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## **ATPE responds to Texas Public School Finance Commission's report**

*State's largest educator association shares detailed feedback on the report's final recommendations*

**AUSTIN, Texas** — [The Texas Commission on Public School Finance](#) voted on Dec. 19 to approve final recommendations for the 86th Texas Legislature to improve the Texas public school finance system. [The Association of Texas Professional Educators](#) (ATPE), the leading voice for educators in Texas and the state's largest educator association, provided input to the commission throughout the year and shares its thoughts on the recommendations.

"ATPE appreciates the long hours devoted by commission members to researching the complexities of school finance and listening to the many concerns by our association and other stakeholders," said ATPE Executive Director **Shannon Holmes**.

In particular, ATPE members have expressed gratitude for those who stood up for Texas students during the commission's deliberations by arguing for the inclusion of additional public education funding. State support for public education has been inadequate to fully overcome the growing list of challenges that Texas schools face. How to address these challenges became a key issue during the 2018 election cycle.

"Texas voters have sent a strong message," said Holmes. "The state must do a better job funding our schools, and Texans will no longer accept excuses for failing to act."

Created by legislators in 2015, the school finance commission has succeeded in keeping the public spotlight on school funding needs in 2018 amid a crowd of other issues competing for resources and the attention of lawmakers.

### **ATPE's Feedback**

The commission's final report contains numerous recommendations that ATPE looks forward to evaluating in greater detail once corresponding bill language is drafted. Many of the recommendations are in line with testimony that ATPE and other stakeholders with expertise in public education policy provided to the commission. ATPE is, however, disappointed by the introduction of a number of significant, last-minute changes to the report that are at odds with the largely transparent and inclusive processes that the commission employed throughout the year.

ATPE urges legislators to consider the following feedback in response to the commission's findings and recommendations:

- **Current public education funding levels are inadequate to meet the state's education goals and the needs of our 5.4 million students enrolled in public schools in pre-kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade.** Texas remains among the bottom one-third of states in per-student funding

despite educating a disproportionate level of students who are economically disadvantaged and/or English language learners, both of which require significantly more resources to educate. **There can be no real school finance reform that fails to address adequacy.** ATPE is disheartened that some members on the commission were unwilling to acknowledge the reality of the limitations of our state's current funding levels out of fears of sparking litigation.

- **ATPE rejects the implication that school districts do not efficiently allocate the money they receive under the state's current funding system.** In 2015-16, school administration counted for little more than three percent of district expenditures, while instruction and direct student supports combined accounted for more than 70 percent. The state's share of public education funding also has fallen dramatically. A decade ago, there was a roughly even split between state funding and local taxpayers; in 2021, it is projected that state funding will be as low as 32 percent.
- Texas teachers should be paid a salary that acknowledges their excellence in the classroom and contributes to statewide efforts at recruitment and retention of outstanding educators. Focusing on initiatives that would provide a premium salary only for "top teachers," as the commission has suggested, would address compensation concerns only for an estimated two to five percent of our state's teachers. A large percentage of the remaining educators serving our state's students are doing so effectively and deserve additional compensation. In order to achieve the stated goal of providing all Texas students with an effective teacher, **ATPE recommends that the legislature set a statewide goal of paying all effective teachers a salary that is suitably competitive and commensurate with the work they are doing—in addition to rewarding the top teachers in the field.**
- The commission has recommended an educator effectiveness allotment to help school districts boost salaries of their most effective teachers with state funding that would commence in the 2019-20 school year. However, the final report also suggests new and prescriptive criteria that school districts would be forced to meet in order to receive the allotment, which would amount to a major restructuring of teacher evaluation systems without appropriate vetting or study. Considering the years of research and piloting that have gone into previous design changes to teacher evaluations in Texas, **ATPE strongly cautions legislators against mandating any rapid, wholesale changes to teacher evaluation laws based solely upon a four-page excerpt in this school finance commission report that did not receive adequate vetting by commissioners or stakeholders prior to its adoption.**

ATPE looks forward to forging real solutions on school finance when the 86th Texas Legislature convenes in 2019. The association pledges to continue working with legislators to implement policies that will benefit all 5.4 million Texas schoolchildren.

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### **The Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE)**

The Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE) has been a strong voice for Texas educators since 1980. It is the leading educators' association in Texas with approximately 100,000 members statewide. With its strong collaborative philosophy, ATPE speaks for classroom teachers, administrators, future, retired and para-educators and works to create better opportunities for 5 million public schoolchildren. ATPE is the ally and the voice of Texas public education. Learn more about ATPE at [atpe.org](http://atpe.org).

