2019 Northwest ISD Legislative Priorities
Rationale and Additional Information

School Finance

Priority: Advocate for an adequate and equitable school funding system that reduces the state's overreliance on recapture and property value increases. Advocate for local discretion on spending to ensure that the needs of students, staff, and communities are met.

> **Rationale:** Texas is currently 43 (out of 50 states and Puerto Rico) in revenue per student, and Texas is gaining more than 80,000 students per year. We need a system that invests more into our students, takes the responsibility off of personal property owners and Chapter 41 districts to fund Texas public education, and gives power back to local communities to decide how to serve children.

Priority: Commit to historic levels of state investment in our schools by investing the dollars the state gains from increased property values into the Foundation School Program.

> **Rationale:** Texas is currently 43 (out of 50 states and Puerto Rico) in revenue per student, and Texas is gaining more than 80,000 students per year. We must continuously raise the academic bar for our students, and the Legislature must invest more into Texas public education.

Foundation School Program

Priority: Advocate for adequate and equitable funding and oppose any cuts to the FSP. Support an updated and adequately funded formula-based school finance system, which takes into account student and district characteristics when determining appropriate levels of funding to meet state and local standards.

> **Rationale:** Students have different academic needs, so districts should be funded based on local student needs. Formula-based funding takes into consideration the differences in educating students with different needs, goals, and aspirations.

Enrichment

Priority: Increase number of "Golden Pennies" beyond the current $1.06 and allow local school boards discretion to access the pennies without the mandatory Tax Ratification Election.

> **Rationale:** "Golden Pennies" are those tax rate pennies from $1.01 to $1.06 that cannot be recaptured by the state through the Robin Hood laws of the Texas School Finance System. NISD advocates for the increase in the number of Golden Pennies and for the ability to access those pennies without a Tax Ratification Election.

Priority: Calculate all Chapter 41 recapture, including enrichment, at the Austin yield.

> **Rationale:** Property wealthy districts (Chapter 41) are calculated at two different levels. The "Austin Yield" would help lower NISD's payment to the state, thereby retaining more dollars to be spent on Northwest students and programs.

Local Property Value & Property Tax

Priority: Oppose the state benefiting from rising property values that taxpayers assume is benefiting public schools. Advocate that the full value of this funding benefit public education and not be used to fund other state initiatives or decrease the share of public school funding. Advocate for the creation of an index that adjusts the Basic Allotment for the biennium based on the percentage increase for the statewide property value per student.

> **Rationale:** All revenue generated from school property taxes should be spent on Texas school children attending Texas public schools. If the state continues to fund school districts using personal property taxes, those funds must be kept in education and not used to balance the state's general budget.

Priority: Support fast-growth school districts' need for flexibility and ability to exceed the $0.50 debt cap due to rapid enrollment growth and construction needs, as well as allow locally elected school boards and voters the ability to effectively manage the total tax rate.

> **Rationale:** All Texas school districts have a state-mandated cap of $0.50 to build and/or renovate facilities. For fast growth districts like NISD, this puts a burden on the district, because our student population is growing so fast. NISD's tax rate should be managed by local taxpayers and leaders, and not by Austin.

Allotments

Priority: Increase the Transportation Allotment to better reflect current transportation costs.

> **Rationale:** The state needs to support districts to safely transport students to and from school. The transportation allotment has not been updated since 1984. This is a huge expense for school districts like Northwest ISD.

Priority: Advocate for increased funding for the Technology and Instructional Materials Allotment (TIMA) to adequately fund instructional materials and support the new, long-range education plan for 1:1, infrastructure, and internet support. Oppose any carve outs from TIMA that decrease the amount of funds to school districts, and support local control and flexibility in district use of the TIMA funds.

> **Rationale:** Technology is a part of modern students' lives. The Legislature needs to fund school districts to make sure Texas students are in 21st century learning environments. Based on the Texas State Board of Education's new Long-Range Plan for Public Education, the state should adequately fund school districts for the recommended initiatives.

Pre-K

Priority: Advocate for funding full-day pre-kindergarten programs for all students who qualify and who want to apply.

> **Rationale:** Research shows that full-day pre-kindergarten programs can positively affect at-risk children throughout their educational lives. The Legislature needs to fund school districts, so students can receive full-day services.

Vouchers & Charters

Priority: Oppose any state voucher plan, tax credits, taxpayer savings grants, tuition reimbursements, or any program that diverts public tax dollars to private entities, homeschool students, or parents with little or no academic or financial accountability to the state, taxpayers, or local communities.

> **Rationale:** Taxpayer dollars should not be used to fund private schools or homeschooling parents. These are basic parental decisions, and NISD supports choice, but public funds should not be used to pay for private school education with no accountability measures.

Priority: Oppose the further expansion of charter schools, including increases in the number of campuses under existing charters, unless they are subject to the same accountability and transparency rules as traditional public schools including, but not limited to: public notices, school discipline, transportation, bilingual programs, policy notices, employment contract policies, special education requirements, lunch programs, and nepotism statutes.

> **Rationale:** Charter schools place a burden on regular campuses because of the state's approval method. Charter schools should be held to the same academic and financial accountability standards at regular public campuses. And school districts should be informed years in advance of charter campuses opening in order to plan accordingly (budgeting and staffing).



Accountability & Assessment

Priority: Establish a comprehensive accountability system that looks beyond high-stakes, multiple-choice exams to meaningful assessments that incorporate facets of the whole child, as well as measures what the community deems as a priority. Oppose A-F campus and district ratings.

> **Rationale:** 5.4 million students in Texas cannot be accurately assessed using one tool (STAAR). Many different measurements, that are important to local communities, must be used.

Priority: Advocate that the state student assessment program be limited to only those assessments required to meet ESSA (federal) requirements, and redirect the fund savings from the reduction in assessments to help fund TIMA.

> **Rationale:** Local teachers need to teach more, and the state needs to test less. The Legislature should adopt a testing schedule that requires only what the federal government requires, and the dollars that are saved from this should be used to create 21st century learning environments.



School Safety & Security

Priority: Advocate for additional and ongoing funding for school safety initiatives. Advocate for flexibility in how districts utilize these funds to meet the needs of local schools and communities. Oppose any new requirements that are not funded as they are created.

> **Rationale:** Before teachers can teach and students can learn, they must feel physically and emotionally safe. The Legislature needs to provide districts extra funding to meet local needs. And safety requirements from the state do not need to be unfunded mandates.

Priority: Support funding for data security (staff and student), including cybersecurity funding dedicated to support all school districts.

Rationale: Texas school districts are under attack, almost daily, by cyber criminals. The Legislature needs to support local districts with funding to be able to fight these attacks and safeguard student and adult confidential information.

Local Control

Priority: Support enhanced decision-making authority for those governmental entities closest to the citizens and oppose state/federal overreach.

Rationale: Our school board is elected by our community to represent our local community, our values, and our interests. They have been entrusted by the voters and their authority to make decisions and act in the best interest of the local community should be respected and upheld.

Teacher Retirement System of Texas (TRS) Funding

Priority: Advocate for the continuation of the current defined benefit pension program for TRS members.

Rationale: The Legislature should maintain the current Texas Retirement System as is, and support Texas public education employees with a solid retirement system.

Priority: Advocate for increased state funding to assist with increased healthcare costs associated with TRS-Care.

Rationale: Retired public education employees are facing continuously increasing medical/healthcare costs. The Legislature should fund increased costs, and not pass the costs onto Texans living on fixed incomes.

North Texas Transportation Infrastructure

Priority: To accommodate the rapid growth in Northwest ISD and North Texas, support efforts and funding to expand the road infrastructure needs, especially East/West thoroughfares, and to expedite the construction of roadways to support public schools that are planned and built.

Rationale: Texas is falling behind in transportation infrastructure for areas experiencing rapid growth. The Legislature must work together with local communities and counties to make sure transportation infrastructure is adequate and safe.

For more information, visit nisdtx.org/legislative.