

## GCISD Legislative Priorities for the 86th Legislature

### 1. *Public School Funding*

- GCISD Supports an Increase in Statewide Funding for Public Education to Meet the Needs of All Student Populations
  - **GCISD Impact:** Currently, the State’s contribution to public education is only 38%. In GCISD, state funding is just 7% prior to recapture.
  - **Solution:** Allocate more state funding to the system, at a minimum 50% of the funding for public education, exclusive of local property taxes. Update funding formulas to include a mechanism for inflation to keep up with costs of operating a school district, including offering competitive pay and benefits and also provide all districts more funding to serve the student populations with different needs and challenges.
- The Current Recapture System Must be Overhauled to Allow the Community to Keep Local Tax Dollars
  - **GCISD Impact:** GCISD has been designated as a Chapter 41 (“property wealthy”) school district and as a result, must make a recapture payment to the State. Since the inception of recapture in 1993, GCISD has contributed more than \$600 million to the State. As property values increase, the State’s reliance on property taxes has increased and the allocations to public education have decreased. In the past five years, GCISD’s recapture payment has more than doubled from \$24 million to \$53 million. If the voters in GCISD approved an increase in the M&O tax rate, over 60% of those funds would be recaptured and sent to the State.
  - **Solution:** Increase the equalized wealth level on the compressed tax rate and also for the additional tax pennies approved by voters through a Tax Ratification Election (TRE).

### 2. *Assessment and Accountability*

- Support an accountability system that uses multiple measures that reflect local community values and objectives. The current State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) test is a measurement of relative performance rather than academic progress and falls short to inform parents, teachers and community of student progress and achievement.
  - **GCISD Impact:** The current A-F Ratings based on the STAAR test are not timely nor are they informative for parents, teachers or administrators and they do not reflect local community values.
- Advocate for State assessments that are developmentally appropriate, are limited to those required for federal mandates and that are not used to determine teacher pay.
  - **GCISD Impact:** GCISD loses 3 instructional days annually for STAAR testing and interim assessments and the District must complete course content 6 weeks prior to the end of

the school year. High-stakes testing encourages teaching to the test, especially if teacher pay is tied to students' performance on STAAR.

- **Solution:** Implement a community-based accountability system.

### **3. Local Governance and Taxpency**

- Allow local elected school boards to respond to the unique needs of their communities
  - **GCISD Impact:** GCISD serves more than 13,800 students from five municipalities with a total population of over 80,000 residents. GCISD is represented by locally elected trustees who represent the community and work collaboratively to determine what is best for the needs of students and staff. Each Texas school district has unique circumstances and have different needs and the local leaders need flexibility to address these challenges.
  - **Solution:** Allow local elected trustees the ability to adjust tax rates within a voter-approved range in order to address competitive compensation and student needs. Also, reduce the equalized wealth level for additional tax pennies approved by voters through a TRE.
- Provide taxpayers a transparent accounting of how property taxes collected for public education are allocated by State and local entities.
  - **GCISD Impact:** Local governance works best when taxpayers understand how their tax dollars are being used. Property values in GCISD have increased on average 9.85% over the last 3 years and taxpayers have seen an increase in taxes although the district's M&O tax rate has remained the same. During that time, M&O property taxes have increased \$21.9 million, but the recapture payment to the State has also increased \$23.7 million. This means that GCISD sent \$1.7 million more to the State than it collected in tax increases. At the same time, GCISD prioritized the budget to give staff a cost of living adjustment to assist with rising health insurance premiums and other increases in costs.
  - **Solution:** The State must provide an accounting of how all property taxes collected for public education are being spent in the State budget. As part of this transparency, the State should allow Districts the ability to note on tax statements, the amount being sent to the State as recapture.

### **4. School Safety and Security**

- Provide ongoing State funding for school safety initiatives, including social/emotional health initiatives and responses.
  - **GCISD Impact:** GCISD has implemented several prevention and security measures that exceed the recommendations of both the Texas School Safety Center and the Governor's safety committee. However, the largest obstacle for improving any further is additional funding.

- **Solution:** Provide ongoing State funding for school safety initiatives, including social/emotional health initiatives and responses and allow Districts the flexibility to use the funds for appropriate prevention and safety measures for their individual students, staff and facilities.

#### **5. *Keep Funding for Public Schools With Public Schools***

- Oppose any plan that provides State funds for vouchers, tax credits, education savings grants or any other transfer mechanisms to privatize public education without public accountability, transparency and a consistent regulatory framework.
  - **GCISD Impact:** Taking funds away from public education reduces programs and services from our 13,800 GCISD students and their families.
  - **Solution:** State funds should only be provided to public education organizations to maintain transparency, accountability and a level, competitive environment for all Texas students and communities.

#### **6. *Teacher Retirement System (TRS) Pension and Health Care Plan***

- Support increased State funding to assist with rising healthcare costs associated with both TRS-ActiveCare and TRS-Care and advocate for TRS-Active-Care alternatives to provide additional options to Districts.
  - **GCISD Impact:** At the minimum, a GCISD teacher with dependents will spend \$13,068 per year on TRS Active-Care premiums in 2018-2019. This is equivalent to 22.5% of an average teacher's salary. TRS healthcare and pension plans are vital tools in recruitment and retention of high-quality teachers.
  - **Solution:** Increase State funding for TRS Active-Care program or for salary increases for all staff to cover rising healthcare costs.
- Advocate for the continuation and adequate funding of the current defined pension program for TRS members.
  - **GCISD Impact:** A defined pension plan guarantees a pension to teachers after serving our State and District's greatest resource - our students.
  - **Solution:** Maintain and provide adequate funding of the current defined benefit pension program for TRS members.