



From the Desk of Dr. Rivera: Ways to Share Your Views in Texas' 86th Legislative Session



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Texas' 86th legislative session is underway! [Speaker of the House Dennis Bonnen](#) is bringing new leadership, but--as always--policy disagreements among lawmakers are anticipated. However, our top three elected leaders--Gov. Greg Abbott, Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick and Speaker Bonnen--announced at a Jan. 9 press conference they plan to work as a united front in the interest of Texas.

Conversing with Lawmakers Made Easy

Let's be vigilant tracking issues and making our voices heard:

- [Please take the time to register here.](#)
- When you sign up, you'll be matched to your respective lawmakers and able to express your views directly through email and Twitter.
- While we cannot and do not endorse any group's philosophies or interests, we recommend you use this handy tool to help address your own personal questions or concerns.

Speaker Bonnen announced [House committee assignments for the 86th Legislature](#), and Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick introduced [Senate committee assignments](#). We look forward to their collective work and will track both chambers' progress as they convene during this session.

School Finance Reform Still 'Top Priority'

Gov. Abbott confirmed that property tax and school finance reforms are this session's top priorities. Although funding sources are not clear yet, we remain optimistic that significant changes will occur on both fronts.

Positive fiscal news came via the Texas comptroller's release of the [Biennial Revenue Estimate](#). In this estimate, more state funds are expected to be available. The 2019-21 biennial budget represents an 8.1 percent increase from the amounts available for 2018-19. We can't predict how our lawmakers will allocate these dollars, but the surplus is welcomed.

Dip into State's Rainy Day Fund Possible?

Rainy day fund: a reserved amount of money, saved over time earmarked to be used in times when regular income is disrupted or decreased, in order for typical operations to continue.

Financial experts often recommend saving the total of three to nine months of expenses in an emergency fund. This rule of thumb helps us address unforeseen costs. The state of Texas has wisely reached and surpassed that amount in its rainy day fund. Texas' fund is projected to reach an unprecedented \$15 billion in the coming budget cycle--if left to grow.

Early in the new legislative session, a group of state leaders with influence over these expenditures seems open to making significant withdrawals to address what issues it views as essential. **Topics up for consideration include hurricane relief, teacher pensions and unspecified public school safety issues.**

Students to Attend Texas PTA Rally Day Feb. 25

Texas PTA is among the many agencies and interests groups helping legislators hear what constituents consider important. The 480,000-member-strong group is sponsoring a Rally Day on Monday, Feb. 25, at the Texas state capitol. It's essential that we teach our students the importance of participating in advocacy. That's why we're proud to announce students from all Mesquite ISD high schools will be represented in Austin at this event. [Learn more about Rally Day here.](#)

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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