

2019 Policy Priorities

TEXAS CHARTER SCHOOLS ASSOCIATION



Increase funding for students who need it most.

The Texas School Finance Commission, along with the Governor and Lieutenant Governor, have recommended changes to school funding that will increase funding for students most in need. In the 2017-2018 school year, 67 percent of students enrolled in charter schools were identified as economically disadvantaged and 24 percent were identified as English Language Learners (ELL). By increasing funding for these student populations, regardless of the type of public school they attend—district, charter, magnet, or anything else—Texas will help boost academic outcomes and the chance at a productive life after high school for millions of students.

Students from disadvantaged backgrounds who attend charter schools face an even greater funding deficit because charter schools do not have access to local property tax revenues to fund buildings. These costs are paid from funding that would normally be spent in the classroom. In 2017, the Texas Legislature created a small fund to help charter schools pay for school buildings, but it's far less than the amount ISDs can access and charter schools are still pulling money from the classroom to pay for building costs. This funding pool was set up as a fixed amount, not a per-student amount, which does not take into account the rapid annual growth in the number of students attending charter schools. Converting this funding to a per-student fund, rather than a fixed sum, ensures money meant for the classroom stays in the classroom.



Stop local governments from discriminating against charter schools.

Over the past several years, local governments have been unfairly discriminating against charter schools, forcing them to spend taxpayer money on lawyers instead of in the classroom, and to comply with additional red tape. Cities across the state are denying charter schools school-zone speed limit signs, which puts students in danger; requiring charter schools to follow different rules than ISDs on the size of parking lots and number of parking spaces, forcing schools to spend millions in classroom funding to buy more land than they need; denying permits to use more space in their existing buildings; and some are even threatening to deny public charter schools the ability to use privately-financed bonds. Local governments should treat all public schools—district or charter—similarly when it comes to zoning, permitting, and bonding.



Put more existing funds in the classroom by exempting leased buildings from property taxes.

Charter schools must use state funds to pay local property taxes on leased school buildings. Any funds a public charter school puts towards property taxes is money that could be used on teacher salaries, improved technology, instructional materials, and other critical classroom needs. Exempting the facilities that public charter schools lease from property taxes will put all charter schools on par with ISDs and private schools, which do not pay property taxes on their buildings.



Ensure accountability sanctions apply to failing schools, not data-entry errors.

Texas has one of the strongest public school accountability systems in the country. Charter schools face a no-appeal closure policy if they fail three years in a row. ISDs face sanctions, including state takeover, if they fail five years in a row. With these tough sanctions on the books, it's important that a failing grade be assigned to a school when it is truly failing. TEA does not allow any public school to appeal a low grade that is the result of a school data-entry error, even if the correct data would result in a higher accountability grade. With schools subject to closure or takeover based on these grades, it is important that they are based on the schools' real performance, not a data-entry mistake. TEA should be required to consider appeals to grades that are based on data-entry errors.