

89th Session changed early-voting but failed to pass a proof of citizenship.

Based on Natalia Contreras, [texastribune.org](https://www.texastribune.org), 6-20-25

After considering a number of bills that would significantly reshape election administration and voting access in the state, Texas lawmakers ultimately approved only a few, including legislation that would alter the schedule of the 12-day early-voting period to increase access. They also passed measures aimed at reducing rejections of mail-voting applications and ballots, and added new restrictions on curbside voting.

Among the bills that didn't advance were two of Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick's priority bills, which would have imposed a requirement for voters to provide documentary proof of citizenship, and a measure that would have given the Attorney General more authority to prosecute election crimes. Bills that would have permitted online voter registration, audits of hand-count results, and guns in polling sites also stalled. The following eight articles describe the changes.

Expansion of early voting could delay partial preliminary results

Legislation that expanded early voting had evolved considerably before its passage. The bill as initially drafted would have banned vote centers, a model offered by some counties where voters can cast ballots at any polling place in the county. The proposal prompted pushback from counties that said vote centers save taxpayers millions of dollars and make voting more convenient. After a series of compromises bill retains the required 12-day early voting period, but starts it later, and eliminates a three-day gap between the end of early voting and Election Day.

That schedule gives voters an extra weekend of access to early voting. And the bill requires that voting be available for nine hours on Sundays, instead of six, and that voting be open on any holidays during the early voting period. But the changes mean that partial vote tallies from the early ballots, which are typically released shortly after polls close on Election Day, won't be

available until later, when all polling locations have closed and reported tallies.

Some election officials said the changes would require hiring additional election workers to work longer hours, as well as more voting equipment and possibly extra polling locations. Counties would have to cover those costs, as the state didn't allocate additional funding.

Proof of citizenship won't be required to register to vote in Texas

SB 16 was among the most sweeping proof-of-citizenship proposals for voters introduced anywhere in the country, applying not only to new applicants for voter registration but also retroactively to 18.6 million voters on the rolls. Voting rights advocates warned that the bill would disenfranchise eligible voters, and discourage future voters by making registration and voting more burdensome. But SB 16 and its companion in the House missed a key deadline and died without a full House vote, so the bill, a key Republican priority, didn't get a floor vote.

Curbside voting will be more restricted

Under current law, if a voter is "physically unable to enter the polling place," the voter can ask that an election worker bring a ballot to the entrance of the polling place or to a car parked at a designated spot. The law requires all polling sites to offer such curbside voting.

In the past year, some election officials noticed more voters using curbside voting. A legislator told the House Committee on Elections that he was concerned about potential misuse of the practice. A law now requires anyone using curbside voting to sign a form swearing under penalty of perjury that they are unable to enter the polling place without personal assistance or a likelihood of injuring their health.

In addition, as a check against potential misuse, the bill requires election officials to ask anyone providing transportation to a user of curbside voting whether they have done so for multiple voters. The transportation provider will need to sign a form, with their name and address, stating that they are assisting a voter. Failing to fill out such forms will be a Class A misdemeanor, punishable by up to a year in jail or a fine of up to \$4,000.

Voting by mail will get a little easier with new processes for handling errors, more legible instructions

After Texas' overhaul of election law in 2021, which created new ID requirements for voting by mail, more voters across the state saw their mail-ballot applications or ballots being rejected because of errors. The 2021 law created a process for voters to correct errors on mail ballot applications and to track online whether the application has been received and processed. This year's legislation was meant to refine that process.

The new law will allow election officials to call and email voters to notify them of errors before their application or ballot is processed, and it allows voters to correct the errors by mail or in person.

Lawmakers also approved a bill requiring the instructions on a vote-by-mail application to be printed in larger type, to make them more legible for people with disabilities and elderly voters. This new law also requires the application to be available in various languages, "appropriate to the demographic composition of this state." Both bills were approved with bipartisan support and are set to take effect in September.

Counties can keep mailing out unsolicited voter registration applications

Lawmakers filed bills to prohibit counties from sending out voter registration forms to people who didn't request them, and bar the use of state money to support such mailings by other groups. The bill passed the Senate but failed to meet key deadlines in the House. The measure was filed in response to moves by two Democratic-led counties to mail out voter registration forms to hundreds of thousands of residents, unsolicited. but the effort sparked a Republican backlash because it could make it easier for ineligible people to register and cast ballots.

Texas won't offer online voter registration

Texas lawmakers held their first hearing in a decade on legislation that would allow people to register online to vote and revamp the state's current paper-based system. But the House legislation missed key deadlines and failed to move forward. At least five similar bills filed this session by Democratic lawmakers did not even get committee hearings.

No guns allowed in polling locations

Bills that would have allowed poll workers to carry concealed handguns inside polling places, or allowed anyone to carry a concealed weapon inside a polling location, stalled. The bills failed to meet key deadlines to move forward.

Attorney general is denied broader powers to prosecute election crimes

Paxton's office won't gain new powers to prosecute election crimes, after the House and Senate failed to work out their differences on how much leeway to grant the state's top legal official in such cases. A House Bill was filed and the Senate passed a version that would have given the attorney general's office the power to unilaterally prosecute local election crimes when a county declines to do so.

Extra funds per student for 2025

Ana Goodwin, Matt Zdun, Isaac Yu, [houstonchronicle.com](https://www.houstonchronicle.com), 8-14/22-25

Texas lawmakers this spring agreed to pump an extra \$8.5 billion into the state's public schools over the next two years. **Most of the new funds are earmarked to specific purposes, such as teacher pay raises, school safety and special education.** For example, the legislation will hike teacher salaries by \$5,000 a year in large districts and \$8,000 in smaller districts. That means many rural districts are set to receive the biggest increases, as lawmakers seek to help them attract more teachers and cover basic overhead costs.

The 2025-26 extra funds per student for Clear Creek ISD with 39,684 students will be \$697, Friendswood ISD with 6265 students will be \$635 and Dickinson ISD with 12,554 students will be \$698.

The above figures are estimated per-student funding amounts based on HB 2, SB 4, and SB 23 and are in addition to what districts already receive under current law. They are projections that could change based on property tax appraisals, new state guidance on the law and local district decisions.

HB 2 is one of the largest one-time investments by lawmakers in public education in recent memory. It benefits rural schools the most through bigger teacher raises and a special small-district allotment. SB 4 and SB 23 cut property taxes and directly influence the amount of money flowing to school districts.

[Chronicle staff writers Yu and Goodwin wrote additional articles pointing out that administrators

across the state note a disconnect between the new state funding and district cuts or proposed tax hikes.]

Texas lawmakers structured the new funding so that most dollars must be spent in targeted areas. And it comes as school districts are trying to overcome years of mounting budget deficits caused by a lapse in federal pandemic-era dollars and a surge in inflation since the last major state funding bump in 2019.

“There are strings attached to almost every dollar,” said Spring Branch ISD superintendent Jennifer Blaine at a recent school board meeting... Of the \$8.5 billion in new funds, roughly 40% is earmarked to raise teacher salaries by roughly \$5,000 a year in larger districts and \$8,000 a year in smaller districts. Many small, rural districts are set to receive the biggest increases, as lawmakers seek to help them attract more teachers and cover basic overhead costs. The bump comes amid widespread agreement among lawmakers and administrators that teachers should be paid more, as their salaries in Texas have lagged the national average. The next largest chunks of the state funding are dedicated to special education, school safety, and early education. There is also a fund of \$500 million to give raises to support staff, like custodians, librarians and counselors.

HD Chambers, president of the Texas School Alliance, a group of 51 large school districts, said he understands why parents and taxpayers may be confused about why the cuts or tax hikes are still coming. “You just got all this money, and now you're asking me for more? They’ve been told how to spend it, [but] there are areas that need money that just aren’t getting covered.”

In response to questions about districts’ concerns, state Multiple administrators say the money lacks the flexibility that past state funding increases have had. That has made it hard to keep alive locally popular programs that the state hasn’t prioritized or reverse the cuts to those programs that districts have already made. Historically, new money approved by the state Legislature has flowed through the “basic allotment,” a flexible funding source that provides districts with a certain amount of money per student to cover a broad swath of costs. This year, lawmakers opted against a large increase to the basic allotment, adding just \$55 per child, in favor of the more targeted approach.

The allotments are tied to the number of students attending schools, so the more students a district has, the more money districts receive. The set up means that districts with declining enrollment, from large suburban

districts like Aldine ISD to smaller rural districts, could continue to see impacts like classroom consolidation or campus closures. Even losing a small amount of students drives funding decreases that make fixed costs like facilities and maintenance hard to afford.

Lawmakers did come up with a last-minute new \$1.2 billion allotment to help schools cover overhead costs like utilities, fuel for school buses, and property insurance. Those items have surged in cost in recent years and are often second on a district’s balance sheet only to payroll, Chambers said. They’re also among the hardest areas to cut.

But the problems also impact fast-growth districts that are currently opening one or several campuses every year, said Martha Salazar-Zamora, superintendent at Tomball ISD. Though her district was able to bring a balanced budget this year in part thanks to the new funding, she expects costs to continue ballooning.

“We did receive money, and we are grateful for the money we've received. But when you look at the cost of doing business, every budget is still being strained,” said Salazar-Zamora.

School administrators largely applauded the hike in teacher pay. But the increase comes with extra administrative costs for which the Legislature didn’t set aside specific funds. **It means districts will need to use a sizable chunk of their budgets to cover increased contributions to employees’ pensions and health insurance associated with raising teacher salaries.**

The extra benefit costs amount to \$75 for every \$1,000 raise a teacher receives, which could reach millions for a large district like Houston ISD. Administrators say the benefits example is one of many where state requirements don’t come with enough dollars to fully see them through.

After the school shooting in Uvalde, lawmakers in 2023 began requiring most districts to have at least one armed school resource officer stationed at every campus. But many schools said the money provided wouldn’t cover the steep costs, so they filed for temporary exemptions to the rule or dipped into other funds to make up the gap. In the school funding bill, lawmakers added another \$430 million for schools to spend on security measures over the next two years, but districts say it still won’t cover the full costs. Paying out of pocket for the required officers can end up eating into the other local programs parents have advocated for.

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