

## Weekly Report January 29, 2021

### GOVERNOR:

Governor Greg Abbott announced that Nexstar television stations across the state of Texas will carry a live telecast of his 2021 “State of the State” address on Monday, February 1, 2021 at 7:00 p.m. During the address, Governor Abbott will update Texans on the state’s response to COVID-19, highlight exceptional Texans from across the state, and outline his priorities for the 87<sup>th</sup> Legislature.

### BUDGET:

**Lt. Governor Dan Patrick Comments on Senate Budget** - Lt. Governor Dan Patrick issued a statement about the filing of SB 1, the Texas Senate budget bill, by Senator Jane Nelson (R-Flower Mound) saying, “I want to thank Senate Finance Chair Nelson and the Senate Finance Committee who have worked tirelessly with our office for months. As always, Senator Nelson has done outstanding work. SB 1 reflects the challenges we face this legislative session because of the crippling impact of the coronavirus pandemic on our economy and difficulties encountered by our oil and gas industry. It also reflects the news late in the last quarter that the Texas economy is coming back even stronger than ever. SB 1 reflects our commitment to those conservative budgeting principles that have kept our state resilient and economically sound. SB 1 would appropriate \$251.2 billion in All Funds and \$119.7 billion in General Revenue funds. This is within the increase in Texas population growth times the rate of inflation and represents a 4 percent growth in General Revenue. The 5 percent reduction in spending cuts that I asked state agencies to make is included. This budget also reflects our commitment to:

- Maintaining the same fiscal restraint that has kept our state strong, using population times inflation as our guide;
- Continuing to do all we can to mitigate the pandemic without further damaging the economy;
- Maintaining the historic education funding increases and teacher pay raises established in 2019;
- Continuing our commitment to delivering health care and mental health care to Texans;
- Maintaining our commitment to public safety and border security; and
- Maintaining our commitment to roads and transportation infrastructure.

This is not the first time Texas has seen difficult economic times. We are committed to maintaining our fiscal integrity using the conservative budget principles that will ensure Texas remains a job creating engine for the nation and a major player in the global marketplace.”

**Next Week:** No hearings of the Senate Finance Committee will be held next week, but the committee has posted an organizational meeting for Monday,

February 8, 2021 at 10:00 a.m. and posted meetings every weekday through March 2, 2021 (except Monday, February 15<sup>th</sup>).

### **GENERAL BUSINESS:**

**Texas Association of Business Legislative Priorities** – On September 27<sup>th</sup>, Texas Association of Business released “Priorities for Prosperity,” a roadmap that drives job creation, strengthens our workforce, protects employers’ rights, grows the digital landscape, and expands transportation infrastructure. Brint Ryan, Chairman, Texas Association of Business said, “The roadmap reflects the state’s leading business and chamber association’s top priorities for the Texas Legislature’s 87<sup>th</sup> Regular Session and reflects the commitment of the TAB Board of Directors and members to protect the future of Texas business. With the coronavirus continuing to impact the Texas economy, now more than ever we need to ensure that businesses in Texas not only rebound but grow and flourish. To do so will require a recommitment by state leaders to support practical policies that support business success. Priorities for Prosperity is a set of common-sense policies that will support businesses and strengthen our economy.” TAB’s top five legislative priorities are:

- Provide economic protections for employers - TAB supports approaches that will allow businesses to reopen safely and without fear or risk of undue litigation.
- Maintain commitment to public education, workforce skills, economic development, and education for growth - A strong focus must remain on strengthening the Texas workforce through education and protecting existing economic development incentive programs, particularly Chapter 313.
- Protect the rights and even the playing field for Texas’ job creators - Protect the rights of employers to operate businesses in the most effective manner possible in alignment with company and free market principles.
- Provide a digital landscape, and access to technology to drive prosperity and growth - A commitment to developing a state Broadband Plan that is aligned with free market principles and provides for reliable, high-speed access for all Texans. Further, TAB supports utilizing market-driven policies regarding data privacy rather than a “patchwork quilt” network of state laws.
- Keep Texas moving - Transportation infrastructure will be important in facilitating economic recovery as well as a critical link to spurring job creation and job growth as Texas aspires to remain competitive in the global marketplace. TAB calls for the restoration of public-private authority for major transportation projects through the utilization of the Texas Comprehensive Development Agreement authority which expired in 2017.

### **PUBLIC EDUCATION:**

**Legislative Priorities of Fast Growth School Coalition** – On January 25<sup>th</sup>, the state’s fastest-growing school districts called on state lawmakers to protect Texas’ historic investments in public schools and address “chronically low state

investment in fast-growth school facilities funding.” The Fast Growth School Coalition represents the collective voice of the state’s fastest-growing school districts. The majority of new student enrollment in Texas public schools each year occurs in roughly just 75 of the more than 1,200 Texas public school districts. Dr. Greg Smith, Executive Director of Fast Growth School Coalition said, “The coalition’s legislative priorities reflect the unique challenges fast-growing districts face and broader public school policy concerns in light of COVID-19. Increasing state funding for new facilities to ensure our fast growth districts can meet the needs of their community remains a challenge. COVID-19 only adds to the budget challenges and financial concerns facing our districts and public schools all across our state.” In addition to protecting the state’s historic investments in public schools last session (HB 3, 86<sup>th</sup> Regular Session), Fast Growth School Coalition’s legislative priorities also include:

- Encourage investment in facilities funding - Adjust the “fast growth allotment” in public school facilities funding to ensure targeted funding serves schools where concentrated enrollment creates a disproportionate impact.
- Support charter school transparency and efficiency - Require voter approval of a new charter within the ISD where it will be located and provide better school and public notification for new charter school construction.
- Renew Texas’ commitment to local control - Support local control with uniform election dates. Amend ballot language that misleads voters and restore the notion of freedom with accountability.
- Connect students, schools, and communities - Develop an omnibus solution to address the broadband access divide in urban, suburban, and rural communities,

Dr. Smith concluded, “We strongly believe – and the economic data has shown – that money matters in public education and an investment in our state’s fastest-growing schools makes good economic sense. Areas of rapid economic growth, business expansion, and significant population increases are where Texans can find fast-growth school districts. Not only do fast growth districts provide high-quality education, but they’re also driving Texas’ economy and recovery from the pandemic. Texas’ fastest-growing school districts create and sustain jobs, drive new construction and infrastructure investment in local communities, and spur further business relocations and expansions.”

**Proposals Related to Mental Health Needs of Students** – On January 25<sup>th</sup>, **Senator Jose Menendez (D-San Antonio) filed a package of bills addressing the mental health needs of students.** Senator Menendez said, “Today we filed legislation that will make our education system stronger by focusing on students and their well-being, along with bills that will ensure justice and equality for all Texans. Throughout the duration of COVID-19, we have witnessed rising mental health concerns. It is imperative that we provide our students the tools and resources they need, and empower schools to address bullying and the school to prison pipeline. My passion continues since passing ‘David's law’ and we

continue to do our work to combat bullying and education safe environment for our children and school personnel. Today we filed legislation that put us on a path toward a more just and equal state. I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting these pieces of legislation, which will help make Texas a better place for all.” Bills in the package include:

**Education Reform:**

- **SB 405** - would require students to take at least one mental health course in high school to learn more about mental illnesses and healthy coping mechanisms.
- **SB 406** - would require school board and trustee members to take a course on trauma informed school care to better help their students and teachers
- **SB 407** - would ensure schools and school districts track bullying and cyberbullying incidents and use this information to adopt preventative measures to help students.

**Equality and Justice:**

- **SB 408** - would ensure each public university has an adequate number of polling locations on their campus in relation to their student population.
- **SB 409** - would ensure that rape kits from deceased victims will be tracked.
- **SB 410** - would establish a Texas Redistricting Commission whom will be responsible for the process of drawing legislative districts.

**TEA Annual Report for 2020** – On January 28<sup>th</sup>, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) released the 2020 Annual Report and School Year 2019-2020 Pocket Edition. The agency’s Annual Report promotes the progress and advancements taking place in Texas’ more than 1,200 public school systems. It also serves as a resource for illustrating areas where Texas must maintain its investment in ensuring every student, regardless of circumstance, is prepared for success in college, a career, or the military. The 2020 Annual Report focuses on key areas of achievement based on the agency’s Strategic Priorities:

1. Recruit, Support, and Retain Teachers and Principals;
2. Build a Foundation of Reading and Math;
3. Connect High School to Career and College; and
4. Improve Low Performing Schools.

Notably, the report chronicles the agency’s comprehensive response to the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic. Through authorization from legislative leadership and Governor Abbott, TEA and the Texas Department of Emergency Management (TDEM) have administered the disbursement of more than \$2 billion from the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. This funding has provided critical support to schools, students, teachers, and families with immediate educational needs related to COVID-19. The agency also released its School Year (SY) 2019-20 Pocket Edition, which annually provides a detailed, easy-to-access overview of the public school landscape in Texas with details on student population, students by program, Special Education services,

Kindergarten readiness, and a summary of public education spending for fiscal year (FY) 2019.

[Here](#) is a link to the TEA 2020 Annual Report. [Here](#) is a link to the 2019-20 Pocket Edition.