

Legislative Position



Texas Elementary Principals and Supervisors Association

2009

The Principalship

Strong instructional leadership by the principal is essential in academically effective schools. Because of the increasingly diverse and complex responsibilities of the principalship and the high level of accountability, the principal must have authority for decisions involving personnel assignment and evaluation, campus budgets, discipline, curriculum design and implementation, and other leadership and management areas.

Because of the importance of elementary education (PreK-Grade 8), the increased responsibilities and accountability of elementary principals, and the strong link between campus leadership and school success, the Association supports improved and equitable compensation for the principalship.



Substantial independent research shows that a lower number of students in an elementary classroom (PreK-Grade 6) has a profound impact on student learning.

Equity/School Finance

Every child, regardless of where he/she lives, should have an equal opportunity to a quality educational program. Creating and maintaining an equitable funding system for Texas public schools must be the highest priority of our state. An equitable system must provide for the elevation of poor districts to an adequate funding level, without diminishing the quality of education for those students in school districts with above-average wealth. An equitable system must also include funding for construction of new facilities, especially for fast-growing school districts.

To improve and/or maintain student achievement levels, the state must provide the necessary funding for increased student enrollment, inflation costs, technology and programs for students performing below grade level.

The reduction of committed state funds is completely disruptive to quality services. The Association opposes efforts to change funding to deny the increased costs of educating compensatory students, bilingual students, special education students, gifted students and other higher-cost student populations.

Reading Initiative

The public schools' highest academic priority is to have students who are reading at grade level. To ensure later academic success and full participation in society, students should be successful readers by the end of the third grade. To ensure students are reading at grade level and continuing to read on level, the state must provide the necessary funding for personnel, programs, instructional resources, staff development and extended day/year programs, including prekindergarten.

Class Size Maximum

Continue the maximum class size requirement ratio of one teacher to 22 students in kindergarten, first-, second-, third- and fourth-grades; however, the Association strongly recommends reducing the class size requirement for prekindergarten to one teacher to 18 students. One of the most significant educational reforms in Texas was mandating lower class size. Substantial independent research shows that a lower number of students in an elementary classroom (PreK-Grade 6) has a profound impact on student learning. (A summary of the research is available from TEPSA.) The Association encourages local districts to implement policies for grades 5 and 6 that are consistent with current research.

The Association is aware of the changing demographics of our student population and the increasing number of students who require more individualized attention. The inclusion of students identified with special needs demands even lower class size. Having a low class size in the early grade levels (PreK-Grade 6) is so significant to a child's education that the Association will not support any weakening of this law.

The Association strongly opposes any effort to dilute the law by the use of averages, segregation of low-achieving students, increasing the number of students per teacher, the use of teacher aides to replace qualified teachers, the use of waivers to circumvent the law, or any efforts to penalize high performing "exemplary" campuses by removing the class size maximum law.

Extended Instructional Support for Students Performing Below Grade Level

The Association strongly supports expanded funding of not less than 30 additional days of instruction for all students performing below grade level. For some students, additional time is critical to meet grade level requirements. Failure to remain on grade level is directly related to student dropout and discipline problems. Priority funding must be at the earliest grade levels, where the student difficulty is first observed.

Education of Disadvantaged 3-Year-Olds/Universal Prekindergarten for 4-Year-Olds

Continue support for the disadvantaged child by maintaining the 3-year-old students' education program. There should be a committed state effort to ensure eligible student participation. The Association supports expanding the program to enable more students to be eligible for inclusion. The Association strongly supports statewide fully funded, universal access to full-day, full-year prekindergarten for 4-year-olds, including facilities expansion.

Mandatory Kindergarten

Continue state funding for a full-day, full-year kindergarten program. The Association supports all schools providing a full-day, full-year kindergarten program. The Association supports lowering the mandatory student attendance age as of September 1 from six to five to ensure that all students are involved in a quality educational kindergarten program. National research indicates full-day, full-year kindergarten is superior to a half-day program. This program is critical to placing educational emphasis on the early grade levels. (A summary of the research is available from TEPSA.)

Early, Intensive Intervention to Prevent Social Promotion and Retention

Social promotion and retention are seldom effective solutions for students performing below grade level. Numerous studies have demonstrated that retention does not have a positive effect. However, promoting children without adjusting instruction to meet their needs is not effective either.

To prevent social promotion and retention, the state must institute policies and provide funding incentives for programs that emphasize developmentally appropriate early learning, including prekindergarten and full-day kindergarten, lower class size in the early grades, training for teachers in research-based reading instruction, and early intervention with students who are falling behind. Funding must be provided for early and intensive intervention, including mandatory extended year/day programs for students needing additional time and support to help them succeed.

The Association supports maintaining local control and flexibility for retention and placement of students based on individual needs. A variety of assessment techniques and instruments, including observation by teachers, parents and principals, and the appropriate grade level assessments, such as early reading inventories and state-mandated tests, should be used by local districts to determine academic achievement. Promotion/retention decisions should not be based on a single factor.

Campus Accountability

Public schools should be accountable for student achievement. The Association is concerned about the overemphasis of testing as the main standard used for accountability and campus ratings. The Association believes that criterion-referenced testing has greater potential to positively impact student achievement.

The profession needs to place a high priority on developing and implementing multiple and varied processes of assessment that are non-discriminatory and that adequately consider the diverse talents, abilities and cultural backgrounds of children. The assessment of young children should include continuous observation of individual growth and development as well as individual testing for diagnostic purposes and instructional planning.

The predictability of the Academic Excellence Indicator System and Assessment plan, including the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test, must remain consistent over time with minimal annual revisions. TAKS test should be administered only at grades three through exit level in the foundation curriculum areas. Consideration must be given to the number of tests administered at any one grade level.

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Public School Choice/Charters/Home School

The Association supports the option of campus and school district choice within the public school system. However, any choice option must include a fair redistribution of funds, not overburden the receiving campus nor interfere in court mandates.

The Association supports the current limited number of independent charter schools that must be approved by the State Board of Education. Charter schools should not be exempt from safety, student assessment, accountability, transportation, employing fully qualified and certified public educators, nondiscrimination and other essential rules.

The Association encourages districts to develop local policies that contain guidelines for admitting new students from home schooling arrangements.

School Vouchers

The Association strongly opposes using state funds for vouchers and/or tax credits to attend private or religious schools.

If state funding of private or religious schools is permitted, these schools must accept and retain all children regardless of special needs or family beliefs and provide necessary services, including transportation. Additionally, all schools that receive state funds must be held accountable for student success by the same state standards as public schools.

Parental Rights and Responsibilities

Parents are recognized as having the primary responsibility for the upbringing of their children by providing basic needs, including education. Parents are partners with teachers and administrators in their children's education.

The Association supports and encourages parental access to student curriculum, programs, procedures and activities, under locally-developed guidelines.

Parents have a responsibility to be partners in their children's education by supporting and reinforcing the learning experience at home, attending parent/teacher conferences and student performances, attending and participating in school activities, complying with state compulsory attendance laws and providing school record information in a timely fashion in order to place the child in the appropriate instructional program. The Association supports the enforcement of compulsory attendance laws when parents do not send their children to school.

Recruitment, Professional Development and Retention

Texas public schools must compete with many public and private entities to attract and retain quality personnel. This competition has resulted in a critical educator shortage. The Association strongly supports legislation that would secure state-funded incentives, compensation and benefits at a level to attract new educators and to retain quality personnel.

Both research and practice clearly show how critical the principal is to the success of a school. The shortage of qualified candidates to lead our schools is a growing problem in Texas. The Association supports state efforts to fund recruiting programs for aspiring principals such as scholarships and loan forgiveness programs.

Opportunities to enrich the skills and knowledge of all educators are critical if educators are to meet the increasing needs of students. The Association supports state funding for staff development programs. Educators must model lifelong learning through participation in professional development activities.

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Certification

The Association supports educator certification requirements. State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) rules and procedures must provide administrators with appropriate flexibility to assign teachers in response to the unique needs of each campus. The Association supports the standards and skills identified by SBEC as the basis of principal preparation programs and the assessments required to obtain the principal certificate.

School Safety/Academic Security

Students have the right to learn in school without undue interference of their education by other students. The Association advocates positive measures to promote a safe learning environment for all children such as the teaching of social skills and conflict resolution.

The Association supports alternative school settings for students at all grade levels who are disruptive, violent or potentially violent. The state must provide the necessary funding for alternative school settings. If the needs of students are to be met, the significantly increasing incidents of severely disruptive and disturbed children must be addressed. The Association supports increased flexibility for principals and teachers to appropriately manage disruptive or dangerous students, including those qualified under IDEA or Section 504.

The Association supports state law that requires school districts to implement a student code of conduct that is age-appropriate, and includes campus placement/review committees, the minimum requirements of documentation and parental notification, and a limited three-day student suspension.

The Association supports strong state laws and enforcement of those laws to specifically protect the rights of children and adults in a safe and secure school environment. The state should exercise strong legal sanctions to prohibit adults visiting the campus from engaging in assault (verbal or physical) or attempts to intimidate school employees as they carry out their responsibilities of maintaining a safe campus.

Teacher Retirement System

The Association supports the integrity of the Teacher Retirement System; it supports legislation that would increase the current state funding of 6 percent. The Association supports increasing the yearly multiplier for active Teacher Retirement System members while also providing for a cost of living increase for retired members.

The Association strongly supports efforts to maintain a quality and affordable health insurance program for retired educators.

The Association strongly opposes any effort to finance other state interests with Teacher Retirement System funds. The Association strongly supports the continuation of a defined benefits plan.



Health Care

The Association strongly supports a quality and affordable state-funded health insurance program for active and retired school employees. To attract and retain quality personnel, the state must provide funding for health insurance commensurate with programs provided in the corporate sector.

Permanent School Fund

The Association supports the preservation of the Permanent School Fund. This trust fund was created for future generations of Texas children. The Association opposes any effort to deplete the corpus of the Permanent School Fund.

Elementary Education Funding

The Association supports an equitable distribution of funds between elementary and secondary education within all Texas school districts.

Additional formula weights should be provided to promote the additional staffing of assistant principals, counselors, nurses, librarians and other support personnel at every elementary campus. The Association believes the state should fully fund all mandated programs.



Vision

Serving Texas PreK-8 School Leaders

Texas Elementary Principals and Supervisors Association (TEPSA), formed in 1917, represents more than 5,800 PreK-8 school administrators. TEPSA members supervise 150,000 schoolteachers who direct the activities of 2.4 million Texas schoolchildren.

In addition to principals, the membership includes supervisors of reading, mathematics, science, special education and other subject disciplines; it also serves central office administrators who are responsible for the administration of elementary education. TEPSA is the only association in Texas with PreK-8 school principals and supervisors as the core of its membership.

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