



# The Lost Decade

Texas schools are underfunded & facing devastating staffing shortages

Without significant statewide investment in public school funding, Texas is facing a retention crisis for certified teachers and qualified school staff.

That's not just a disaster for those employees or for the administrators who must rehire the positions — it's a crisis for students who stand to lose crucial care and support after three school years disrupted by a pandemic.

**April 13, 2022**

# Key Takeaways

- **Salaries of Texas public school teachers have fallen over the past 11 years when adjusted for inflation.** Since the 2009-2010 school year, wages have declined by roughly 4% on average. Teachers in some school districts have experienced drastically larger declines, including North East ISD (14%), Houston ISD (13%), and Corpus Christi (11%).
- **Salaries for Texas teachers lag their peers nationwide.** Public school teachers in Texas make an average of \$7,449 less than the national average teacher salary. Even when teacher wages are indexed to cost of living, Texas ranks 29th out of the 50 states and Washington, D.C.
- **Salaries for school support staff in Texas have seen modest gains, but many roles remain close to poverty-level wages.** Paraprofessional staff (including educational aides and interpreters) and auxiliary staff (including custodians, food service workers, bus drivers, and many others) have seen modest gains in average base pay over the past 10 years, but the average base pay for these two categories is less than half that of professional staff (including teachers, counselors, and school administrators).
- **Understanding how we got here — and how we can resolve the situation — requires looking at how our schools are funded.** The Texas Legislature's last major school finance bill was 2019's House Bill 3. While that bill was touted as a win for schools and teachers, upon reflection, it has done more to cut taxes for corporations than to fund schools and raise school employee pay.
- **Stagnant, low pay is a leading reason teachers and school staff are considering leaving their jobs in education.** Thirty-four percent of Texas AFT members surveyed in November 2021 named salaries as their top workplace concern. In that same survey, 66% of school employees said they had considered leaving their jobs in the past year.
- **Pay stagnation and high turnover, however, are not just pandemic problems.** Teacher turnover has been generally increasing over the past 11 years; the additional stress of the pandemic and a highly politicized environment have exacerbated an existing problem.
- **Ultimately, these issues affect all Texas students.** Not only have teacher wages stagnated in the wake of HB 3's passage, so too has the basic allotment — the base level of funding for public schools. Texas ranks 45th in the nation in terms of per-pupil funding. That means fewer resources for students' classrooms and academic or extracurricular programs, on top of higher turnover among their teachers and support staff.

As Texas schools have been forced to navigate a third tumultuous academic year disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, countless news stories have described severe staffing shortages across the state in K-12 classrooms, lunchrooms, buses, and school buildings.

While pandemic-related safety concerns undoubtedly have played a role in the departure of many teachers and school staff in Texas, our discussions with educators and research support a broader conclusion: long-running issues of stagnant pay and increased workloads have become unsustainable, particularly coupled with COVID-19 safety issues and highly politicized classroom culture wars like the bogeyman of critical race theory hysteria.

Problems that have bubbled under the surface are now impossible to ignore, as shortages of key staff like substitute teachers, bus drivers, and food service workers have prevented schools from providing students with a full, robust, and constitutionally guaranteed educational environment.

**“I really don’t want to leave my teaching job, but it’s becoming untenable in a lot of ways.”**

**— Amanda, teacher in North East ISD**

We believe this is a moment of crisis, a conclusion substantiated by polling. In November 2021, the Texas American Federation of Teachers, a statewide union representing more than 65,000 public school employees, surveyed its members. In that survey, 66% of teachers and school staff who responded said they had seriously considered leaving their jobs in the past year. Various surveys and polls of educators, including a nationwide study by the Rand Corporation, report similarly disturbing statistics.

This report was prepared jointly by Every Texan and Texas AFT. In it, we present data on the past decade of salaries for K-12 teachers and school staff in Texas public schools. This data illustrates the widespread issues with earning a living while working in Texas schools. Additionally, we present an analysis of the perils for retired educators, whose pensions and benefits remain similarly misaligned with inflation and the current cost of living. For critical context, we offer an overview of school funding issues and an explanation of how the Legislature's actions — and inaction — have led us to this crisis point. Finally, we suggest some solutions at both the local and state levels to address these issues before they culminate into an irreversible crisis.

Our hope in presenting this information is not just to sound the alarm, but to steer policymakers and Texans at large toward productive conversations about solutions. The future of our state's public education system is too critical to surrender.

# A 'lost decade' for Texas teacher wages

The decade from 2010 to 2020 has been touted by legislators and state government officials as one that includes “historic” salary gains for teachers as a result of the passage of House Bill 3, which went into effect in 2019.

When asked by a Univision reporter in February 2022 whether he would commit to raising salaries for teachers, Gov. Greg Abbott responded that he and the Legislature had already provided “one of the largest” pay raises for teachers in history with HB 3 in 2019.

Salary data doesn't bear out this

claim. Instead of an historic decade for education wages, the period of 2010-2020 is more accurately described as a lost decade.

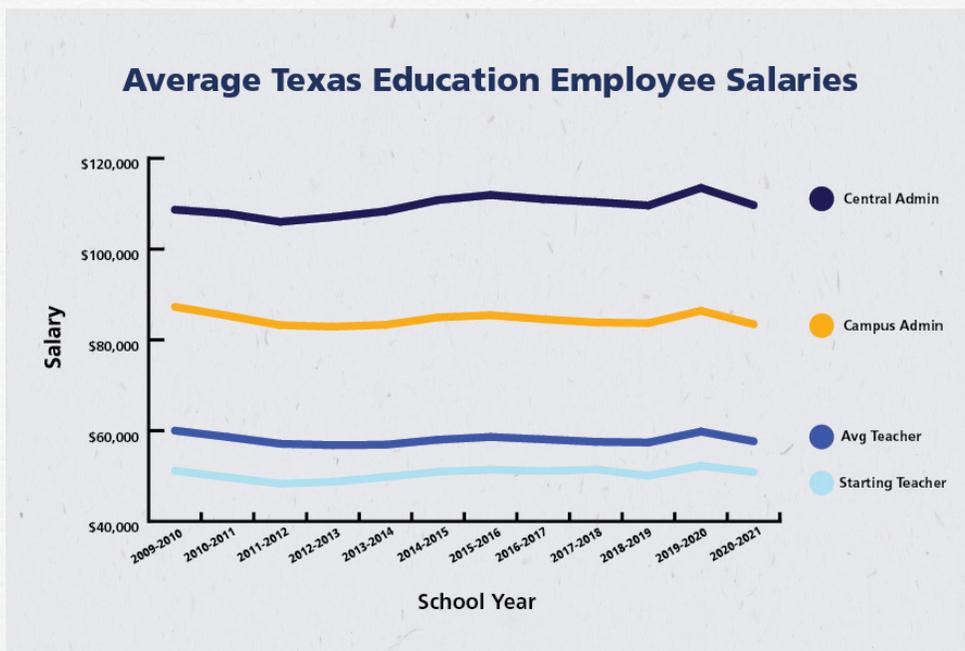
When accounting for inflation as reported by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average salary for Texas teachers remained essentially unchanged in that 10-year period. The average starting salary for new teachers in Texas, meanwhile, went backwards, decreasing by 4% when accounting for inflation.

Few who work in Texas schools have seen any upward trajectory in their take-home pay and buying power. On-campus administrative

employees like principals, who receive salaries roughly \$20,000 higher than teachers, still saw a slight (1%) drop in average salaries between 2010 and 2020, when factoring in inflation.

The exception? Central district employees — chief among them, superintendents. From the 2009-2010 school year to the 2019-2020 school year, central district employees saw their real wages rise from an average of \$103,790 to \$108,367 (adjusted for inflation). Throughout the 10-year period, central district administration made more than twice as much as first-year public school teachers.

**Figure 1**  
**Salaries for most Texas K-12 employees have stagnated**  
Average Texas education salaries by employment type, 2009-2021

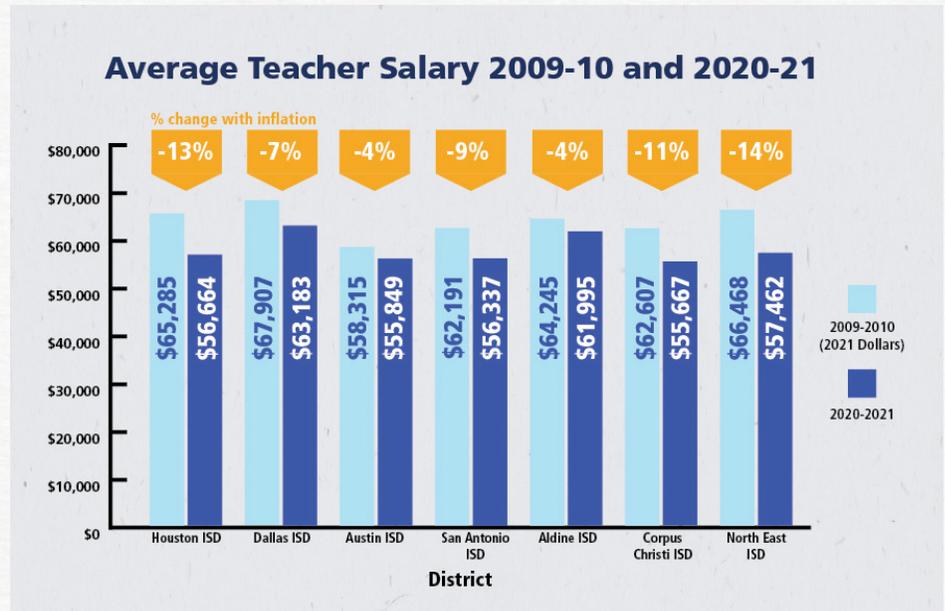


When expanding the comparison to the 2020-2021 school year — the first academic year entirely consumed by the pandemic — salary averages for Texas teachers sink even lower. Between the 2009-2010 and 2019-2020 school years, real average teacher wages were virtually stagnant, but between 2009-2010 and 2020-2021, real average teacher wages dropped by 4%. Teachers in some Texas school districts have lost more ground — and dramatically so. Salaries for teachers in North East ISD (-14%), Houston ISD (-13%), and Corpus Christi (-11%) have decreased by double digits over the last 11 years when accounting for inflation.

Source: Texas Academic Performance Reports & Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Price Index Data

Figure 2

Salaries for many Texas teachers have decreased dramatically when adjusted for inflation  
Average Texas teacher salaries in 2009-2010 and 2020-2021 when accounting for inflation.



Source: Texas Academic Performance Reports & Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Price Index Data

Campus administration salaries dropped by 4% during that same expanded 11-year period, and central administration salaries increased by 1%.

When looking at the 11-year timespan instead of the 10-year, only one group saw improvement: new teachers, whose real average wage still dropped but by a smaller margin — 1% instead of 4%.

This significant drop in percent change for most employee salaries when comparing 2009-2010 to 2020-2021 (as opposed to 2019-2020) seems to be the result of both the relatively rapid change in the consumer price index from 2020 to 2021 and the general budgetary effects the COVID-19 pandemic had on the 2020-2021 school year. Regarding the latter, funding for school districts was affected by the sudden significant reduction in student attendance at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic. While the Texas Education Agency did offer districts funds with the purpose of “holding them harmless” for this reduced attendance, those funds did not make up fully for the funds lost.

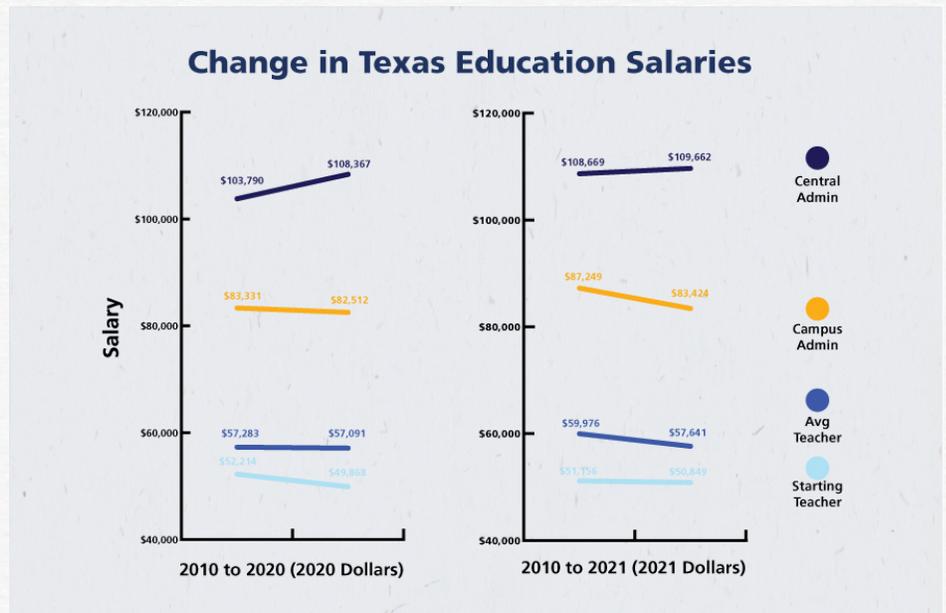
The percentage drops in salaries may not look significant on paper, but they add up quickly when you compare them with other aspects of the economy. In January 2022, national real estate brokerage Redfin reported that average monthly asking rents in the United States increased 15.2% year over year. Meanwhile, the national median monthly mortgage payment for homebuyers climbed 25% year over year.

This is not just a national trend. According to Redfin’s January data, Austin ranks No. 2 in terms of fastest-

Figure 3

When accounting for inflation, most education salaries in Texas have diminished — except for central district administrators

Change in Texas education employee salaries from 2009-2010 compared to 2019-2020 and 2020-2021.



Source: Texas Academic Performance Reports & Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Price Index Data  
rising rents in a metro area with a 35% increase from the previous year. Fort Worth and Dallas are both experiencing 24% increases in average monthly rents, and San Antonio has seen a 15% increase. In looking at monthly mortgage payments meanwhile, Austin, Fort Worth, Dallas, and Houston have all increased by more than 30%.  
With double-digit increases in home and rental prices and general decreases or stagnation in teacher paychecks, the precarity becomes clear quickly, especially for those teaching in large urban districts. If you cannot afford a roof over your head, how can you be faulted for looking for an exit from your demanding job?

# Pay raises for other school employees still don't provide for a decent living

It's important to remember that teachers and administrators are not the only people working in our public schools. A large cadre of employees are required to keep schools running, from school nurses to bus drivers to paraprofessional teaching aides.

While salaries have remained stagnant for teachers, wages for non-teaching school staff have made modest gains in the past 10 years. Comparing the 2011-2012 school year average base pay to 2021-2022, support staff members, on average, are making 2.48% more now, when salaries are adjusted for inflation.

Keep in mind, however, that non-teaching school staff include a variety of roles and an enormous spectrum of wages, some far lower than others. The Texas Education Agency sorts school employees into five major categories:

- Teaching staff
- Support staff (including nurses, counselors, librarians, athletic trainers, and social workers)
- Administrative staff
- Paraprofessional staff (certified interpreters and education aides)
- Auxiliary staff (including bus drivers, food service workers, electricians, plumbers, and technology specialists)

Of those categories, paraprofessional and auxiliary staff members have significantly lower base pay than the other classifications. The TEA considers teaching staff, support staff, and administrative staff as "professional staff."

In looking at school personnel in Texas, the makeup of the workforce looks like this:

Teaching Staff	49.47%
Auxiliary staff	25.03%
Support staff	10.68%
Paraprofessional staff	10.65%
Administrative staff	4.17%

The makeup of the average base pay for each of those categories of personnel breaks down very differently:

Teaching Staff	\$57,641
Auxiliary staff	\$28,727
Support staff	\$67,962
Paraprofessional staff	\$22,221
Administrative staff	\$90,731

When all categories of personnel are combined, the average base pay is \$49,113 — a figure more than \$20,000 more than the average salaries for auxiliary and paraprofessional staff. It should also be noted that salary figures for certain positions within those two groups hover close to federal poverty thresholds.

For example, an average Texas school cafeteria worker makes \$24,497. If that employee were a single parent and/or a caretaker of other family members in their household, they may well be at or below the federal poverty guidelines for a family of three (\$21,960) or four (\$26,500). How

can Texas public schools be expected to retain employees who cannot afford to feed their own families while feeding other people's children?

As a city, Austin's cost of living is 20% higher than the national average, according to data collected and analyzed by BestPlaces.net. In Austin ISD, meanwhile, lunchroom monitors and student aides currently make \$7.25 per hour — the federal minimum wage — according to the district's 2021-2022 compensation manual. While these hourly employees are the lowest paid in the district, other hourly employees do not fare much better. Custodians make \$10 hourly, bus drivers make \$17 hourly, and childcare workers make between \$10 and \$13 hourly.

According to data from the MIT Living Wage Calculator, which estimates the living wage needed to support individuals in specific geographic areas, a single adult would need to make \$55,186 per year after taxes to live comfortably in Austin.

This is above the average base pay for custodians (\$33,535), maintenance employees (\$43,650), and transportation employees (\$29,944) in Austin ISD for the 2021-2022 school year.

If these employees cannot live comfortably in Austin, it stands to reason many of them will move outside the city and, consequently, outside of Austin ISD. Living in suburban or outlying areas means their commute will be longer and more expensive. Retaining these employees will become more difficult.

**"Each and every pay period, I receive \$610. That is barely enough to cover all my household expenses. I'm also a caregiver for my elderly parents."**

— Tasha Wilson, paraprofessional in Spring ISD

# Pay raises for other school employees still don't provide for a decent living

For the 2019-2020 school year — just after the passage of House Bill 3, the last major school finance bill — Texas teachers made, on average, \$6,554 less than the average for teachers across the country. For the 2020-2021 school year, the gap grew to \$7,449.

Even when the average teacher salary in Texas is indexed to the state's cost of living (slightly below the national average), it still lags the national average for teacher salary.

Texas ranks 27th in comparison to the other 49 states and Washington, D.C. Though this ranking is toward the middle of the list, looking solely at the number may be misleading. Some of the other most populous states, including California, New York, Pennsylvania, and Illinois, are all at the top of the list in terms of teacher pay. These states have more teachers and, therefore, drive up the true average for teacher pay.

The national average for teacher pay was \$63,645 for the 2019-2020 school year, which is roughly equal to average teacher pay that year in Michigan, which ranks 16th. While Texas is only one spot short of the median on teacher pay, it falls 11 spots below the true average.

When considering relative cost of living in different states, Texas performs slightly worse, dropping from 27th place to 29th, when adjusted. Even though Texas has a slightly below average cost-of-living index, many other states have an even lower cost of living and, thus, beat Texas in teacher pay when these numbers are adjusted. (This is to say nothing of the major metropolitan areas like Austin or Houston that have significantly higher costs of living.)

The other notable thing to consider when examining the salaries of many school staff members — professional, paraprofessional, auxiliary, or support — are the additional degrees and certifications required for employment. While most teaching staff carry post-

graduate degrees, support personnel like bus drivers and cafeteria workers are also required to obtain additional certifications beyond what would be expected for similar employees in other industries.

**“Being short-staffed wouldn't be so exhausting if, generally speaking, our compensation reflected that. Our pay is not even outpacing inflation.”**

— George Cuba, paraprofessional in Irving ISD

For this reason, it is interesting to examine how these salaries compare with those in other industries.

Compared to the nationwide and statewide average salaries for all occupations, most teaching positions have a higher average salary. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), there is only one teaching role that makes less than the average salaries for all occupations: non-special education pre-K teachers. Seemingly, this is the result of half-day curricula in many preschools, resulting in many of those teachers being treated as part-time workers.

Outside of teaching jobs, however, there is another group of Texas school employees that makes below both the U.S. and Texas average salary: classified workers, which include bus drivers, bus monitors, and cafeteria workers. Short-term subs also make less than both the statewide and nationwide average salaries for all workers.

When comparing Texas teachers to other professional occupations, the picture gets worse. Texas teachers face what the Economic Policy Institute calls the “Teacher Pay Penalty, which is “how much less, in percentage terms, public school teachers are paid in

weekly wages relative to other college-educated workers (after accounting for factors known to affect earnings such as education, experience, and state residence).” For the latest findings in 2019, the national average penalty was 19.2%, but these similar college graduates made 21.9% more than Texas teachers.

Across the board, for most occupations, Texas workers make less than their counterparts nationwide, even when considering the lower-than-average cost of living in Texas. It is difficult to avoid the inference that Texas' status as a right-to-work state and one in which public sector employees, including teachers and school staff, do not have the right to bargain collectively is a major contributing factor.

This difference has been illustrated on a micro scale throughout the pandemic in public schools. In Texas districts with substantial employee union presence, retention stipends, COVID-19 bonus pay, and overall pay raises have been more forthcoming. Employee unions in Houston ISD, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD, Brownsville ISD, and other independent school districts across the state have successfully pushed districts to grant teachers additional days of paid sick leave. Given the struggles teachers endured throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, two extra paid holidays were added to the Austin ISD calendar because of advocacy from Education Austin members.

School employee unionization has also made a difference in the paychecks of teachers and staff in districts with strong local advocacy. For example, in 2021, the Socorro ISD school board approved a compensation plan proposed by Socorro AFT and included 4% pay raises. Likewise, thanks to union activism from the Houston Federation of Teachers, Houston ISD teachers received raises of about \$3,500 on average for the 2021-2022 school year.

# Educators face both short-term and long-term financial hardships

According to a 2018 study conducted by the Texas State Teachers Association and researchers from Sam Houston State University, 39% of educators surveyed stated that they worked a second job during the school year, and 56% stated that they worked a second job during the summer.

Of those teachers working a second job during the school year, 79% said having the second job affected their ability to teach effectively. On average, respondents from across Texas stated they would need to make an extra \$10,559 from teaching to afford to quit their second job.

At the time of that study in 2018, Texas teachers made \$7,149 less than the average teacher nationwide. Despite a brief dip after the passage of HB 3, the gulf between Texas teachers and their national peers increased to \$7,449 during the 2020-2021 school year.

A significant challenge facing educators is the ever-rising cost of healthcare. While premiums have risen almost every year for each of the four plans offered by TRS-ActiveCare, the minimum contribution by the state and districts has remained stagnant at \$225 since the inception of the plan in 2003.

This means that as premiums continue to rise, TRS-ActiveCare participants have paid an increasingly greater share of the total premium directly out of their salaries.

While salaries and benefits for current educators and school staff are a pressing concern, another is inadequate retirement. Retired educators in Texas have gone more than a decade without an increase in their pension benefits — and some have never seen an increase. As a result, they live on modest pensions, with an average of \$2,118 per month, hardly enough for a dignified retirement for public servants.

It is important to note that Texas is one of 18 states that do not require teachers to be enrolled in Social Security. In fact, only 17 districts across Texas are vested in Social Security. The Teacher

Retirement System of Texas (TRS) estimates that 96% of its members are not invested in Social Security. Those who have paid into Social Security, meanwhile, likely run into the major federal roadblock of the Windfall Elimination Provision, which cuts up to 60% of a retiree's Social Security benefit because they have a separate public pension.

Additionally, most U.S. states (60%) have an automatic cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) structure in their pension, so benefits increase with inflation; Texas does not.

The result: The average retired teacher in Texas receives \$25,416 annually without the supplemental income of Social Security benefits.

While it is one of the largest pension funds

**“Retirees are living paycheck to paycheck every single day. There is no rainy day fund.”**

— Rita Carden Runnels,  
retired educator

in the nation, covering more than 1.6 million active and retired public school educators, TRS is comparable only to pension plans in other states where most teachers are not enrolled in Social Security. The other 17 states in this situation offer an option for a defined-benefit plan. Of these 18 states, Texas ranks 15th in the state contributions, showing that the state contributes far less than what actuaries recommend to keep the fund stable.

Despite this, Texas ranks well in terms of overall funding of the system, which suggests the system is healthy. This fund could allow TRS to increase benefits and remain viable, which the agency itself has stated when asked about a COLA. What has been lacking, instead, is the political will of the Texas Legislature and the governor to codify automatic COLAs into law.

# How we got here: school finance reforms put tax cuts before teachers

Continuous underfunding of the school finance system makes it hard for school districts to give consistent raises to teachers and other school employees. House Bill 3, the school finance bill passed in 2019, was touted for giving teachers a pay raise, but the true legacy of HB 3 is ongoing tax cuts that hurt the state's ability to invest in schools and teachers.

One of the major selling points of HB 3 was that it would build into school finance formulas a method to give pay raises to teachers and other school personnel. Every time the basic allotment (the base level of per-student funding) is increased, school districts are required to use 30% of the resulting budget increase for compensation. Of that additional funding, 75% must go to teachers, librarians, counselors, and nurses. Districts are directed to

prioritize compensation increases for teachers with five or more years of experience.

The problem? HB 3 does not require the Legislature to increase the basic allotment each year. However, it does require the Legislature to reduce property tax rates each year. This forces the state to take on more of the responsibility of funding schools without an alternative revenue source to make up the lost property tax revenue. In passing HB 3, the Legislature chose tax cuts over teachers and students.

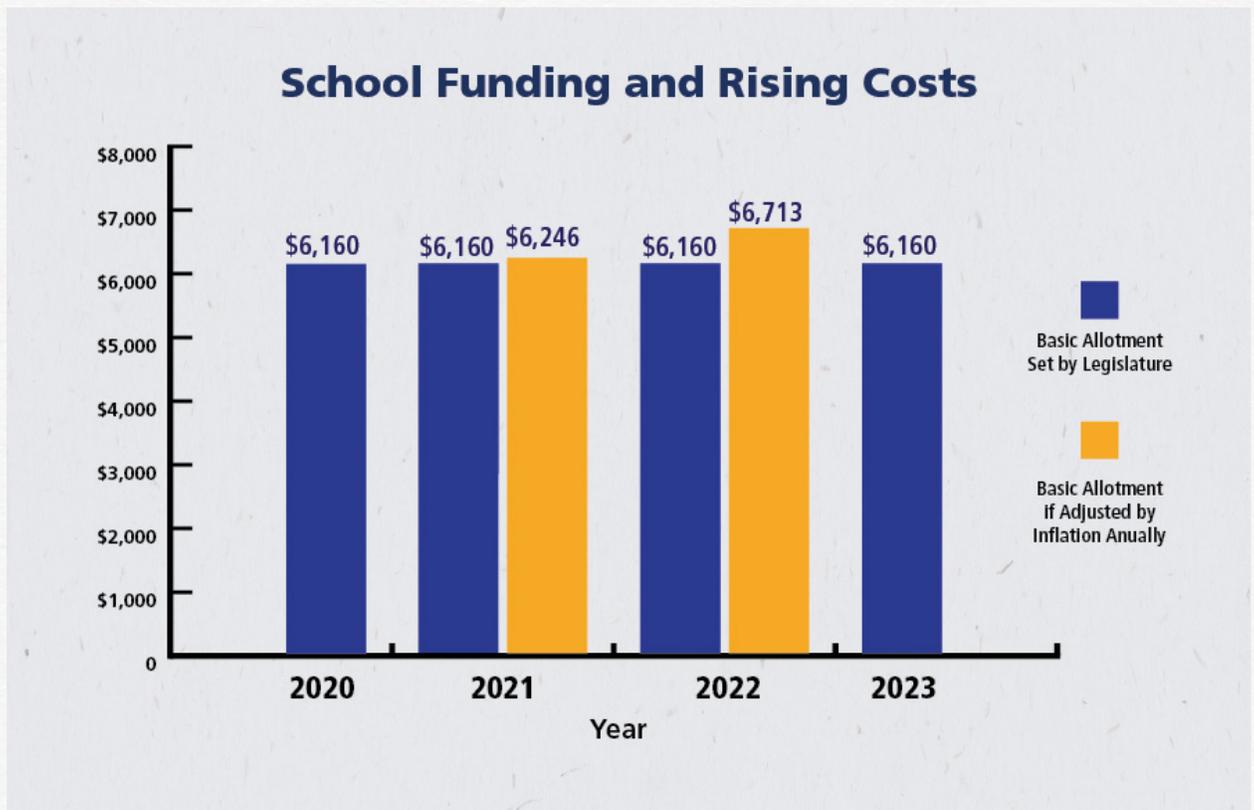
In 2019, the Legislature set the basic allotment at \$6,160 per student for the 2020 and 2021 school years. When they returned in 2021, the Legislature chose to keep the basic allotment at the same rate for the next two years — essentially denying school districts the

funding that would have triggered pay raises for teachers and other school personnel.

If the Legislature would have adjusted the basic allotment for inflation annually using the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Consumer Price Index, it would be \$6,713 per student today.

The basic allotment makes up most of the per-pupil funding in Texas. According to data compiled by the Education Data Initiative, Texas ranks 45th out of all 50 states and Washington D.C., in terms of per-pupil funding, with a rate of \$9,613 per K-12 student. Of all the states neighboring Texas (Oklahoma ranked 47th, New Mexico 41st, Arkansas 37th, and Louisiana 30th), only Oklahoma ranks slightly lower in per-pupil funding (\$9,512 per K-12 student).

**Figure 4**  
**School funding has not kept pace with rising costs and inflation**  
Comparison of the basic allotment set by the Texas Legislature by year for 2020-2023 compared with the total for each year if the amount were adjusted for inflation annually.



Source: Texas Education Agency & Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Price Index Data

# The connection between property taxes and funding public schools

Funding for Texas schools comes from state revenue and local property tax collections. Each school district's unique characteristics are run through a complex set of formulas to determine the set amount of funding that each school receives for operations. Revenue collected from property taxes is used first to meet the set funding amount. If a district is unable to generate all its funding locally, the state provides aid. Districts that collect local revenue beyond the state's set amount send

the excess back to the state for redistribution to other districts and charter schools; this process is known as recapture.

Prior to HB 3, when local economies were strong, property tax collections increased, and the state was able to reduce its contribution to schools while ensuring that schools still received the set amount of state/local total revenue. The school finance system, therefore, allowed the state to take advantage of higher local property value growth, which state budget

writers would plan for in their funding projections. As a result, the state's share of school funding was declining each year.

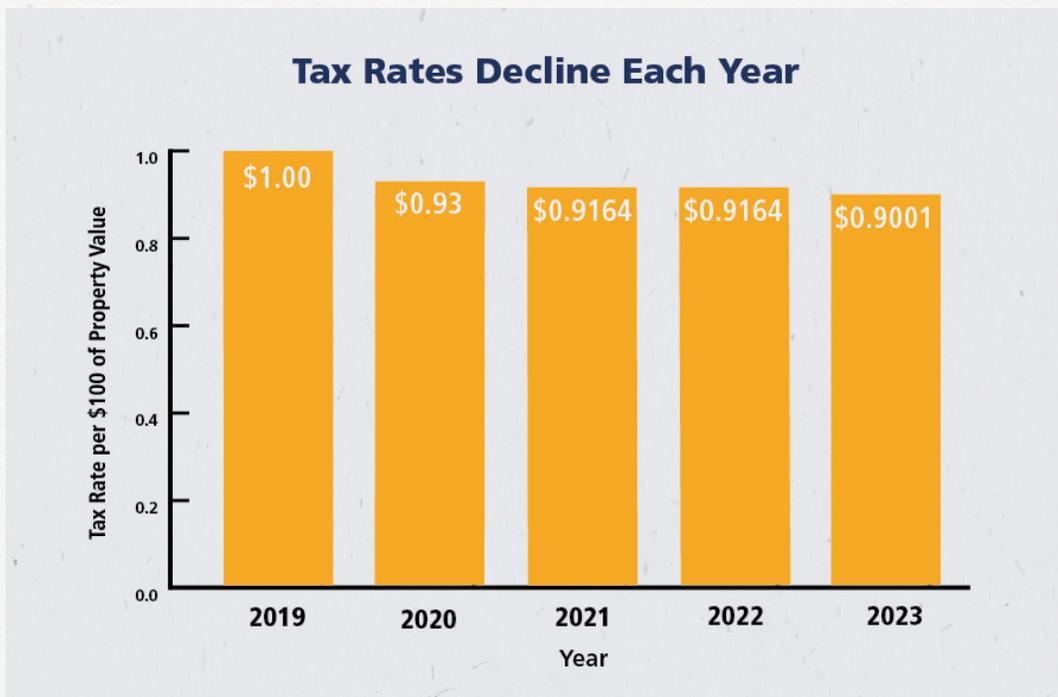
In a radical change, under HB 3, the state does not fully reduce its contribution to schools when property tax revenues increase. Instead, school districts must decrease their local tax rates once they hit a certain level of property value growth, resulting in fewer local property tax dollars collected. To ensure schools receive the same level of funding, the state will need

to dedicate more state dollars to public education, mainly general revenue dollars that come from the sales tax.

This change shifts where school funding comes from but does not increase the amount of funding for schools. While the amount of funding for our schools remains static, tax rates are forced to decline each year. Without a revenue source to replace the declining local revenue, the Legislature will not have the resources needed to increase the basic allotment for teacher pay raises. Ultimately this funding loss will lead to deep cuts in education spending.

Furthermore, commercial property is worth much more than the average home, so corporations are the biggest beneficiaries of these tax cuts. Due to appraisal growth, most homeowners did not experience any actual savings from HB 3 — just slower growth in their property tax bill.

**Figure 5**  
**Tax rates decline each year in Texas, but the cost of running a school does not**  
Tax rates per \$100 of property value declining from 2019 to 2023



Source: Texas Education Agency

# HB 3 abandoned tax equity in school finance

Prior to HB 3, the Texas school finance system was based on a principle of tax equity that worked to ensure all school districts had access to similar levels of revenue for similar tax effort. Every child in Texas is guaranteed the same level of education, so it is important that all communities put the same effort (measured by tax rates, in this case) into supporting public education. The state's role was to equalize funding between property-poor and property-wealthy districts

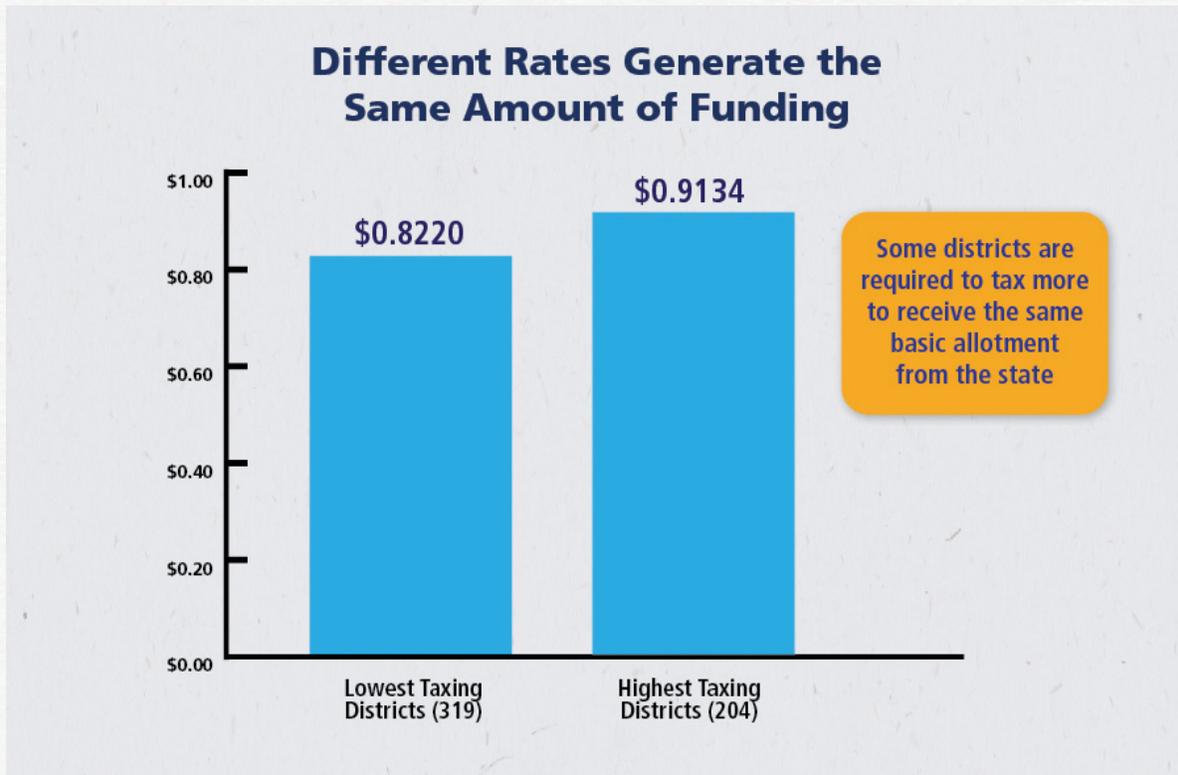
with state aid for property-poor districts and recapture funding from property-wealthy districts.

Now, in addition to statewide tax rate compression, school districts are also required to reduce tax rates at the local level when property value growth for the district exceeds the statewide average. The law caps the inequity between the lowest and highest taxing districts at 10%. This radical change abandons the principle of "equal revenue for equal tax effort" and shifts to a taxing

system based purely on the rate of property value growth within school districts.

HB 3 allows some school districts to tax at a lower rate than other school districts to receive the same base level of funding to support schools. Districts seeing the fastest economic growth will experience the greatest declines in property tax rates at the expense of districts with less growth. This means the state is picking winners and losers in terms of tax rates, but classroom funding doesn't change.

**Figure 6**  
**HB 3 allows school districts with high property value growth to tax less for the same base level funding as districts with low property value growth**  
Different tax rates generate the same amount of state funding



Source: Texas Education Agency

# The cost of not addressing these issues

When passed, HB 3 contained \$5 billion in tax cuts for the first two years. Ongoing tax compression will cost the state of Texas the ability to attract and retain high-quality teachers, to invest in early education, and to meet the needs of our most vulnerable students. Public policy is about choices, and the Texas Legislature chose tax cuts over public education.

Instead of increasing the basic allotment each year to provide teachers

and staff cost-of-living increases, policymakers chose tax cuts.

When given the opportunity to make lasting investments in our educators and plan for the future of learning, the Texas Legislature chose tax cuts.

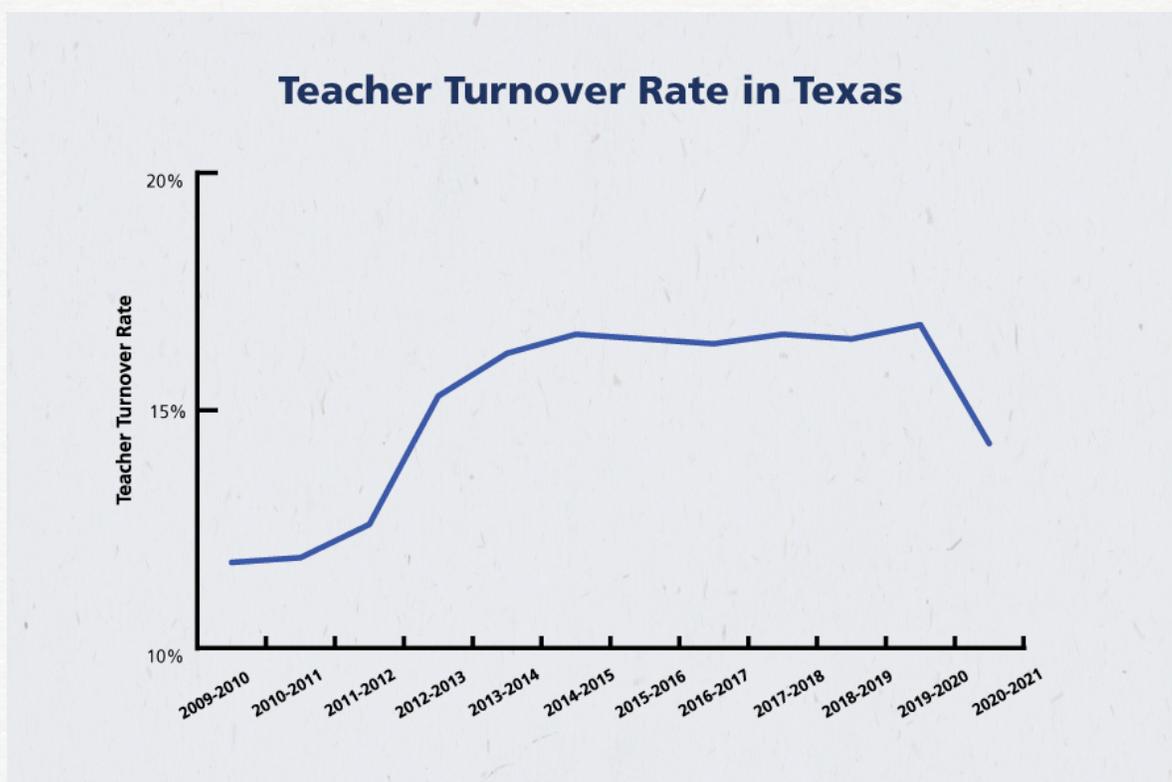
A high-quality education system is not without costs, but ignorance costs more. The price we will pay as a state for choosing tax cuts is far greater than what it would take to invest in the future prosperity of every Texan.

We know this because we already see the cost in teacher turnover. From the 2009-2010 school year to the 2019-2020 school year, teacher turnover rates have been steadily increasing. The 2020-2021 school year, the height of pandemic uncertainty, was the only academic year in the past decade in which the turnover rate slightly decreased, dropping to 14.3% from 16.8%. Even with that dip, the turnover rate remains significantly higher than it was a decade ago.

Figure 7

The turnover rate for Texas teachers is well above what it was a decade ago

Teacher turnover rate measured by percentage from the 2009-2010 school year through the 2020-2021 school year



Source: Texas Academic Performance Reports

When looking at this situation from a local perspective, school districts with a lower salary when indexed to inflation were more likely to have higher turnover rates for the 2020-2021 school year.

Teachers have reported many different reasons for leaving the profession, but one common reason is lack of fair compensation. According to Texas AFT's 2021 survey of its members, 44% of school employees who have considered leaving the classroom cite pay incentives as the change most likely to keep them in their jobs.

**"It's very upsetting that I entered this career knowing that I couldn't have this as a sole income when I have a family. So I put my personal life on hold, as many other teachers do, because I cannot afford a family right now with just a teacher's salary."**

**— Nicolette Balogh,  
teacher in Houston ISD**

# Policymakers have the means to address these problems. They just need to listen and learn.

Just as this problem was not created overnight, it cannot be resolved with the snap of a finger. But there are practical solutions that can allow Texas not only to

catch up to the national averages for teacher and school personnel pay but surpass them. Decision-makers at every level can play a role in implementing those

solutions, and public school employees and supporters should be prepared to advocate for their interests and their students' interests at every level too.

## School boards can use existing funding to invest in staff

Resolving the problems starts locally. When looking at the growth of superintendent and central administration salaries compared with the relative stagnation of teacher and staff wages, it becomes clear that this disparity only reinforces inequity in the workplace and in our communities.

The average salary for district administration is \$108,367. The average base pay for a paraprofessional, who could be a certified interpreter or an educational aide in the classroom, is \$22,221 – nearly five times less than administrators.

School boards are responsible for hiring superintendents and approving employee pay rates; they can take action to narrow this salary gulf. Equitable solutions could include instituting pay scale ratios that would prevent any district administrator from making four or five times the amount of an employee – regardless of classification. Likewise, school boards and administrators can reduce the amount they pay to consultants and contractors and re-invest that money in teacher and staff salaries.

## The Legislature and the state of Texas must increase funding for public education

Pay gaps and disparities, however, cannot be fixed solely by local school district action. The Legislature must step up and take responsibility for increasing per-student funding through the basic allotment on a regular basis. That means the Legislature must also take responsibility for finding alternative revenue sources beyond property taxes for funding our public education system.

In a state in which \$3.6 billion of taxpayer money is spent annually to fund and expand a system of privately run charter schools, it seems clear there are alternative revenue sources to be found. Finding that money and reallocating it to increase the basic allotment should be one of the Legislature's primary goals in 2023.

To match inflation, legislators should increase the allotment to \$6,713, roughly an extra \$600 per student. The effects of this in our schools would be nearly instantaneous and enormous.

Increasing the basic allotment to match inflation would allow districts to do a number of things to address local needs:

- Hire additional teachers and education aides to provide more individualized attention to students with reduced class sizes

- Increase salaries for experienced and new school staff so that Texas can recruit and retain qualified, well-trained educators — instead of losing them to states who are making such investments, like neighboring New Mexico
- Stock classrooms with necessary school supplies, instead of expecting educators to spend an average of \$449 out of their own pockets each year to do so
- Offer a COVID-19 stipend to staff who have worked tirelessly over the past two years to support students
- Provide 10 days of COVID-19 leave for teachers and school staff so they are not forced to dip into their own personal leave to quarantine and recover

Not only would increasing the basic allotment put money back into employees' pockets, but the additional funding could also allow more schools to invest in wraparound services to support students and families.

We have seen the importance of these services over the past two years, as our schools served as community hubs. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, cafeteria workers have provided food to students in need, bus drivers have provided mobile internet hotspots, and every employee has gone above and beyond to provide extra resources to students and families. This should be the norm, with appropriate funding and well-paid staff.

## The path forward to a stronger public education system in Texas

Naturally, it is heartening to see elected and aspiring state leaders beginning to take this issue seriously. What all Texans should watch for, however, is how efforts like the TEA's Teacher Vacancy Task Force approach the issue of recruiting and retaining teachers and other school employees.

Funding educational aide tuition exemption programs would do far more to recruit quality teachers and staff — and avoid a larger issue with under-qualified instructors — than waiving requirements or lessening certification standards.

Likewise, extending the deadline for teachers to complete state-mandated (but unfunded) Reading Academies would do far more to retain current educators than inequitable pay-for-performance schemes.

Codifying collective bargaining rights for teachers and support staff in state law would do far more to advance their interests than any task force — particularly one that added representative educator members only after significant public outcry.

Our organizations know this to be true because we have listened to educators and school staff members about their challenges long

before this state task force was announced.

Teachers and school staff have spoken repeatedly about the problems that make them consider leaving their jobs, as well as the solutions necessary to help them stay. In its November 2021 survey of education employee members, Texas AFT found that 34% of members said their salary ranked as their No. 1 workplace concern; 24% of members, meanwhile, ranked rising workloads (much without added compensation) as their primary issue in their jobs. Additionally, 28% of Texas AFT members said school funding was their top concern in their communities at large.

These concerns aren't isolated to public school employees. A 2022 survey released by the Charles Butt Foundation noted that 56% of all Texans say public schools in their communities do not have enough funding. That same survey found that 63% of Texans think the salaries for teachers in their communities are too low.

Teachers, school employees, parents, and Texans at large agree about the importance of public education and the immeasurable impact educators have on students. All that remains to secure the future of Texas public schools is for state and local leaders to implement the solutions necessary to make people want to work in them.



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