

### Getting Ready for the 89th... by Josh Sanderson

We are four months out from the beginning of the 89th meeting of the Texas Legislature, and preparation for the legislative session is already starting. Interim charges and budget instructions to state agencies are two things that can be very instructive in showing what state leadership's priorities are for the upcoming legislative session (even before they lay out their legislative priorities).

#### Legislative Appropriations Request Instructions

Legislative Appropriations Requests (LARs) are what each state agency submits to the legislature before the beginning of a legislative session outlining their budget needs over the next two years. The Governor, Lt. Governor, and Speaker of the House issue instructions to state agencies on how to build and submit these budget requests.

On July 25th, Governor Abbott and Lt. Governor Patrick issued a joint letter to state agencies instructing them that agency baseline budget requests for the 2026-27 biennium may not exceed amounts appropriated in the current 2024-2025 biennium, with few exceptions.

In their letter, the Governor and Lt. Governor stated: "Legislative Appropriations Requests should take into consideration that priorities for the next appropriations act **will include property tax relief**; additional funding to support construction and modernization of dispatchable electric generating facilities; operational funding for the mental health facilities authorized by the 88th Legislature; **and funding for Educational Savings Accounts** and securing the border."

We will have the opportunity to review TEA's budget requests during the agency's initial budget hearing that has yet to be posted at the time of this writing.

#### Interim Charges

Neither the Lt. Governor nor the Speaker of the House included studying public education funding in the interim charges they issued to committees earlier this year. However, both sets of interim charges include studying the creation of a voucher/education savings account program to fund private schools.

It is no surprise to see vouchers and property tax cuts continue to be two of the top priorities for Governor Abbott and Lt. Governor Patrick. As we have repeatedly pointed out, the cost of creating a new multi-billion entitlement program, alongside the ever-increasing cost of property tax compression, will create long-term constraints on state general revenue, which will limit additional revenue for public education. As the cost of ongoing property tax compression increases, which it inevitably will, and as the cost of a potential voucher program proposed by the Governor grows, which the state admits that it will, additional state general revenue (discretionary funds) that otherwise could be used to invest in public schools will be severely constrained in the long term.

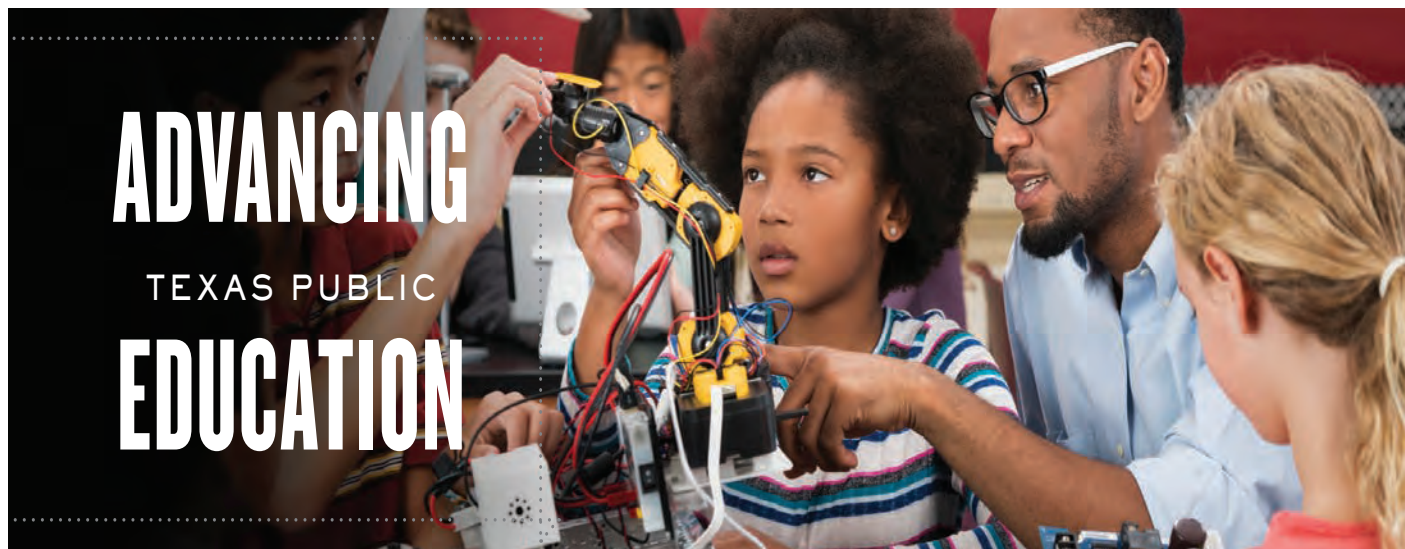
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## Getting Ready for the 89th... continued

We know through internal polling that approximately seventy percent of school districts have adopted deficit budgets for the 2024-25 school year. It is our job, as advocates for the children in our public schools, to show state leaders the effects of the state neglecting public schools have on children and our communities, and no one understands this better than all of you.

The Equity Center will continue to oppose any voucher proposal; however, our top priority this legislative session is to maximize increases in your overall funding, and to do it in a manner that preserves your local discretion as to how these funds are allocated.

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# Superintendent's Corner... by Dr. Carl Dethloff

## A Lesson From the Golf Course

Thanks, or no thanks to my youngest daughter, Caroline, who encouraged me to do something in life besides "school," I started tinkering with the game of golf almost 3 years ago. As an empty nester, and newly enrolled TRS member in 2024, I was anxious to pick up a new hobby post-superintendency. I soon realized that I possessed two golfing superpowers: entering triple bogeys on my scorecard and utilizing multiple fairways during a round.

Despite these characteristics, I have become addicted to this game that originated by striking a pebble over sand dunes using a bent stick near the eastern coast of Edinburgh, Scotland in the mid-15th century. Golf has certainly evolved over the decades – in both technological advancements and in the governing entities that set the rules. I find it thought-provoking that my interest in golf coincided with one of the major disruptive forces that professional golf has experienced in the last century –the battleground between the Professional Golf Association (PGA) tour and the newly formed LIV golf (named after the Roman numeral 54 which is the number of holes played in each event).

The PGA has been the long-standing provider of golf tournaments, teaching, and creating interest in the game since its inception in January 1916. The upstart LIV golf, funded by overseas billionaires, is attempting to create a more dynamic and energizing golf experience. Thus, we are witnessing an existential struggle between the highly respected and traditional PGA, which has promoted and shaped an interest in the game for over one hundred years, versus a newly formed league (that has some incredible golfers) attempting to grab a profitable share of the golf market. ***See where this is going?***

It appears, at least on the surface, reminiscent of our current situation in Texas' public schools. A regarded institution that has served tens of millions of customers, admittedly sometimes anchored by its past, strives to innovate rapidly to meet the needs of an ever-changing and growing population. A new league or movement continues its efforts to siphon away funding that negatively impacts certain customers and creates increased costs for all. Not to mention, nifty marketing exploited with the linguistic phrase of "choice" is the scripted pitch.

Our long serving public schools continue to face increased scrutiny from some elected officials and private sector individuals to systematically fix the social, emotional, intellectual, and work force needs of the future. While some of these concerns certainly fall on the shoulders of public schools, there are multiple stakeholders that share this responsibility. Blaming the school for society's imbalances and deficits is not the proper approach.

Our public schools in Texas have long been a fixture of hope and results-- now our schools are confronted with power brokers, many from outside our state boundaries, to replicate a dual system of education, educational savings accounts (ESA) or vouchers. These vouchers would cost our taxpayers billions of dollars in addition to our current educational spending attempting to duplicate a system that is not only already working but continuing to produce high achieving students that positively impact our cities, communities, and economy.

***Our educational institutions in Texas and their graduates have shaped the successes of Texas*** and its thriving economy for over a century. While I submit that our public education system must continue to innovate and get better for Texas children, I am perplexed how creating yet another education scheme will fix any academic deficits we have encountered. Rather, a competing system may cost taxpayers an additional \$4 billion in the next biennium. These additional monies would be better spent on roads, healthcare, infrastructure, border security, and an assortment of other essentials Texans need, including funding our current classrooms and school districts and ensuring safe schools.

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## Superintendent's Corner... continued

Perhaps I'm optimistic, but I still believe all golfers share a common bond – the betterment and enjoyment of the game. I am hopeful we can take the creative ideas of LIV golf and meld them with the proven practices and tradition rich experiences that our PGA has provided for over a century. Together, we can shape the future, save taxpayers hard earned money, and create solutions that benefit all children and golfers of Texas.

As we finish the course and enter the 19th hole, I leave you with these words from a commercial aired during "The Open" golf tournament earlier this summer:

***"Don't break with tradition, enrich it. Don't yield before history, make it."***

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# Putting Your Funding Into Perspective

There have been countless discussions about the effects inflation and the lack of state adjustments have had on your funding. The Texas legislature is acutely aware of this data, yet failed to pass school finance legislation as the result of the governor demanding that education savings accounts be included. After the 2024 school year, it will have been five years since the legislature passed meaningful school finance legislation – the Basic Allotment and weights have all remained static.

There are two ways TEA reports per student funding to the legislature: funding per student in average daily attendance (ADA) and funding per student in weighted average daily attendance (WADA).

We believe the most accurate approach is to look at funding per WADA, since this approach takes into consideration the varying weights assigned to students.

According to TEA, student funding **per ADA adjusted for inflation** is approximately the same amount it was in 2019, prior to the \$5 billion infusion of funding from House Bill 3. Effectively, that championed increase in public education funding from 2019 has been erased.

When looking at student funding **per WADA**, the amount **is less than the per WADA amount from 2015.**

***\* Note the charts comparing this data on the following page.***

Recently, in a report issued to the House Committee on Public Education, TEA reported that total funding per student for the 2021-22 school year was \$14,928 per student.

It is incredibly important to point out that this is not the amount each of you have to operate your schools. This amount includes the \$10,358 in Maintenance and Operations revenue, as well as the \$2,627 in federal funding which was temporarily inflated as the result of one-time ESSER funds. It also includes an average of \$1,699 in statewide I&S funds, which comes from local bonds in individual school districts.

We point this data out to say that as we approach the 2025 legislative session, we must understand the numbers that are going to be used to attack your funding and to justify proposed voucher/education savings accounts.

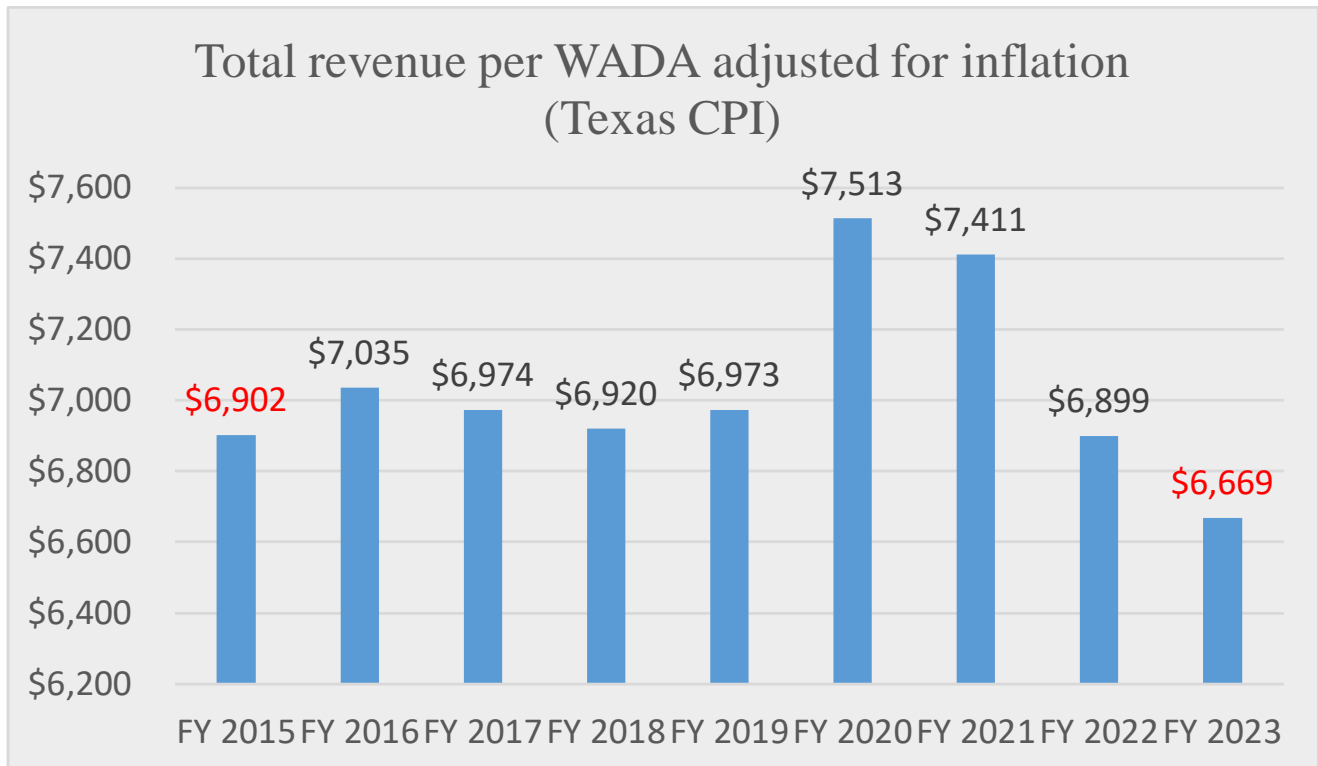
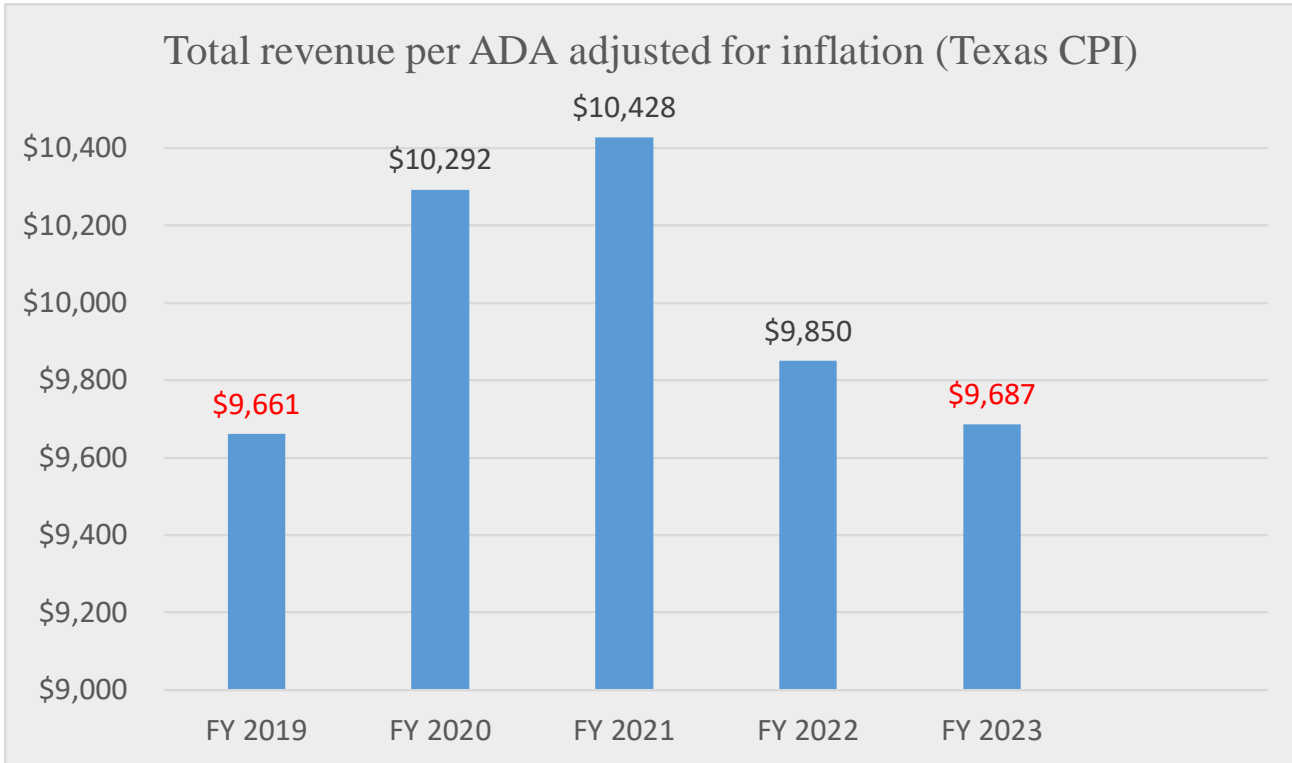
Educators and school district leaders and advocates must be able to communicate with lawmakers and your local taxpayers what money you actually have available to fund your students' education and how that funding is utilized.

If you need help collecting or interpreting your funding data, pulling charts or information such as this to better educate your board members, community or legislators and staff, reach out to us! We have numerous tools and resources available on our website, in your member portal or even personalized help at any time for our members. This is a benefit we cannot over-emphasize! And if you aren't already utilizing our Funding Wizard, log in to check it out!

***\*\* Stay tuned for updates and alerts regarding legislative news, interim committee postings and more! If you are not receiving our updates (including email newsletters, alerts, video updates and more), check your district's spam filters, call us to verify membership, or JOIN TODAY!***



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# Legislative Hearing Updates

The Senate Finance Committee met Wednesday, September 4th to discuss property tax reduction. Specifically, the interim charge directs the committee to identify the best combination to further increase the amount of homestead exemption and compression to continue cutting Texans' property taxes. Additionally, establish and report on the cost of eliminating school maintenance and operation property taxes; all school property taxes; and all property taxes.

For reference, eliminating all school M&O property taxes for the 2024-25 school year would cost **\$32.3 billion, \$27.9 of which is Tier I M&O. Eliminating all school property taxes, which includes I&S collections, would cost the state nearly \$44 billion for the current school year.**

The Senate Education Committee will meet on September 18th at 9 AM to consider interim charges, which include reading and math readiness; testing reform; COVID-19 funding oversight; and monitoring the implementation of legislation passed during the last legislative session on public school safety, public school library procurement, and high-quality instructional materials.

You can watch the Senate Education Committee hearing here: [Senate Education Hearing](#)

We attend hearings and provide committees with information on the long-term impact of property tax compression/homestead exemption increases, the need for additional school safety funding, as well as school finance issues that are not covered in House and Senate interim charges.

***\*Be sure to check your email each week for relevant updates, videos and tools to keep you and your community up to date on issues impacting your school funding.***

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