



Abbott wants to tie teacher raises to incentives; TSTA opposes

During his State of the State address to the Legislature today, Gov. Greg Abbott continue to push for “merit” pay raises for teachers, a short-sighted idea that TSTA will continue to oppose in favor of an across-the-board pay raise. Teachers in Texas are paid, on average, \$7,300 less per year than the national average, based on NEA’s latest survey.

“This session, we must pay our teachers more,” Abbott said. “We must provide incentives to put effective teachers in the schools and classrooms where they are needed the most.”

In truth, thousands of very effective teachers are leaving the classroom every year because they can no longer support their families. And selecting a handful of teachers for raises based largely on STAAR test scores is not the answer.

Abbott made teacher pay, school finance reform and property tax relief emergency items, which could remove some procedural hurdles for these bills during the early part of the legislative session. But the governor didn’t make clear how he wants lawmakers to address school finance reform. And his version of property tax relief is to clamp unrealistic limits on the ability of school boards and other local elected officials to raise local revenue for critical public services.

TSTA will continue to advocate for more state funding for public education. That is the only way to provide realistic property tax relief and increase classroom resources for teachers and students.

At present, Texas pays for only 38 percent of the cost of the Foundation School Program, the basic school funding law, while local taxpayers pay for 62 percent.

Abbott also declared school safety an emergency item in the wake of the tragic shooting at Santa Fe High School last spring. He pointed out the need to address mental health issues in our schools and endorsed a proposal by Senate Finance Chair Jane Nelson to create the Texas Mental Health Care Consortium to collaborate on statewide mental health needs.

But, again, funding will be key. Texas schools will need to hire thousands of additional counselors to bring staffing up to professional standards.