Texas 2036 has rolled out its 2021 legislative agenda, which focuses in on six key policy areas that we believe are top priorities for the 87th Legislative Session: education, workforce, digital connectivity, healthcare, government performance, and budget prioritization.

These six policy areas are interconnected, interdependent, and key to the state’s success. It’s critical that we take action on all of these together.

By making these important investments and reforms, we will be taking crucial steps towards securing a bright and prosperous future for our great state.

**EDUCATION**

**Challenge**
- Only 30% of Texas 4th graders meet grade-level reading standards (NAEP)
- Wide achievement gaps exist among Texas students by race, ethnicity, and income
- The COVID-19 pandemic has caused massive learning loss, especially among low-income students. At Dallas ISD, half of all students experienced learning loss in math and nearly one-third lost ground in reading (MAP)

**Goals**
- Limit and remediate COVID-related learning loss
- Close achievement gaps that pre-dated COVID among Texas students
- Protect and implement evidence-based public school reforms

**Policy Toolkit**
- Protect funding for HB 3 and other critical, evidence-based reforms
- Defend student assessment and district accountability and adapt them to new, COVID-related challenges
- Expand student eligibility for expanded and innovative school year models
- Support stronger literacy instruction in Texas schools
- Increase access to high-quality teaching and tutoring
- Expand access to advanced courses such as Algebra I in 8th grade and Algebra II in high school
- Expand access to high-quality, online AP and IB courses, especially for low-income and rural students

**WORKFORCE**

**Challenge**
- By 2036, 71% of jobs in Texas will require at least some postsecondary experience
- Only 32% of Texas high school graduates earn a postsecondary degree or credential within 6 years
- Only 27% of native Texans have at least a bachelor’s degree, compared to more than 40% of migrants

**Goals**
- Remove barriers for Texans to attaining postsecondary degrees and credentials
- Align Texas’s education and workforce systems to the needs of the workforce

**Policy Toolkit**
- Establish meta-majors and stackable micro-credentials in Texas postsecondary institutions
- Create integrated education and workforce data systems that enable shared goal setting and stronger program evaluation
- Strengthen accountability for postsecondary institutions and programs based on student outcomes
- Establish funding models for postsecondary institutions that encourage better student outcomes and closer program alignment to workforce needs
- Ensure that dual credit offerings in Texas are high-quality, aligned to postsecondary degrees and credentials, and accessible to students of all backgrounds
- Strengthen credit transfer among institutions through common course numbering within higher education regions
### HEALTHCARE

**Challenge**
- Coverage – Before the pandemic, 18% of Texans were uninsured
- Affordability – Even among insured Texas families, more than half skipped or delayed health care due to cost
- Access – 78% of Texas counties have been designated Health Professional Shortage Areas, and 74 counties do not have a hospital

**Goals**
- Increase the number of Texans with options for affordable health insurance
- Address out of control health care prices
- Improve and modernize the options for rural Texans to access primary and emergency care

**Policy Toolkit**
- Coverage
  - Consider all options on the table
- Affordability
  - Improve health price disclosure laws
  - Remove barriers for benefit plans to provide cost and quality information to enrollees
  - Reform health insurance for Teacher Retirement System of Texas (TRS) and Employees Retirement System of Texas (ERS)
  - Address anti-competitive behavior
- Access
  - Remove barriers to telemedicine use
  - Allow independent practice for nurse practitioners in primary care shortage areas
  - Implement the Texas A&M Health Science Center (TAMHSC) Rural and Community Health Institute (ARCHI) rural health reforms

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### GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE

**Challenge**
- Fewer than 20% of agencies report significant progress in areas like data analytics, management and governance, and nearly half of the employees at the agency tasked with modernizing state technology are set to retire in the next three years

**Goals**
- Modernize government technology and data capacity
- Ensure that the state has the right people in place to solve modern problems
- Update state contracting

**Policy Toolkit**
- Create stable IT funding
- Improve agency data sharing
- Improve health data infrastructure
- Improve state hiring and benefits
- Modernize state contracting

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### DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY

**Challenge**
- Nearly 1 million rural Texans lack broadband infrastructure, and more than 3 million urban-area households do not subscribe to available high-speed internet that chokes access to 21st century services like remote learning and telemedicine

**Goals**
- Improve state broadband planning
- Coordinate local, federal, and private-sector efforts to improve broadband deployment
- Find the sweet spot for the Texas regulatory environment to promote market principles
- Find new pathways to stable funding

**Policy Toolkit**
- Create/adopt state broadband plan
- Create state broadband office
- Pursue market reforms and incentives
- Identify stable funding streams
- Pursue public-private partnerships

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### BUDGET PRIORITIZATION

**Challenge**
- Texas currently projects a $4.6 billion budget shortfall, on top of health, education, and pension cost growth

**Goals**
- Focus legislative attention on long-term needs
- Raise awareness of the long-term structural imbalances that can arise from a depleted tax base and unfunded liabilities

**Policy Toolkit**
- Prioritize long-term needs in budget debate
- Urge restraint and additional analysis for tax exemptions
- Address the state’s growing pension liability

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Texas 2036 is a non-profit organization building state-wide support for sustained, data-driven planning and policy efforts. Our ambition is to enable Texans to make policy decisions through accessible data, long-term planning and statewide engagement.

For more information, visit [www.texas2036.org](http://www.texas2036.org).