



Fully Funded, Fully Respected:

The Path to Thriving Texas Public Schools



The state of Texas spends roughly \$3,314 less per student than the national average each year. That adds up to about \$18 billion less spent on Texas public schools than elsewhere in the United States.

\$18 billion is a substantial sum, but not when looking at the state's budget as a whole, which sits at a record \$188.2 billion for the upcoming biennium. Notably, \$18 billion is much less than the state budget surplus — \$32.7 billion — reported by the Texas comptroller's office.

There is no fiscal reason why Texas, a state that boasts the world's ninth-largest economy, should be spending \$18 billion less each year on its public schools. Likewise, there is no fiscal reason that Texas educators' real pay should have declined over the past decade or that school support staff in Texas schools should be earning wages close to the federal poverty threshold, as we reported in our joint publication, *The Lost Decade*, in 2022.

The money is in the budget. The outstanding question is whether the political will exists.

In this paper, we have endeavored to put a price tag on a different future, one in which lawmakers prioritize respect for public schools and their employees and one in which we work together to build a public education system that helps Texas children thrive.

Often, we are asked what "fully funded" means in terms of Texas public schools. In this document, we provide an answer to that question for this biennium.

"My actual salary is less than \$22,000 a year, and this affects me tremendously. Luckily, I live with my parents, both by choice and by necessity, because making less than \$22,000 a year is barely enough to make rent, and that's it. No groceries. No leisure. So I have enough to help my parents out and pay for tuition, and that's about it. I'm going to be straightforward about it, the pay is unliveable."

- **George Cuba**, paraprofessional in Irving ISD, pursuing his education degree and certification



"What do I want the state to do to support us? Don't leave us behind. A raise of 15% would help me very much to take care of my mom. She's 87 years old. She depends on me. To be able to share more with my family, with my husband, with my daughter, with my granddaughter. To also be able to enjoy a weekend with something extra — go out to dinner, to the movies. Not like we are right now, that we're only working for the bills."

- **Fressy Molina**, Custodian, Judson ISD



INVESTMENTS

WHAT PUBLIC SCHOOLS NEED

At least \$10,000 certified staff raises \$8,879,847,042/biennium

At least 15% raises for all non-certified staff \$3,738,206,074/biennium

Fully staffing teachers in classrooms to recommended ratios \$1,398,231,128/biennium

Fully staffing counselors, psychologists, and social workers to recommended provider ratios \$6,204,415,767/biennium

Hiring a nurse at every campus that doesn't have one \$257,509,046/biennium

Upping state contributions to TRS-ActiveCare \$1,400,000,000 one-time

10% COLA for TRS retirees \$11,480,000,000 one-time

Restore "Grow-Your-Own" teacher certification funding \$39,948,319/biennium

TOTAL

\$33,398,157,376

"There wasn't one single thing, one single event, that made me want to leave. It was death by a thousand papercuts. I ended up feeling by the end of it that I was running so fast that I was about to fall on my face every step. And I felt like no matter what I did and no matter how hard I worked, I couldn't produce the kind of work that I wanted to."

- **Sara Fox**
Former teacher,
Conroe ISD



"The monthly amount I receive from TRS barely covers my household bills. I am literally living paycheck to paycheck, and I do not know what I would do if a catastrophic emergency occurred. After 34 years of devoted service to public education, and especially working in the field of special education, my back has taken a beating, and I live with constant chronic back pain. But because I live on my own — and with prices increasing daily, especially on food and gas — I have recently had to go back to work."

- **Mary De La Garza**,
Retired paraprofessional



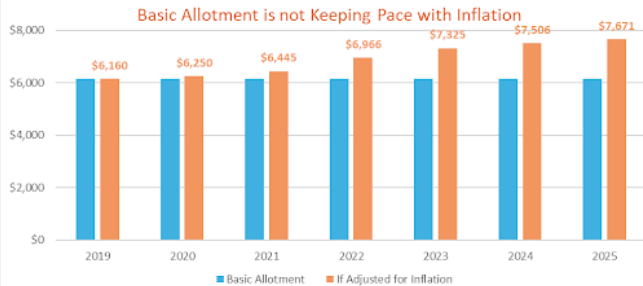
New Revenue

The Basic Allotment

If the Legislature made these **two adjustments** to the basic allotment, education funding would increase by

\$21,020,188,988 for the biennium.

1. Raise the basic allotment to inflation adjusted levels



The basic allotment is the foundational per-student funding provided by the state, and it hasn't increased since 2019. To adjust for inflation, the basic allotment should be \$7,506 for the 2023–2024 school year and \$7,671 for the 2024–2025 school year.

2. Shift from attendance-based to enrollment-based funding

Texas currently determines school funding based on attendance, not enrollment. Texas is one of only six states that use attendance-based funding. Enrollment-based funding is much more accurate and would account for the number of students actually served.

Commercial Property Taxes

The state of Texas systemically undervalues commercial and industrial property for the purposes of property tax collection. A recent AFT research study based on public data, as well as analysis of data from CoStar, a national real estate data firm, revealed that commercial and industrial property were undervalued by \$505,267,652,039 in 2019.

If that property were properly appraised, education funding would increase by roughly

\$9,704,170,526 for the biennium.

The Cost of Privatization

This legislative session presents a number of opportunities for lawmakers to invest in public schools, but it also presents a number of threats to public schools. Lawmakers must avoid these proposals that would further defund Texas public schools.

1. Private School Vouchers

According to the Texas Private School Association, there are currently 250,000 private school students in Texas. If each were sent a \$10,758 voucher, based on last year's average per-student maintenance & operation expenditure that would cost the state roughly

\$5,379,000,000 per biennium.

2. Rapid Charter School Expansion

The Legislative Budget Board (LBB) projects that state funding for charter schools will increase by \$500 million next year. If we place a moratorium on charter school expansion, the state would save more than

\$1,000,000,000 next biennium.

3. Removing Charter Facilities Funding Limits

Currently, charter facilities funding is limited to \$60 million per school year. Proposals pushed by privatization proponents like House Bill 1572 would remove this limit and cause charter school facility funding to increase fivefold to \$308,445,768. This would cost the state an additional \$240 million per year, roughly

\$480,000,000 per biennium.

Charter School Budget Equity

While only a limited number of small public schools can take advantage of the small-to-midsize allotment, all charter campuses receive the allotment regardless of their size. While there are limits on how much of the allotment public school districts can receive, charter schools are not subject to those limits.

Statewide, charter schools received \$357,741,529 in the small-to-midsize allotment in 2021–2022 alone. If the state did not provide charter schools with undue access to the small-to-midsize allotment, the state could save roughly

\$715,483,058 for the biennium.

New Funding Generated:

\$31,439,842,572

Read
the Full
Report



www.texasaft.org/schools-to-thrive/



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