

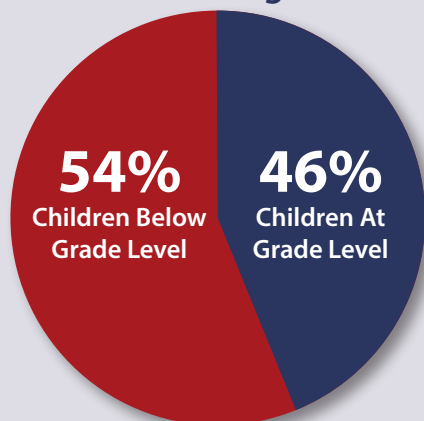
# Right on Public Education:

## Texas' Agenda to Restore Money to the Classroom and Eliminate the Main School Property Tax

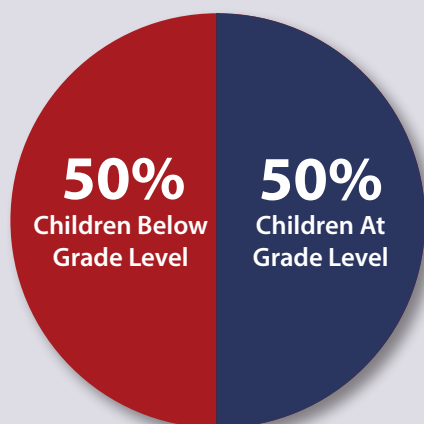
### Most Texas Children Test Below Grade Level

Texans are spending more than ever on public education on a per-student basis and in total, but most students perform below grade level in math and reading (in tested grades) according to the Texas Education Agency.

#### Reading



#### Math



In addition, 49% of tested children perform below grade level in science, 59% perform below grade level in writing, and 47% perform below grade level in social studies.

The Texas Public Policy Foundation's Public Education Agenda is a six-point agenda that will reallocate existing taxpayer dollars to where they matter most: the classroom. Focusing on the classroom will support teachers and effective programs that will improve the ability of all Texas children to read, do math at grade level, and understand the founding principles of America. The agenda will also eliminate the maintenance and operations school property tax over an estimated 12 years—including "Robin Hood"—which currently accounts for approximately 50 percent of all property taxes and significantly reduce property tax burdens on Texas families.

There are two critical financial components to Texas' education system: how we tax people to pay for education (revenue) and how we use the tax money to educate children (spending). Simply putting more taxpayer dollars into the school finance system will not improve student outcomes. How much we spend on public education is not nearly as important as how we spend the money. Money should be spent in the classroom improving student results.

### 1. Direct School Boards, Principals, and Teachers to Establish Goals and Monitor the Progress of Their Schools' and Students' Reading and Math Outcomes.

Research demonstrates that what school boards focus on at their board meetings leads to what administrators, principals, and teachers focus on and affects student results. Our school boards should establish goals and methods with clear information and tools to meaningfully monitor student reading and math progress at each school.



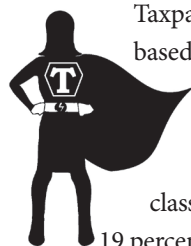
In conjunction with a merit program (below), which allocates resources to help principals and teachers implement high-quality curriculum and student data monitoring tools, the Foundation's agenda would require school boards to adopt goals for, and principals and teachers to focus on, student results.

#### THE TEXAS LEGISLATURE SHOULD:

*Direct school boards to set meaningful and time-limited goals for improvement at each district and school in math and reading, and monitor progress toward goals.*

### 2. Direct School Districts to Adopt Merit Pay Programs for Texas' Most Effective Principals and Teachers, and Support Their Curriculum Success in the Classroom.

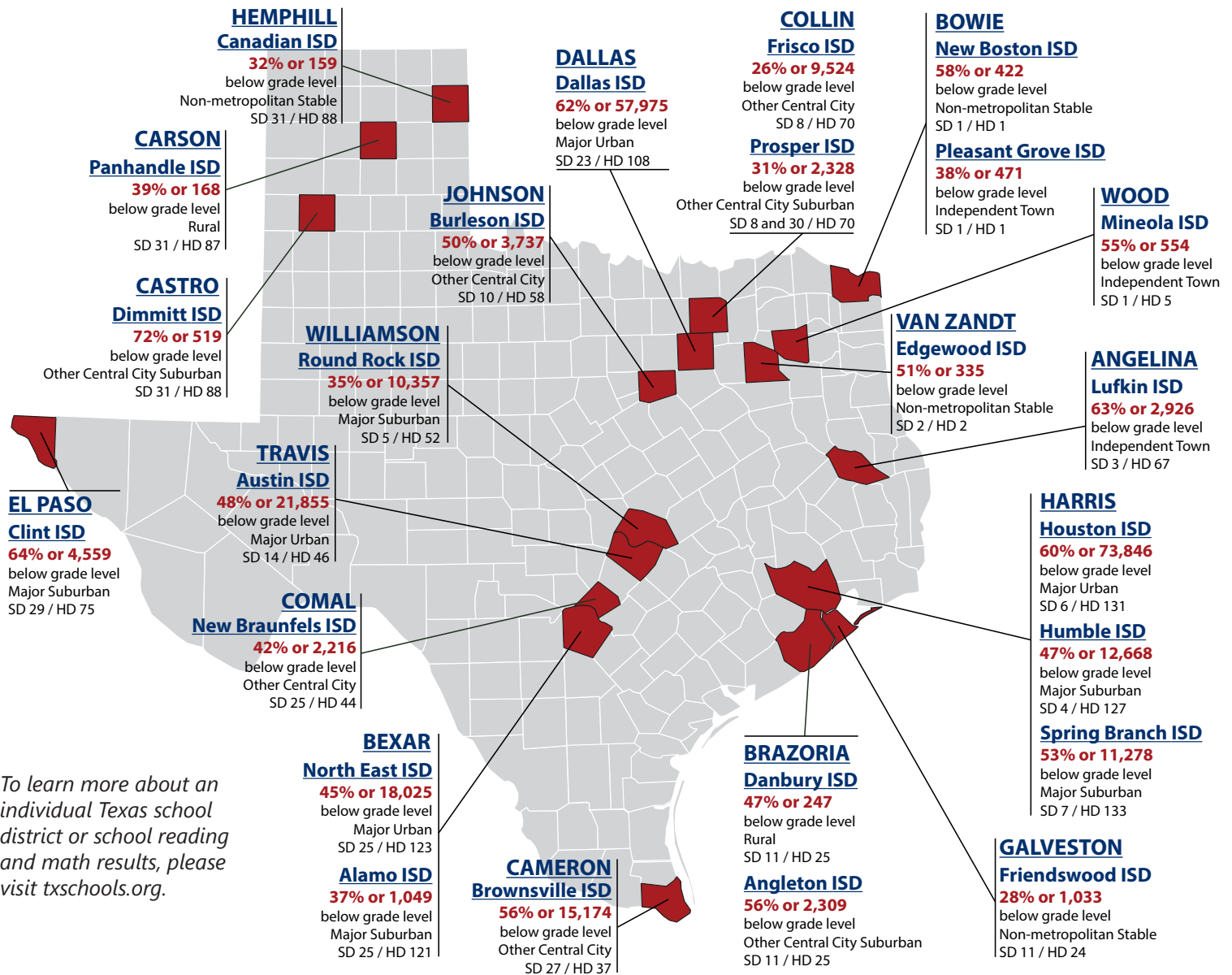
Other than parents, the most important factor in the education of a child is the quality of the teacher. But right now, the Texas education system does not prioritize attracting, developing, and retaining the best principals, teacher leaders, and teachers.



Taxpayer dollars are spent giving wasteful across-the-board pay raises based on seniority-linked salary schedules that reward ineffective teachers. In addition, school district administrative overhead is growing, even as student results decline.

Texas administrators have on average \$281,000 for each Texas classroom. Yet they pay teachers an average of \$53,000. That's less than 19 percent of funding going to the most important element in the classroom.

## The Number and Percent of Students Reading Below Grade Level at Districts of Various Size Across Texas



To learn more about an individual Texas school district or school reading and math results, please visit [txschools.org](http://txschools.org).

The Legislature should use existing tax dollars to encourage school districts and their school boards and administrators to adopt locally designed and administered merit pay programs. These programs should be developed with input from effective school principals, teacher leaders, and teachers and give effective principals more ability to improve educational results at their schools.

### THE TEXAS LEGISLATURE SHOULD:

- Identify effective principals, teacher leaders, and teachers, in part by using data-driven analysis;
- Using and repurposing existing taxpayer resources, pay all principals, teacher leaders, and teachers using a merit pay system, allowing the most effective educators to receive merit pay salary increases, especially those who are teaching economically disadvantaged children, teaching at improvement-required schools, or ensuring children are reading and doing math at grade level prior to 3rd grade;
- In conjunction with our above proposal for school boards to set meaningful and time-limited goals for reading and learning, support principals, teacher leaders, teachers, and school teams in using schoolwide data-driven and evidence-based tools to teach the Texas curriculum standards and monitor student progress and related professional development.

In addition, principals, teacher leaders, teachers, and school teams often need schoolwide, high-quality, data-driven, curriculum-focused programs to help teach the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, understand what students should know and be able to do, use data to monitor student progress, and adjust instruction based on results.

### 3. Empower Parents to Ensure Their Children Have a Civics Education Focused on the Founding Principles of America.

If we fail to restore civics education within society, we will lose the capacity for self-government upon which life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness ultimately depend. Protecting these critical principles requires an understanding of the history and the documents that provide the justification for our very existence as an independent nation. A recent study finds that most native-born



Americans—64 percent—would fail the U.S. citizenship test, which requires a score of only 60 percent to pass. K-12 curriculum should ensure a civics education is provided to our children, without which our democracy cannot survive.

In Texas, 30 percent of children test below grade level on the end-of-course U.S. history STAAR test, and 47 percent test below grade level in social studies.

#### THE TEXAS LEGISLATURE SHOULD:

*Ensure the Texas Education Agency includes 10 questions in the end-of-course U.S. history STAAR test from the 100 questions of the U.S. citizenship test. The 10 questions should align with the already adopted Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills.*

### 4. Eliminate the Maintenance and Operations School Property Tax in Order to Significantly Reduce Each Family's Property Tax Burden.



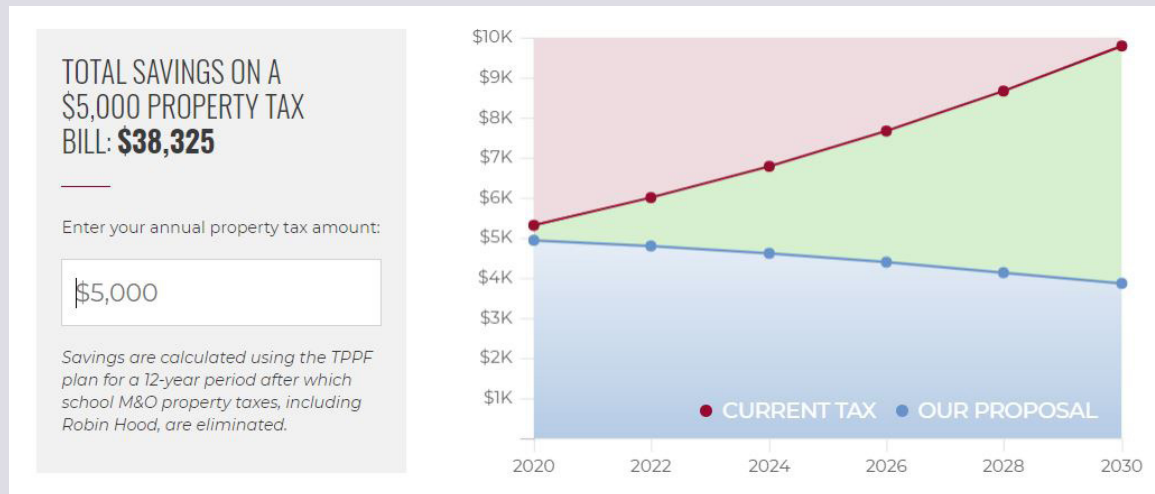
Property taxes are becoming an unbearable burden for Texas families and businesses. Property taxes are making it less attractive for businesses to locate or remain in Texas, and families are losing their homes.

The Foundation has developed an agenda that would limit the growth of government and use state surpluses in general revenue-related funds to eliminate a significant portion of a family's property tax bill, while ensuring public education remains funded.

#### THE TEXAS LEGISLATURE SHOULD:

- *Eliminate the maintenance and operations school property tax, including Robin Hood;*
- *Restrict property tax revenue growth in other taxing jurisdictions to 2.5 percent annually.*

The Foundation's property tax cut calculator will show how much a Texas family would save in property taxes. To use the calculator, go to: <https://www.texaspolicy.com/property-tax-calculator/>.



### 5. Stop Taxpayer-Funded Lobbying.



In 2017, local governments spent as much as \$41 million to hire outside lobbyists, much of it coming from taxpayer dollars allocated for school districts. Those tax dollars should be earmarked

for classrooms, not back rooms. School boards and administrators already have the ear of their elected state officials. They do not need to pay millions to contract with professional lobbying firms.

#### THE TEXAS LEGISLATURE SHOULD:

*Eliminate all taxpayer-funded lobbying, especially the use of taxpayer monies used by school districts to lobby the Legislature. Taxpayer money should be spent on rewarding the best teachers and improving education outcomes in the classroom.*

## 6. Give Voters the Opportunity to Trigger School District Efficiency Audits to Improve the Use of Taxpayer Money.



School districts often ask for tax increases without providing an explanation for how the new taxpayer dollars will be used or whether they will improve student outcomes. Texas school administrators are spending millions of taxpayer dollars on water parks, golf courses, and expensive stadiums, including in districts where thousands of children are reading and doing math below grade level.

Efficiency audits examine a school district's budget and operations and identify ways to maximize resources, improve program delivery, identify redundancies, ensure programs are delivering promised student results, and implement more effective programs for less money. Efficiency audits may allow for significantly more dollars being used on effective programs in the classroom, where it can help children.

### THE TEXAS LEGISLATURE SHOULD:

*Give voters in a school district the ability to require their school district, through petition and referendum, to conduct an efficiency audit upon a voter election using a third-party, independent auditor.*

### La Joya ISD Utilized Their General Fund to Build a Waterpark, While the Majority of Children Perform Below Grade Level in All Tested Subjects.



Photo courtesy of the La Joya Independent School District via Facebook.

Subject	Number of La Joya ISD Children Testing Below Grade Level	Percent of La Joya ISD Children Testing Below Grade Level
Reading	11,720	64%
Mathematics	7,264	51%
Writing	2,508	62%
Science	3,727	56%
Social Studies	2,375	58%