

The Texas Classroom Teachers Association Wants to Get to Know More About You

TCTA greatly appreciates you taking the time to participate in our candidate survey. Please fill out each form section as your answers will be available to our 45,000 members across the state and the general public on TexasTeachersVote.org. Remember to click the SUBMIT button in the Completed section when you are finished.

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Occupation State Representative

Candidate Information State Representative - District 48

Question 1: Most active teachers and other school employees don't have access to high quality, affordable health insurance. The state contributes \$75/month toward insurance premiums, and districts are required to pay \$150 (though many pay more). Even combined, these amounts are far less than what the state pays for state employee coverage (\$625/month for individual coverage, over \$1200/month for family coverage). How would you address school employee health insurance needs? Would you vote to increase the state's contribution toward premiums?

The pandemic has certainly driven home how essential our teachers are, and one need only ask many of the parents trying to teach at home, how valuable an experienced teacher's skill set is. The deal the state has made with its own employees is a sensible one, and I would be in favor of increasing the state's contribution in order to retain and reward the hard work of our teachers.

Question 2: Do you support TRS as the defined benefit retirement system it is today, or would you consider converting it to a defined contribution system similar to a 401(k)?

The state needs to uphold its end of the bargain with our teachers as the retirement plan is in actuality deferred compensation. Incentivizing longevity, and rewarding our most experienced teachers at the end of their careers has been an agreeable system for decades. Texas Legislators need to understand the long term fiscal costs and uphold them, not back down when times are tough. Ideally, we could pass legislation creating investment funds off the Economic Stabilization Fund which would perpetually spin-off revenue to meet the long term commitments to our teachers, whether it's pension or healthcare costs.

Question 3: What changes, if any, do you believe need to be made to the current public school funding system?

Last session, HB 3 made many improvements I had been championing for years: increasing the state share of funding; allowing more uses of compensatory education funds among them. However, there is more we can do. We still have a bifurcated school finance system for charters and district ISDs. We still have massive inequities across our state and in the Austin region. I'm also concerned with funding attached to school performances. From what I've seen, our current A-F system is a better indicator of student poverty than of teacher ability or student performance.

Question 4: Although there are many issues on which virtually all school employees are united,

there are times when the interests of administrators/school boards and teachers/other school employees diverge. Do you plan to create a mechanism to regularly communicate with teachers about issues that affect public education? If so, how will you do so?

The pandemic has prompted me to rethink how my office and I maintain sound communication with constituents and communities. I often hear from teachers through my social media accounts, where I'm fairly active and personally involved. My staff and I have also found a wide range of webinars and virtual events such as the [unconvention] where I will be having a listening session to hear from teachers. I welcome new ideas and suggestions if TCTA has found workable solutions for such dialogue.

Question 5: Under current law, school employees can choose to have professional association dues deducted from their paychecks, entirely at the employees' discretion. Do you support continuing to allow this convenience or would you consider eliminating the ability to deduct dues via payroll, and why?

I fully support the ability for teachers to enjoy their freedom to join a professional association and the convenience of automatic deductions for dues. Throwing up unnecessary obstacles is a cheap tactic used to weaken the voices of working Texans.

Question 6: Do you believe that teachers should be required to be certified or do you think there are some circumstances in which certification should be waived?

One thing that the pandemic has made crystal clear to most parents who are having to provide instruction at home is that teaching is a specialized job that requires unique talents and skills. Certification ensures that a teacher has the necessary prerequisites to be effective in the classroom, just as other professions have their own certification and licensure requirements that provide basic quality control. Flexibility is important in order to acquire the technological expertise for some CTE courses, and the teacher shortage may also require options. However, this should not be an open door to use non-certified teachers on a broad-scale basis.

Question 7: Do you believe that some part of teacher pay should be based on a student's performance on a standardized test?

No, all indicators seem to show that student performance on standardized tests is a better indicator of poverty than the school's performance under current conditions.

Question 8: Blended learning and the use of technology have been helpful, temporary tools utilized by public schools during the COVID-19 pandemic, but research has consistently shown that virtual schools lag far behind brick and mortar schools in performance, and they avoid much of the accountability required of traditional public schools. What do you think about the attempts to expand full-time virtual schools?

Again, with the pandemic, I think most parents have come to understand the limitations of virtual schools. While there certainly may be evolutions in teaching that come out of this extraordinary situation, I would not support a full transition to virtual schools, even for a subset of the population. Aside from the achievement gaps, the American Academy of Pediatrics, among others, has made clear that the social/emotional learning that happens with in-person interactions is vital to a student's development.

Question 9: Rigorous research on statewide programs across the country shows significant,

sustained negative impacts on academic achievement of students using private school vouchers compared to their peers who remained in public schools. Will you oppose attempts to use limited public school funding for private vouchers or tax credit scholarships? If not, why do you support private school vouchers?

I have in the past and will continue to oppose vouchers in any form.

Question 10: As part of an effort to address disproportionality in the discipline system, some advocates promote limiting or eliminating disciplinary actions that remove students from the regular classroom (like sending students to the campus behavior coordinator, in-school suspensions, or alternative disciplinary placements). Others believe teachers need to be able to remove disruptive students from the classroom so that their behavior can be addressed without disrupting the education of other students. What is your position on this issue?

This is a tough issue, especially for those of us who share concerns for teachers being able to manage their classrooms, as well as for those students who are disproportionately impacted by discipline. I believe teachers need a range of tools, but share Rep. Jarvis Johnson's concerns that particularly students of color could be disproportionately impacted.

Question 11: Texas law has established approaches for supportive school climates, including encouraging districts to implement positive behavioral intervention systems and restorative justice programs, and establishing student mental health as a priority. The responsibility for implementation of these programs typically falls upon teachers with already full loads. Will you promote the hiring of sufficient personnel in schools such as campus behavior coordinators, mental health professionals, behavior interventionists, and others to better ensure a supportive school climate?

I certainly support giving our teachers the support systems they need that allows them to do the job of teaching to their highest ability. That includes ensuring schools have the resources they need for the nurses and counselors required to ensure a safe and healthy environment for all students.

Question 12: Districts of Innovation were approved by the legislature to allow school districts additional flexibility. To date, among the top waivers obtained through this process are exemptions for revised school start dates, permission for larger class sizes without parental notification, and relaxed certification standards. Is that what was intended, or do you think the DOI provision needs to be revisited by the legislature?

Larger classes were not the intention of Districts of Innovation. I do think school start dates should reflect the needs of communities and could also play a role in addressing the 'summer melt' of learning. I would have to learn more about some of these trends, but it is rare that the legislature gets something perfect the first time.

Question 13: Will you oppose any legislation similar to the Districts of Innovation language that could take away important educator rights and benefits such as contracts, planning and preparation periods, and duty-free lunch, or removing parental notification for when a teacher is not certified for the class they are teaching?

Yes.

Question 14: Given the varying levels of COVID-19 infection through the state and the potential for additional waves of infection, health experts anticipate that schools will need to close and re-open multiple times during the school year. Who do you believe should make these decisions, and on what basis? Should the re-opening of local schools to on-site instruction be

governed by public health expert developed metrics (i.e., infection rates, trajectories, hospital capacity and other commonly accepted data)?

I believe we should follow the science and guidance of public health experts when it comes to fighting the COVID-19 pandemic. Ideally, local public health officials would be able to make those determinations for their communities. I would hope that a campus or district could also decide to close its facilities in the face of a localized outbreak.