

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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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?

To attract and retain quality educators, we must provide them with the salary and benefits that reflect the respect we have for the important role they play in our state. The cost of health insurance is eating away at any salary increases teachers now receive. The state contribution for teacher health insurance has not increased one penny since the program was initiated in 2002, forcing employees and local districts to bear the burden of skyrocketing health care costs. We must provide salary and benefit increases to our educators, which is one of my top public education priorities.

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)?

I support keeping TRS as a traditional defined benefit plan. Pooled pensions are generally more efficient than individual investment accounts. Furthermore, switching to a 401(k)-type retirement benefit would significantly reduce the retirement income security of teachers and other educational professionals. I do not support putting this increased risk on our education professionals, especially when the switch would not be likely to result in improved retirement income for them.

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

I believe additional public education funding is needed. Our state's duty to support and maintain the public education system is enshrined in our constitution. In fact, it expressly directs that the Legislature must make "suitable provision" for the system. However, the Legislature has failed to do its job without pressure. While the Rainy Day Fund is always an option from which to draw monies to provide critical public education funding, my focus would be on studying ways to increase revenue and working to promote policies that expand our ability to provide essential services.

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?

If elected, I plan to consistently communicate with all constituents who wish to communicate with me, including teachers. It is an elected official's duty to represent the best interests of his or her constituents, and in order to represent the best interests of the constituents you must regularly communicate with them. I plan to keep my Austin staff and district staff open to communication from constituents, and I plan to continue attending meetings of local school districts, educators, and education advocacy organizations to make myself available to those groups.

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 support allowing this convenience for our school employees. The attempt to eliminate the ability to deduct dues via payroll is an attempt to make it more difficult for educators to join these professional organizations.

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?

I believe that all teachers in our public education should be certified so that they know how to best provide our children with a quality education.

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

Suggesting that the tests commonly used today are "standardized" is simply inaccurate. Too much emphasis and reliance are placed on tests which neither provide the needed diagnostic information nor fairly assess what has been learned by the students in a certain period of time.

I do not believe that STAAR scores are a good means of evaluating student success. Likewise, numerical assessments of other performance "factors" can be skewed. Therefore, tying merit pay to such scores is not the best means of rewarding valuable contributions. Local districts are in the best position to determine a teacher's merit and effectiveness. They witness teachers' impact firsthand and receive better feedback on how individual teachers interact with students and the system. Districts should have control over how monies and merit pay are distributed without state interference.

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?

While I do feel that some students are able to thrive in a virtual learning environment, studies have shown in-person schooling is overwhelmingly more effective in terms of student performance. We also must remember that virtual schooling is not the best option for many of our students, as they may face challenges outside of school that would affect their virtual learning experience, including lack of internet access and personal family hardships. A quality public education is enshrined in our Texas Constitution, so it is our duty as Texans to provide students an education that will prepare them for future opportunities.

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 will oppose attempts to use public school funding for private vouchers. We already fail to fund our public school system in a manner that complies with our constitutional duty to do so. We must not allow our resources to be directed away from our public schools. Whether the efforts are labeled “vouchers,” “scholarships,” “savings accounts,” or something else, these are improper uses of our public education funds.

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?

Our top priority should always be creating an environment where students can effectively learn. If a student is inhibiting the teacher’s ability to teach or other students’ abilities to learn, then it may be necessary to temporarily remove that student from the classroom. I would seek counsel from experienced educators and other experts to determine how best to balance order in the classroom and the well-being of those children who are acting, especially keeping in mind concerns about the school-to-prison pipeline. We must all make significant effort to understand the underlying issues that may contribute to a child’s behavioral issues.

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?

Yes. I believe that a fully funded public education provides all resources necessary for our students to learn in a way that best suits them. Unfortunately, our teachers have been tasked with not only educating our students, but also acting as mental health professionals. It is necessary that we provide funding for these other positions in order to allow our teachers to focus on educating our students while still providing the students with a holistic educational experience.

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?

I believe the District of Innovation provision needs to be revisited. While I believe there is some room for local school districts to make decisions that ultimately benefit the students and the system as a whole, public schools should adhere to state standards that govern the quality of the students’ educational experience. This ensures that all students are receiving a quality public education, regardless of their background.

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. I believe it is our duty as Texans to provide our teachers with the resources they need to best serve our students. If there are barriers to our teachers’ ability to educate our students, that is harmful to our broader public education system.

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 look to public health experts to guide the district leaders and administrators in making these decisions and also balance the needs of each school district accordingly, taking into account local hospital capacity, infection rates, trajectories, etc.