



From the Desk of Dr. Rivera: Stakes High for Your Future in Upcoming Legislative Session



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As educators, our primary focus is preparing students for college or career and, ultimately, life. However, we cannot be passive participants in the legislative process. The stakes are too high. When the 86th Texas Legislature convenes Jan. 8, let's stay engaged and updated on how issues affect us personally and professionally.

School finance and Texas Retirement System (TRS) reforms--topics that may likely be on the legislative docket--will affect your and your family's futures.

School Funding

Even before the session begins, [Gov. Abbott's plan to cap property taxes](#) is in circulation. Although the intent has merit, questions still remain about sources of revenue to implement such a lofty plan. For example, if school districts are lowering taxes, is the state willing to pay the difference lost?

Under the proposal, the governor asks that every school district get the same amount of revenue per student, and that sounds equitable. (As you may know, Texas public school districts don't receive the same amount of money per student. In fact, Mesquite ISD receives on average \$1,500 less per student than some of our Region 10 counterparts.) Ensuring district equity has great intentions indeed, but we must stay focused on how it could be accomplished without negatively impacting other programs and the overall education system.

Texas Retirement System

TRS--created in 1937 and serving more than 1.5 million public education employees and retirees today--is one of the most stable retirement systems that currently exists in the nation. However, with the increasing demand on teachers in regard to pay and shortage in numbers, the TRS Board of Trustees voted last July to lower the fund's assumed rate from 8 to 7.25 percent. This was a result of an external study sponsored by outside entities that may not have our best interests in mind.

Outside of a passion for education, TRS is one of the biggest incentives attracting quality candidates to the profession. **Concerned citizens, public educators and the organizations that represent our educators must stay abreast of issues impacting funding of TRS.**

More to Come

Issues such as charter school expansions and safety may also be addressed in this legislative session. With committee assignments and leadership yet to be decided, the Texas House of Representatives is in the middle of a Speaker of the House battle with several members expressing interest in that influential position. Although the speaker will not be set until early January, much is riding on who will hold this leadership role.

Some of us have been passive participants in the overall legislative process, letting important decisions go unnoticed. Let's turn that around! We did well by increasing voting participation in the midterm elections this year. Let that be the first step of many. Uninvolvement is no longer an option.

How to Keep up on Issues Affecting the 86th Session of the Texas Legislature

The Advocate will be published monthly during the session to keep you informed of key legislation affecting the Mesquite ISD community and Texas public education. In the meantime, you can gain some background by researching the legislative priorities of any professional or civic organizations you are associated with.

Other Resources:

www.capitol.texas.gov (View proposed legislation)

www.trs.texas.gov (Teacher Retirement System website)

<https://www.facebook.com/TRSofTexas/> (Teacher Retirement System Facebook page)

<https://capitol.texas.gov/myTLO> (Personalized viewing of legislative content)



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