learning activities, ensuring all students and their families are connected to their school and have access to education, resources and a robust two-way communication system.
- Avoid across-the-board cuts to education and health services. Use the state Economic Stabilization Funds (or “Rainy Day Funds”) to stabilize the state budget and school district funding for COVID-19-related expenditures.
- Increase resources for family support personnel and programs, including parent support specialists and family liaisons.



Keep the Public in Public Education

Public funds should remain in public schools with public oversight from local communities.

- Ensure public funds have public oversight and are not used to support private interests, like privately-owned and operated charter schools, private schools, and voucher and voucher-like programs that do not serve the vast majority of students.
- End expansion of charter schools and hold existing charter schools to the same accountability standards as public schools in achievement, expenditures, student progress and enrollment.
- Ensure communities are involved in decision-making processes that impact their local public schools, including local and state-level processes about charter applications and amendments.
- Ensure that charter schools cannot “cream” students (selecting their preferred students based on academic achievement, English learner or special education designation or discipline history).
- Reject proposals for virtual voucher programs that would promote a private vendor-run education.

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