

Texas School Finance Basics

Article 7 of the Texas Constitution requires the Texas legislature to “establish and make suitable provision for the support and maintenance of an efficient system of public free schools.”

Who pays for public schools? We do! Texas taxpayers fund schools through local, state, federal taxes.

Why does money matter? Well-funded schools are able to:

- a. Offer smaller class sizes for greater attention to students
- b. Attract and retain high quality teachers for improved learning
- c. Engage students with arts, music, computer science, and other vital programs.

Who decides how much to fund the schools? The Texas legislature determines how much funding to provide overall, and how much of that amount the state will kick in. But...

- a. The state has been decreasing its share, down from 48% (2008) to 38% (2019).
- b. More of the funding burden now falls on local property tax payers.
- c. The state now uses Robin Hood (recapture) and local property tax growth to balance its budget and provide tax cuts to businesses, *instead of investing it in education*.
- d. Robin Hood is based on property values in the district, not families’ incomes, so students in a property-rich district may not get sufficient funding for a quality education despite high taxes.

Who determines how schools are funded? State legislators make the rules based on:

- a. Average daily attendance - how many kids show up at school each day by a certain time.
- b. Additional funding for special populations - English language learners, special education, at-risk youth, etc. These formulas haven’t been updated since they were created in 1984.
- c. Cost of Education Index (CEI) - how much it costs to live/educate in each district. The CEI hasn’t been updated since 1990, though it’s supposed to be updated every other year.

Who decides how to allocate funds within each district? Your democratically elected school board decides how to allocate its funds.

Who picks the legislature and school board members who make these decisions? Voters - those who show up, and those who don’t.

Next election is in 2020. How do we effect change until then? Good elected officials listen to their constituents.

- a. Communicate with them about what you think is important.
- b. Become an effective advocate:
 1. Organize
 2. Build alliances
 3. Do your research and come up with solutions to the problems
 4. Educate allies and elected officials
 5. Empower allies for advocacy
 6. Advocate at every level
 7. Vote!

Grade 1 Social Studies TEKS: “Citizenship: The student understands and can identify the characteristics of good citizenship, including truthfulness, justice, equality, respect for oneself and others, responsibility in daily life, and participation in government by educating oneself about the issues, respectfully holding public officials to their word, and voting.”