



88th Session Policy Primer:

Everything You Need to Know to Get Ready for Session



BUDGET AND TAXES

STATE BUDGET BALANCE INFLATED BY “SMOKE AND MIRRORS” AND UNMET NEEDS

Texas Comptroller Glenn Hegar projects a General Revenue (GR) balance of \$27 billion when the 2022-2023 state budget cycle ends in August 2023. Many media outlets have reported the \$27 billion as a “surplus” rather than a “balance.” But the terms are interchangeable only if you believe that Texas’ public PreK-12 schools and colleges, medical and mental health care, child protective services and foster care, community attendant care, college financial aid, and other services get anywhere near the state support they need and that the state budget fully covers inflation every two years. Neither is true.

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WHO PAYS TEXAS TAXES?

Texas households that are the least able to afford it pay the most in taxes as a percentage of their income, while the Texas households that can afford to pay more pay the least.

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WHO DOES NOT PAY TEXAS TAXES?

A fair and adequate tax system would allow the state to invest in the building blocks of thriving communities – schools, health care, public safety, roads, and other public services. The type of tax system we need should provide enough revenue to maintain these public services and also divide up the responsibility for funding these services according to a household’s ability to pay. Unfortunately, our tax system gives the wealthiest Texans and corporations a pass in contributing to state needs.

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CHANGES TO IMPROVE THE PROPERTY TAX SYSTEM

Local property taxes support the essential public services that we all need, whether we are Black, brown, or white and wherever we live in Texas. Property taxes fund our schools, police, and parks. But our property tax system is badly in need of fundamental reforms that would allow local governments to grant progressive homestead exemptions and improve the accuracy and efficiency of property tax appraisals and appeals.

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HEALTH AND FOOD JUSTICE

TEXAS' UNINSURED POPULATION, 2021

The U.S. Census released its newest estimates of uninsured Texans in 2021 in mid-September, and they show very small improvements since 2019 in the percentage of uninsured Texans. 5.2 million Texans (all ages) were uninsured in 2021, meaning 18.0% of Texans were uninsured. Texas is the state with both the largest number and percentage of uninsured residents in the United States. Texans make up 9% of the U.S. population, but 19% of U.S. uninsured.

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TEXANS APPLYING FOR OR RENEWING SNAP AND MEDICAID BENEFITS ARE FACING MAJOR DELAYS

A surge of new applicants throughout the pandemic and very high turnover of eligibility workers led to significant delays in processing applications for SNAP since July 2021, meaning thousands of families were unable to get the help they needed to feed their children within 30 days. Kids and pregnant moms are also waiting longer than 45 days for new Medicaid applications as timeliness has continued to drop since February of this year.

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TESTIMONY FROM THE CHILDREN'S HEALTH COVERAGE COALITION ON IMPROVING MEDICAID AND CHIP ENROLLMENT FOR ELIGIBLE CHILDREN

The Children's Health Coverage Coalition (CHCC) was formed in 1998 (as the Texas CHIP Coalition) to work for the establishment of a strong Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) in Texas. Today, the broad-based Coalition continues to work to improve access to health care for all Texas children, whether through Medicaid, CHIP, or private insurance. In October 2022, the CHCC submitted testimony to the House Select Committee on Health Care Reform on ways to improve outreach to families with children who are eligible for, but not enrolled in, Medicaid or CHIP, including children in rural areas.

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DATA ANALYSIS: RECORD ENROLLMENT AT TEXAS HEALTH INSURANCE MARKETPLACE (HEALTHCARE.GOV)

In 2022, Marketplace enrollment reached a record high of 1.8 million Texans. Enrollment by Texans grew by nearly 550,000 people, a stunning 42%, from 2021 to 2022. Texas had the largest percentage increase in the nation. Record Texas and national Marketplace enrollment were driven in large part by Congressional action (ARPA, extended through 2025 by the IRA) to temporarily make coverage more affordable.

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PUBLIC EDUCATION

COUNT EVERY STUDENT: ATTENDANCE-BASED FUNDING LEAVES TOO MANY STUDENTS BEHIND

The Texas school finance system left nearly 300,000 students uncounted in the 2021-22 school year. In the first year of the pandemic, 8% of kids, or nearly 433,000 students, were uncounted – even after the Texas Education Agency (TEA) made adjustments due to COVID-19 attendance loss. For perspective, that’s nearly the entire school population of Arkansas.

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RECAPTURE: THE MOST MISUNDERSTOOD ASPECT OF THE SCHOOL FINANCE SYSTEM

When school budgets get tight, property-wealthy districts are often quick to blame the primary equity tool of the school finance system: recapture. However, recapture, also known as “Robin Hood,” is not the villain in this story. Kids of all backgrounds, from Texarkana to Austin to Brownsville, deserve a high-quality education regardless of the property value within their community.

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THE CITADEL OF PUBLIC SENTIMENT STANDS STRONG: A LOOK AT TEXANS’ ATTITUDES TOWARD PUBLIC EDUCATION

Schools, despite their lack of funding, are vital sources of community cohesion through the social, emotional, and academic growth of their students. The vast majority of those polled rely on schools, and specifically teachers, to be the bridge for Texas children to a prosperous and healthy adulthood. As we head into a long, hot summer of political hyperbole, let us not forget that Texans have the backs of their schools, teachers, and administrators. Policymakers should follow that lead and double down on supporting public education in the face of continued efforts to tear it down.

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VOUCHERS: “THE LOST CAUSE” FIGHT OF OUR GENERATION

Private schools cannot accommodate the growing number of Texas children who are constitutionally guaranteed a free, high-quality education. If established under the current leadership, vouchers will be used to further dismantle the hard-fought unity of diversity in Texas public schools. The same forces pushing vouchers are also working to undermine our faith in the American government by attacking our elections process. Protecting our system of free public schools is essential to the survival of the American experiment. The truths we hold to be self-evident and the values of E Pluribus Unum, that generations of Texans made more equal and more reflective of American diversity, are only possible if we fortify the citadel of public education in the next Texas Legislative Session. Texans have rejected vouchers for almost 70 years. Looking ahead to 2023, Texans must, once more, reject vouchers and embrace public education.

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EDUCATING EVERY CHILD IS IN TEXAS' OWN SELF-INTEREST

Not only is it our constitutional duty, but it is also in our own self-interest as a state to welcome and educate immigrants and their children. [Research shows](#) that immigrants in public schools have a positive benefit to the performance of their U.S.-born peers. Add that to what we have long known about immigrants in Texas – that [we need their labor](#) to keep our economy churning – and you get more evidence for settling – once and for all – debates about educating immigrant children.

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HIGHER EDUCATION

POLICY LEADERS OF TEXAS: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EQUITABLE HIGHER EDUCATION

The Policy Leaders of Texas Fellowship Program is an initiative sponsored by Every Texan that provides students with the necessary resources, knowledge, and social justice framework to champion issues in higher education policy that are a part of a self-identified and self-constructed policy agenda that demands transformative change. Through the program tenets – empowerment, learning, and leadership development – we envision a postsecondary education system in Texas that is accessible, affordable, safe, healthy, and supportive for all students.

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ACCESS AND AFFORDABILITY: AN UPDATE ON HIGHER EDUCATION IN TEXAS

Equitable education is the vehicle for social and economic mobility. When all Texans have access to quality education, it can lead to better life outcomes and job opportunities. This is increasingly visible within postsecondary education. As we navigate through this pandemic, we must ensure that we are providing students with the support they need to successfully attain their postsecondary education goals and to be prepared for economic growth. Therefore, higher education opportunities must be both accessible and affordable for all Texans. Access to postsecondary education allows for Texas families to earn better wages, meet workforce qualifications, and experience an increased quality of life. Two constant threats to these goals are 1) the increasing cost of tuition and fees coupled with declining state contribution, and 2) the increasing amount of student loan debt.

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THE TEXAS 60×30 HIGHER EDUCATION PLAN: A MIDPOINT REVIEW

With only eight years to go, additional strategies and resources are needed to meet or exceed the college attainment goals of the 60x30TX plan and the Building a Talent Strong Texas plan. Considering the ongoing impacts of the pandemic and the needs of Black and brown students as they navigate historical and present forms of systemic racism, Every Texan's [policy roadmap](#) clearly articulates the need for state and local leaders to prioritize ways to expand affordable access to college and implement state-level student borrower protections to safeguard students.

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BUILDING WORK POWER AND DIGNITY

WHY WORKER POWER IS CRITICAL TO OUR FAIR FUTURE

No matter our race, gender, or place, Texans deserve dignified jobs that support thriving individuals and families. We raise the bar for every Texan when all workers earn living wages, experience safe working conditions, and access fundamental benefits like affordable health care coverage and paid sick days. Worker power balances our economy and ensures working Texans share in the prosperity their labor creates. All of these reasons are why Every Texan is expanding our research, policy, and advocacy work to include a specific focus on building worker power. We are humbled to do this work in partnership with the many unions, worker centers, and coalitions engaged in building an equitable state economy.

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PREVAILING WAGES RAISE THE BAR FOR WORKING FAMILIES

Texans, whether Black, brown, or white, are united in our value of fairness. It's only fair that Texan construction workers earn the wages they deserve for their valuable work. Fortunately, there are research-based ways to raise wages and standards for construction workers on public works projects while simultaneously improving our local economies. Prevailing wage laws require covered government contractors to pay a wage and benefit rate based on similarly employed workers in a given geographic area.

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WORKING CONDITIONS FOR TEACHERS ARE OUR CHILDREN'S LEARNING CONDITIONS

Our children deserve better from Texas. Our children are stuffed in classrooms with underpaid, undervalued teachers striving to do their best with insufficient funding and support from our state government. Teachers and staff see no other option than to leave public education altogether because the working conditions are so poor and below the national average. This means our children aren't receiving the education they deserve. And in some schools, there isn't space for desks and chairs due to high teacher-to-student ratios.

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IMMIGRATION

A DECADE OF “BORDER SECURITY” LEAVES TEXANS INSECURE

Operation Lone Star, like the billions spent to fund it, is not just a failed policy of the current state government, but it is a continuation of a failed white supremacist ideology that uses immigrant lives to win political battles while leaving Texans vulnerable to real dangers such as gun violence and the lack of affordable health care. Texas is better than that, and Texans deserve more from our government than punitive and cruel expenditures incapable of achieving their goals, however obscure and misguided they may be.

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TESTIMONY ON OPERATION LONE STAR

Operation Lone Star (OLS) is neither efficient nor effective public policy. Continuing to fund OLS hurts all Texans, white, black, and brown, by wasting \$4 billion on failed deterrence policies instead of using this general revenue to address critical issues facing the state such as the ongoing risk to kids in the foster care system, the inability to prevent gun violence, or the post-pandemic crises facing teachers and students.

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