

# EDUCATION

The 89<sup>th</sup> Regular Session brought major changes to education, including a historic investment of \$8.5 billion in public schools and the creation of a new school voucher program (SB 2). The school finance bill that passed (HB 2) includes increased investments in teacher compensation, special education, early childhood education, and school safety. The bill also provides a modest \$55 increase to the basic allotment—the foundational per-student funding schools receive—which falls far short of both the House’s earlier \$395 proposal and the \$1,300 school leaders said was needed to keep pace with inflation. This flexible funding source is critical for covering core district needs, from teacher salaries to classroom materials.

Early childhood education, including early literacy and numeracy received a lot of attention this year, with several efforts focused on improving coordination and data sharing (HB 3963 and HB 117) across the state’s fragmented early childhood education (ECE) system. The school finance package (HB 2) also includes changes to how Early Education Allotment dollars are distributed—which are partly based on pre-k attendance currently. Unfortunately, the bill also includes measures that may complicate tuition-based pre-k programs and limit the ability of districts to expand classroom capacity, potentially hindering efforts to increase early learning opportunities.

The Legislature also took major steps to modernize our state’s high school education system and strengthen pathways to college and career for Texas students. New laws (HB 2, HB 120, SB 1786) set statewide goals for post-secondary and workforce readiness, expand access to career-aligned high school models, and improve alignment between dual credit programs and local labor market needs. These changes aim to ensure more Texas students leave high school equipped for college or a quality job.

## Passed

### **Early Education & Out of School Time**

HB 117 by Rep. Schoolcraft creates the Governor’s Task Force on Governance of Early Childhood Education and Care to address governance and operational challenges within our state’s early childhood system.

HB 2310 by Rep. Ordaz requires the Texas Education Agency (TEA), Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC), and the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) to develop a strategic plan to improve early learning and educational opportunities for young children with disabilities or developmental delays.

# Passed

## **Student Health & Wellbeing**

SB 25 by Sen. Kolthorst requires daily physical education for K–8 students and prohibits using physical activity (like PE, recess, or sports) as punishment. It also mandates nutrition education for high school and college students and updated nutrition training for Texas health professionals and medical students.

SB 207 by Sen. Paxton requires schools to excuse student absences for mental health appointments.

SB 314 by Sen. Hughes prohibits certain food additives in school-provided free and reduced-price meals.

SB 1952 by Sen. Paxton clarifies administration and oversight of the Medicaid School Health and Related Services (SHARS) program, which reimburses schools for providing health-related services—like therapy and nursing—to Medicaid-eligible students with disabilities receiving special education services.

SB 2398 by Sen. Campbell requires the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to create a list of academic accommodations for students with concussions or brain injuries and mandates school districts to adopt concussion response policies.

HB 6 by Rep. Leach makes several changes to school discipline policies, including increasing allowable in-school suspension days to 10, removing mandatory Disciplinary Alternative Education Program (DAEP) placement for vape possession, and funding virtual DAEPs. The bill permits out-of-school suspensions for students pre-K through 2nd grade.

HB 33 by Rep. McLaughlin – known as the Uvalde Strong Act—aims to strengthen school security, law enforcement training, and mental health resources for first responders through updates to multiple education and government codes.

HB 367 by Rep. Rosenthal allows students to have excused absences due to serious or life-threatening illness or related treatment.

HB 3062 by Rep. Guerra requires public colleges and universities to provide education on drug poisoning, fentanyl prevention, suicide prevention, and substance use to all first-semester undergraduate students.

## **Pathways to College & Career**

SB 37 by Sen. Creighton restructures higher education governance by granting university governing boards increased control over curriculum decisions and top administrative hires. Requires public universities to regularly review general education courses for alignment with workforce needs and civic outcomes and establishes a state-appointed committee to recommend core curriculum.

SB 365 by Sen. Eckhardt allows Texas public colleges and universities the option to waive college courses taken five to ten years prior for admission purposes under the Academic Fresh Start law, expanding from the current 10-year minimum.

SB 769 by Sen. Zaffirini directs the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to study and report on access and accommodations for college students with disabilities, including enrollment trends, support services, and institutional policies.

SB 1191 by Sen. Creighton requires a standard method for calculating high school GPAs across all Texas public schools, ensuring consistent weighting for advanced courses like AP, IB, and dual credit.

SB 1786 by Sen. Creighton strengthens education-to-workforce alignment by refining community college finance, improving wage outcome reporting, and requiring stronger Tri-Agency coordination on career and technical education (CTE) grants. It also clarifies the definition of “credentials of value” and introduces regional labor demand analysis.

SB 2314 by Sen. Creighton creates My Texas Future, an online platform to assist public high school students with college admissions and financial aid.

HB 20 by Rep. Gates creates the Applied Sciences Pathway program to let students earn high school diplomas and higher education certificates at the same time.

HB 120 by Rep. Bell increases funding for career and technical education by raising per-student P-TECH funding and expanding caps for rural education and facility allotments. The bill also expands Financial Aid for Swift Transfer (FAST) program eligibility.

HB 1211 by Rep. Lujan raises the age limit on Texas’s college tuition waiver for youth who age out of foster care.

HB 2081 by Rep. Bucy establishes the Building Better Futures Program to support educational and occupational skills training opportunities and support services for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities at public and private institutions of higher education.

# Passed

## **Public School Investments**

SB 260 by Sen. Huffman increases the school safety allotment to \$20 per student (ADA) and \$33,540 per campus.

SB 568 by Sen. Bettencourt updates how Texas funds special education by focusing on the level of services students receive instead of where they are placed. It updates funding for services and evaluations, requires annual outcome reporting, and creates grants to support students with autism, dyslexia, and parent-directed services.

SB 2185 by Sen. Hinojosa creates an allotment of approximately \$10 million to support bilingual education programs.

HB 2 by Rep. Buckley provides \$8.5 billion in new funding for Texas public schools, including a \$55 per-student increase to the basic allotment that districts can use for salaries, operations, instructional materials, and more. It also funds teacher pay raises based on experience, expands special education support, and invests in educator preparation, school safety, early childhood learning, and district operations.

## **Other Education Bills:**

SB 2 by Sen. Creighton creates a state-funded Education Savings Account (ESA) program, offering up to \$10,000 per student annually (or \$11,500 for students with disabilities) for private school tuition and other approved educational expenses. The program prioritizes students with disabilities and those from lower-income families and is capped at \$1 billion in state funding for the 2026–27 biennium.

SB 12 by Sen. Creighton establishes new requirements for school districts related to parental access and consent, including grievance procedures, curriculum opt-outs, and student records. The bill also prohibits public schools from adopting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs, training, or policies not required by federal law.

SB 13 by Sen. Paxton establishes new procedures for school libraries, including the creation of a “library advisory council”, processes for challenging content, definitions of “harmful,” “indecent,” and “profane” materials, and more parental access to library catalogs and checkout records.

# Passed

SB 57 by Sen. Zaffirini requires schools to develop a plan to provide accommodations for students with disabilities during emergency drills.

SB 204 by Sen. Paxton requires TEA to create and publish a handbook outlining all parental rights related to their child's education, which must be made available on the agency's website .

SB 569 by Sen. Bettencourt allows public school districts and charter schools to offer virtual and hybrid learning options to students.

SB 870 by Sen. Birdwell allows school marshals to openly carry handguns when in uniform.

SB 991 by Sen. Bettencourt defines chronic absenteeism and requires schools to track and report data on chronically absent and truant students.

SB 2786 by Sen. Creighton exempts certain students from Texas Success Initiative assessment requirements.

HB 27 by Rep. King requires students to have at least half a credit in personal financial literacy and one credit in economics, world geography, or world history to meet graduation requirements.

HB 100 by Rep. Leo-Wilson prohibits schools from using or purchasing instructional materials that have been rejected by the State Board of Education (SBOE).

HB 824 by Rep. Jones requires the SBOE to include civics instruction in high school government curriculum, covering roles of elected officials, voting processes, election laws, eligibility requirements, Robert's Rules of Order, and local representation.

HB 1178 by Rep. Cunningham requires the State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) to issue temporary teaching certificates immediately to out-of-state certified educators applying for Texas certification.

HB 1188 by Rep. Manuel requires school districts to provide parents of students with intellectual disabilities or developmental delays, at their first IEP meeting, information about services and benefits available through local disability authorities and federal waiver programs.

# Passed

HB 1481 by Rep. Fairly prohibits students from using cell phones during the day on school campuses.

HB 2757 by Rep. Frank allows school boards to adopt their own policy determining a child's school entry age when the child's parent is an active-duty member of a foreign military stationed in Texas.

**Key Budget Items (PK-12):** \$8.5 billion investment in public education, including over \$3.7 billion for teacher pay increases, \$1.3 billion to help districts with basic costs like utilities, insurance, and transportation, \$850 million for special education funding, \$430 million for school safety, \$677 million for early learning in reading and math, \$153 million for college, career, and military readiness and CTE (including P-TECH and R-PEP), \$190 million for charter school facility funding; \$13.3 million increase to extend free lunch to more Texas qualified students; \$170.2 million to make the Texas Child Health Access Through Telemedicine (TCHAT) program available to any school district in the state

**Key Budget Items (Higher Educations):** \$89.5 million in increased funding for Texas Higher Education Coordination Board (THECB) to cover additional needs related to HB 8 (community college finance reform) by the 88th Legislature; increased investments in student financial aid that will enable 68% of eligible students to receive support through the TEXAS Grants, TEOG, and TEG programs;