

## HOUSTON INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT 85<sup>TH</sup> SESSION LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

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### FINANCE

**Stop detachment and annexation of commercial property in Houston before June 2017.** Due to rising property values and an outdated school finance system, the state views HISD as property wealthy. HISD's Board of Education was required by state law to hold an election in November 2016. Voters rejected "purchasing attendance credits," or sending \$162 million in local property taxes to the state, as the method for paying recapture. Therefore, by law the Commissioner of Education can remove \$18 billion worth of the most valuable non-residential, commercial properties from HISD's tax roll and reassign (or annex) those properties to other school districts. The reassigned properties would be taxed at different tax rates from buildings nearby and would probably pay a higher tax rate than they were paying to HISD. This has never happened before and the Legislature will need guidance.

If the Legislature does not act, the Commissioner of Education will begin detaching properties in July of 2017.

The 85<sup>th</sup> Legislature can and should take action to stop detachment and annexation of property in Houston. This has become an economic issue for the State of Texas. Long-range planning is needed. Dallas is the next school district to enter recapture. The 85<sup>th</sup> Legislature must improve and modernize the school finance system to 21<sup>st</sup> Century standards; otherwise, Texas faces an uncertain and bleak economic future.

HISD supports:

- Eliminating the state's over-reliance on local property taxes to fund schools statewide and replacing those local property tax dollars with General Revenue from the state.
- Increasing the weights for compensatory education and bilingual education populations within the state's funding formula.
- Increasing the Chapter 41 Equalized Wealth Level for Level 1 school districts.
- Reducing the tax penalty to local homeowners by recognizing half of the local homestead exemption in the state's funding formula.
- Counting students enrolled in full-day Pre-Kindergarten in a school district's weighted average daily attendance (WADA).
- Allowing Chapter 41 districts subject to paying recapture or detachment to receive the transportation allotment.

## **EDUCATIONAL EQUITY**

**Invest and enhance educational opportunities for at-risk, immigrant, special needs and gifted and talented students through digital learning.** HISD educates a diverse population of students within a global, world class city. Almost 80 percent of HISD's students come from low income families. One-third of HISD's students are learning English. Students need a state-supported public education system that rewards strong performance and innovation, trains effective teachers and clears obstacles to learning. HISD believes all kids should have what they need to be successful.

One particular barrier for public school students across Texas is access to technology. HISD is a nationally-regarded thought leader and innovator in digital learning. All students need access to the most current digital resources and the Internet both at home and at school. Such resources are essential for students to feel prepared for post-secondary opportunities and life-long careers.

HISD supports:

- Improving digital learning opportunities and broadband access statewide.
- Providing additional methods for integrating technology in the state's curriculum and assessment systems.

## **LOCAL CONTROL AND GOVERNANCE**

**Preserve the local control and flexibility of school districts by duly-elected school boards.** Local board of trustees are elected by and held accountable to their constituents. As such, the state should afford school boards the flexibility in regards to their programs and operations to innovate and create educational environments that best meet the needs of their students. HISD understands the school board is responsible for student outcomes and the District is committed to the task. New legislation is not always the right answer for a problem that can be addressed locally.

HISD supports:

- Maintaining local decision-making authority over issues unique to the Houston community such as bond elections, election dates, district policies and tax rates.
- And, when legislation is required, increasing collaboration between the state and local school boards to advance educational opportunities for Texas' public school children and remove barriers.