

TEXAS<sup>20</sup><sub>36</sub>

# TOP POLICY OPPORTUNITIES

For 2023

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- ▶ Big Policy Ideas, Supported by the People of Texas to Prepare the State for its Bicentennial





## EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

**1. Improve Teacher Quality of Life** by increasing teacher pay, increasing access to high-quality instructional materials, improving teacher training, and supporting educators in the classroom. The availability of funding this session provides an opportunity to invest in raising teacher wages and transitioning to higher quality materials, which will cut down on time spent lesson planning and give teachers more flexibility.

**2. Accountability and Assessment** remain among the state's primary tools for ensuring that students of all races, incomes, and zip codes have equitable access to a high-quality education.

**3. Continuation of the Evidence-Based Practices** required by legislation passed last session coupled with HB 3 (2019) reforms will ensure students who are struggling academically receive the necessary learning supports and help schools significantly improve their approach to instruction in the primary grades.

52%

of students are on grade level in **reading** on the STAAR exam, with **30%** of 4th graders proficient on the NAEP

40%

of students are on grade level in **math** on the STAAR exam, with **38%** of 4th graders proficient on the NAEP

87%

of schools earned an A or B in the **accountability system**, but almost half of students aren't on grade level and reading in math

17%

of **classroom assignments** are actually on grade level

87%

of Texas voters agree that *"taxpayers have the right to know how the schools in their community are performing relative to others in the state using 'apples-to-apples comparisons' on an annual test in reading and math."*  
Only 7% disagree.

82%

of Texas voters supported **increasing access to high-quality tutoring in reading and math for Texas public school students.**  
Just 6% of voters oppose.

## WORKFORCE ALIGNMENT

**1.** Texas has a generational opportunity to overhaul its **Community College Finance** formulas to meet the state's workforce needs.

**2.** Texas also has the opportunity to significantly **increase the number of workforce credentials earned in high school**, particularly in rural schools, by adopting the recommendations of the Texas Commission on Virtual Education.

**3.** The state should continue its commitment to the **Tri-Agency Workforce Initiative**, which builds the data and cross-agency infrastructure toward long-term alignment of the state's education and workforce systems.

62%

of jobs in Texas will **require a postsecondary credential** by 2030

26%

of Texas high school graduates **earn a post-secondary credential within six years of graduation**

0.2%

of state Community College funding is aligned to **employers' workforce needs**

87%

of Texas voters agree that *"community colleges should focus on offering course programs that match the needs of the local workforce."*

90%

of Texas voters believe it is important *"for the state to focus on increasing the number of credentials earned while students are still in high school."*

81%

of Texas voters favor *"providing financial incentives to Texas community colleges to focus on courses in career fields where students can earn a self-sustaining wage."*



**Our Education and Workforce policy efforts are divided into two main workstreams: (1) improving student outcomes in our PK-12 system, and (2) improving postsecondary achievement with better workforce outcomes.** The combined goal of these efforts is to ensure Texans have the education and skills necessary to pursue a productive career and earn a family-sustaining wage.

### **Closing PK-12 Achievement Gaps with Data-Driven Policies**

- Defend Annual Assessment, Accountability, and the A-F System
- Encourage High-Quality Curriculum
- Defend House Bill 3 Programs and Encourage Future Data-Driven Investments
- Improve Teacher Quality, Compensation, and Training
- Support High-Quality Public Charter Schools
- Increase Access to High-Quality Tutoring

### **Removing Barriers to PK-12 Student Outcomes**

- Increase Access to Rigorous Coursework
- Increase High School Access to Workforce Training and Credentials
- Improve Student Access to Virtual Learning and Other Innovative Learning Models
- Improve Digital Literacy, Technology Planning, and Funding Stability

### **Postsecondary Workforce Alignment**

- Prioritize Career Outcomes and Economic Mobility in Community College Finance
- Incentivize Attainment of Credentials of Value
- Promote Self-Sufficient and Family-Sustaining Wage Attainment as a Goal of State Education and Workforce Programs

### **Access to Economic Mobility**

- Increase Access to Reskilling and Upskilling Opportunities
- Increase Employer-Led Education Opportunities
- Improve Recognition of Prior Learning and Competency-Based Education Models
- Expand Skills Attainment and Skills-Based Hiring
- Support Efforts to Improve Access to Quality Child Care

### **Efficient Postsecondary Pathways**

- Improve Dual Credit Completion and Transfer
- Ensure Stackable Sequencing of Credentials
- Pursue Cross-Agency Programmatic Integration and Funding
- Improve Workforce Data Infrastructure



## AFFORDABLE HEALTH CARE

1. Texas should pursue an **“all options on the table”** strategy for **increasing the number of insured Texans**, including providing new Texas moms with extended eligibility, increasing current eligibility thresholds for low-income Texans, and improving take-up among eligible, but unenrolled Texans.
2. Texas must capitalize on the transparency revolution, **ensuring that price transparency rules are enforced, and eliminating remaining barriers** to get useful information on price and quality to patients at the point of decision.
3. Texas needs to address the negative impacts of highly concentrated markets, using a light-touch method of **prohibiting anti-competitive contracting practices** that drive up prices without corresponding improvements to outcomes.
4. Texas has an opportunity to **improve rural access to primary care** in shortage areas by expanding practice options for nurses and pharmacists.
5. Texas can **improve the quality of state-managed health care plans** to reduce net costs paid by current and retired teachers. Texas can optimize ERS benefits to slow cost growth for the state without shifting costs to employees.

**18%** of Texans are **uninsured**, representing nearly 5 million people

**59%** of Texans have **skipped needed health care due to cost**, including 56% of Texans with insurance

**2.5x** Texas employer-based insurance, on average, pays over **2.5 times what Medicare does** for the same service

**200+** Texas counties are **federally designated primary care shortage areas** in their entirety

**1,228,212** Covered lives in state managed health plans for agency employees (ERS) and teachers (TRS)

### Nearly 7 in 10

Texans believe eligibility for Medicaid should be increased to make single individuals earning \$13,000 a year or less.

**90%** they should be informed **how much medical treatment will cost before they receive it.**

**78%** of voters support **government action to prevent business tactics that reduce competition.** (Arnold Ventures polling)

**81%** of Texans support **allowing highly trained nurses to provide more primary care health services in shortage areas.**

**85%** of large employers believe a **greater governmental role is needed to help them contain health care costs.** (KFF Employer Survey)



**Our north star in health care policy is to ensure that Texans are able to obtain the high-quality care they need, when they need it, at a price they can afford.** In order to achieve this, high-quality care for Texans must be both available and affordable. While these goals sound simple, the challenges we face in this area are complex. In many cases, incentives are misaligned, which has resulted in inefficient allocation of resources and a low return on investment. While the challenge is great, so is the opportunity. Because of the growing bipartisan recognition that our current health care system isn't working well, there is a chance for real, impactful reforms that can help ensure that all Texans are able to access and afford the care they need, when they need it.

### Affordability and Transparency of Care

- Enforce and Expand Transparency
- Remove Barriers to Cost and Quality Data
- Reform State Employee Health Benefit Plans
- Protect Smart Shoppers Within Their Deductibles
- Reduce Inappropriate Facility Fees
- Improve Market Competition by Prohibiting Anti-Competitive Contracting Practices

### Availability of Medical Care

- Enable Independent Practice for APRNs, Especially in Demand Shortage Areas
- Codify Federal Flexibilities for Vaccine Administration
- Improve Access to Children's Mental Health Services
- Support Innovation to Expand our Health Care Workforce Pipeline
- Ensure Continued Access to Telemedicine

### Increasing Health Insurance Coverage

- Pursue an "All Options are on the Table" Approach to Increasing Covered Lives
- Authorize, Develop, and Enact 1115 (Medicaid) and 1332 (Affordable Care Act) Waivers
- Expand Medicaid Eligibility to Close the Coverage Gap
- Increase Postpartum Medicaid Eligibility from 6 Months to 12 Months



## ENERGY EXPANSION

Texas needs to **pursue an “all of the above” energy strategy** as part of its energy expansion. This includes robust oil and gas production along with the the development and deployment of hydrogen, geothermal, battery storage, carbon capture and underground storage, and an expanded renewable energy portfolio.

2.5x

Texas produced roughly 2.5 times more energy than any other state in 2020, with total **energy production of 23,329,100 billion BTUs**



72% of Texans want Texas to remain as the nation’s energy leader in the adoption of new technologies that allow for cleaner forms of energy that can grow the Texas economy, create jobs, and improve air quality.

## WATER INFRASTRUCTURE

1. Texas should consider dedicating significant **funding to address aging, deteriorating water infrastructure**. In doing so, the state can provide long-term solutions to address challenges we will face as our state continues to grow. We can also prevent crises like those in Laredo, Odessa, or even Jackson, Mississippi.

2. The state can also **establish regional water market frameworks** to enable smarter water management strategies that lead to more efficient and effective water use.

C- & D

ASCE’s **grade** for Texas’ drinking water and wastewater infrastructure

\$65 billion

EPA’s estimate to **repair Texas’ aging, depreciating infrastructure**

88%

of Texas voters are **concerned** that communities may not be able to meet water needs during a severe drought



84% of Texas voters support legislative action to **create a fund to update aging water infrastructure**.



82% of Texas voters agree that **the state should increase investments to expand water supplies**.



73% of Texas voters agree that **Texas must rethink how water markets work and how water is priced. Just 12% disagree.**

## BROADBAND

Despite historic state and federal efforts to increase access to high-speed internet in underserved rural and urban market, challenges remain to **ensure stable funding for the state’s broadband efforts**.

14.9%

of Texas households do not have **broadband internet subscriptions**



81% of Texans supported using \$2 billion of federal funds to improve the state’s broadband and emergency communications infrastructure in 2021.



**Texas' growth correlates with accelerating infrastructure needs.** The continuation of our economic miracle hinges on the expansion and modernization of our energy, water, transportation, broadband, and government infrastructure. Just as this infrastructure needs to grow, so, too, does the need to replace aging, depreciating infrastructure that presents greater liabilities with each passing year.

## Energy Expansion

- Pursue an “All of the Above” Strategy for Energy Expansion
- Support Market-Based Investments in Clean Energy and Decarbonization
- Support Development of Hydrogen and Carbon Capture Hubs
- Support Regulatory Certainty for Oil and Gas Production
- Support Natural Gas Infrastructure Resilience
- Reduce and Mitigate Oil and Gas Waste Streams

## Water Planning and Infrastructure

- Support Water Development Board Sunset Legislation
- Develop More Accurate Water Planning Data
- Fund Solutions that Address Growing Water Needs
- Establish Frameworks for the Development of Regional Water Markets that Encourage Voluntary Transfers of Water
- Support Water Workforce Development Programs

## Resilient Electricity

- Leverage Federal Infrastructure Funds to Improve Grid Resilience
- Address Agency Staffing Challenges that Inhibit Grid Reforms
- Support Efforts to Improve Electricity Affordability for Texas Households

## Future-Forward Transportation

- Align Funding and Revenue to Market Trends
- Embrace Technological Innovation

## Digital Connectivity

- Optimize the State's Broadband Program to More Efficiently Close the Digital Divide. This involves:
  - Map Underserved Areas in Our State Program
  - Expand Personnel Capacity Within the Broadband Development Office
  - Update Speed Standards for Broadband Infrastructure Projects Funded with State Dollars
- Coordinate Federal and State Broadband Funds for Maximum Impact
- Expand Market Reforms and Incentives for Broadband Expansion
- Advance Digital Literacy Opportunities

## State Parks

- Support Expansion and Improvement of State Park Infrastructure



## GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE

1. Texas has the opportunity to **invest in cybersecurity and IT modernization efforts** using one-time budget surplus funds. Reforms passed last session (HB 4018, 87-R) provide a long-term pathway to improving state IT, if funded.

2. Texas should **address the rising cost of living** for state employees, including tackling housing affordability in Austin.

3. Texas should pursue salary, benefits, and workplace reforms to **ensure the state is able to recruit and retain high-quality employees**. This can include pay raises, remote work, and skills-based hiring.

2.46 billion

Cyberattack attempts on state agencies every two months

21.5%

State agency turnover in 2021, the highest in recent history

61.7%

of Legislative staff make **below the median income** for a single person

### By a 2-to-1 margin

Texas voters support increasing pay for state government employees.



of Texans supported using **\$1 billion of federal funds to improve the state's cybersecurity and technology systems in 2021.**



of Texans are concerned about **growth trends that include housing affordability challenges in large cities.**

## JUSTICE AND SAFETY

1. The state's regulation of law enforcement has been called "toothless." Texans deserve a regulatory framework for officers and agencies that serves the profession **by modernizing the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement** by investing in its data and IT capacity, improving transparency, and addressing wandering officers.

2. Texas should **reduce the state court backlog** that was exacerbated by the pandemic, leaving Texans waiting longer for justice and contributing to overcrowding in our jails. Texas should support the judicial workforce and upgrade the judiciary's legacy IT and data infrastructure.

3. DFPS continues to use a data system that a federal judge found created "an unreasonable risk of harm" to children, due to the amount of time it took to collect ultimately disorganized data. Texas should instead fund and **implement a federally compliant foster care data system.**

1,400

Re-hirings of dishonorably discharged peace officers since 2012

154,000

Added pending cases in state district courts since March 1, 2020

1 of 5

Texas is one of the last remaining states to not switch to the **new federal standard** for foster care data systems

83% of Texas voters said **making it harder to rehire law enforcement officers who were previously fired for poor conduct would increase their confidence in law enforcement.**

89% of Texas voters are concerned about the **historic backlog of criminal cases in our courts.** 59% are "extremely" or "very" concerned.

41% of Texas voters believe that **children today will have better opportunities than previous generations.** 29% believe children will have worse opportunities.



**Government Performance is a signature policy area for Texas 2036, with our team often the only voice on many critical issues.** Our first session and special sessions featured impactful victories on state employee pension reform, information technology and cybersecurity modernization, education investment fund reforms, and smart use of federal funds to promote long-term growth. This session, our government performance efforts will be divided into two primary themes: (1) broadly addressing the long-term fiscal, workforce, and technological needs of our state government; and (2) leveraging data and IT to specifically target improvement in government services related to policing, the judiciary, and child welfare.

### **Fiscal Sustainability and Budget Performance**

- Ensure Long-Term Priorities are Funded and Measured Accurately by:
  - Reducing the Risk Long-Term Liabilities Will Have on Future Generations and Balance Sheets
  - Continuing Information Technology and Cybersecurity Modernization
  - Reforming State Budget Performance Measures
- Preserve a Broad-Based Tax Structure Aligned to a Modern Economy

### **Talent, Technology, and Data**

- Modernize State Employment Practices, Pay, and Benefits. This Involves:
  - Increasing State Agency and Legislative Staff Salaries
  - Improving Access to Remote Work for Appropriate State Jobs
  - Encouraging Skills-Based Hiring for State Employees
- Address Rising Housing Costs for State Employees
- Ensure Data Quality and Privacy by:
  - Improving State Agency Data Infrastructure and Sharing
  - Ensuring State Held Personal Data is Protected and Private
  - Leveraging 2-1-1 Data to Improve State Customer Service

### **Justice Data and Accountability**

- Address Court Backlogs with Resources, Rules, and Reporting Changes
- Improve Law Enforcement Regulation and Data

### **Improving Systems for the Vulnerable**

- Ensure IT for Tracking Foster Children Best Serves the State and Texas Children
- Pursue an “All Options Are on The Table” Approach to Improving Child Welfare
- Improve Conditions in Correctional Facilities
- Reduce Recidivism by Improving Employment Outcomes for Justice-Involved Texans



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