

# ATPE'S PRIORITIES FOR THE 87th LEGISLATIVE SESSION: Prioritize public education funding

*ATPE supports prioritizing public education funding to ensure school districts have the necessary resources to address the many ongoing challenges of COVID-19, preserve funding gains and equity achieved through last session's House Bill 3, and continue efforts to raise the prestige of the education profession through meaningful compensation.*

Successful schools engage students by providing high-quality programming delivered by high-quality educators. Consistently bringing these two elements together requires adequate and reliable funding, a need that has never been more urgent than during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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ATPE is grateful to legislators on both

sides of the aisle who have committed to maintaining the funding increases in last session's House Bill (HB) 3, even as Texas has experienced declining state revenue. **Maintaining the progress made by HB 3 is the first commitment the Legislature should make regarding public education funding.** However, thanks to better-than-anticipated revenue collections, federal relief funding, and a projected \$11 billion balance in the state's "rainy day fund," maintaining HB 3 funding levels is not the only school finance commitment lawmakers should uphold this session:

- **First, the Legislature should include sufficient funding in a supplemental appropriations bill to reimburse the costs school districts have already incurred due to the pandemic—costs that exceed the spending anticipated by lawmakers when they adopted the state budget currently in effect.**

Covering these unforeseen costs will allow districts to spend their regularly allotted funding to preserve educational programming without having to make personnel cuts or significantly dip into their reserves. The supplemental funding bill should be paid for using the Economic Stabilization Fund (commonly referred to as the state's "rainy day fund"), thus preserving regular state funding and any additional federal funding for future expenses our schools will face over the next two years.

- **Second, in the next two-year state budget cycle, the Legislature should use incoming federal relief dollars to remediate student learning losses due to COVID-19.** The funds Congress is dedicating in its coronavirus relief legislation for extraordinary education-related needs should not be used to supplant the state-budgeted money necessary to maintain ordinary public education funding obligations related to HB 3.
- **Finally, legislators should look for ways to offer aid to school districts at risk of losing vital funding.** In 2020, when student attendance rates plummeted due to COVID-19, state leaders offered a limited "hold harmless" provision to protect schools against losses under the state's attendance-based funding system. ATPE has advocated for this provision to be extended through the remainder of the 2020-21 school year, and we urge lawmakers to consider any other support that can help schools avoid harsh financial penalties through no fault of their own.