



## Texas House District 19 – Kodi Sawin Candidate Survey Responses

See survey at <https://teachthevote.atpe.org/Candidates/Kodi-Elizabeth-Sawin>

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### RESPONSES TO THE 2024 ATPE CANDIDATE SURVEY:

#### 1. If elected, what are your top priorities for public education?

To continue to compete in the global economy, Texas must recognize that our public schools are critical infrastructure that must prepare students for today and tomorrow's workforce challenges.

Start with the fundamentals:

- Provide competitive salaries and incentivize retention for professional public educators
- Pay teachers to match professional training and development. I keep hearing how Texas is number #1 in everything—well, let's be #1 in teacher pay
- Ensure the State of Texas pays its fair share for school finance funding mechanisms, including CPI (inflation adjusted) metrics
- No more unfunded mandates and fund the ones that exist
- Get politics out of the classroom. The political interference by state politicians needs to end. I trust our teachers to teach, our parents to parent, and our students to learn.

#### 2. Voucher programs take many forms (tax credits, scholarships, education savings accounts, etc.) and are either universal or aimed at specific subpopulations (special education students, low-income students, students attending schools with poor A-F accountability ratings, etc.). Would you vote to create a voucher program of any type to pay for students to attend non-public K-12 schools, such as private or home schools?

I am opposed to the creation of any voucher program in Texas. Private school voucher implementation will drain money from an underfunded public school system. Vouchers undermine the ability of public schools to provide a quality education for all children in Texas. Public schools are the heart of our communities in Texas. I will join the non-partisan opposition to school vouchers that has existed in Texas for decades.

Public schools are critical public infrastructure. The Texas Legislature, throughout many sessions, has been adversarial to providing the state's fair share of school funding—further pushing down the cost of schools to local school districts by extension, local property taxpayers, both homeowners and renters.

Vouchers should never be considered when there is no predictable, stable source of school funding originating at the state level. Further, vouchers should never be considered until private and charter schools are held to the same account and have the same requirements as public schools.

**3. In 2023, the Texas Legislature passed House Bill (HB) 3 requiring a number of new school safety measures. However, many believe the Legislature did not adequately increase funding to cover the cost of the mandates in HB 3 or other locally adopted school safety measures. How would you work to make schools safer and ensure such initiatives are properly funded?**

In the aftermath of Uvalde, the Legislature required districts to post an armed security guard at every school and provide mental health training to certain employees. The Legislature provided \$15,000 per campus and \$10 per student to accomplish this. With the lack of new funding for public schools, there is simply not enough money for many districts to implement these changes without cutting the existing budget.

In the last session, Governor Abbott and Republican leadership tied increased school security funding to the passage of school vouchers. I would quit playing games with the safety of our students and pass increased school security funding without making it contingent on the passage of vouchers.

**4. Despite a record-breaking surplus of \$38 billion during the 2023 legislative session, school funding formulas were not increased to keep pace with inflation since they were last adjusted in 2019. Do you believe Texas public schools should receive additional funding? If so, how should the state pay for it?**

I would make sure that school districts are funded properly. The Legislature has not increased the basic allotment for public education since 2019 and the results have been budget cuts, school closings, and the inability of districts to properly pay their teachers. The governor's own Teacher Vacancy Task Force said increasing the basic allotment was their top recommendation since it would provide substantial compensation and benefits increases for teachers.

**5. Texas has faced growing teacher shortages in recent years, with many schools hiring uncertified teachers to fill the gaps. How would you work to ensure Texas public schools have an adequate number of trained and certified teachers?**

I support recommendations from the Teacher Vacancy Task Force. The Teacher Vacancy Task Force released its final report after a year of work at the end of February, including the following:

- increasing teacher salaries by increasing the Basic Allotment,
- revising the minimum salary schedule and
- expanding the Teacher Incentive Allotment (TIA)

I do not support hiring uncertified teachers to make up for a shortage of teachers caused by the leadership at the Texas Capitol through un- or under-funded state mandates, short-shifting teachers on pay, and making public schools a partisan football during election season to appease out-of-state billionaires.

**6. Inadequate compensation hampers the recruitment and retention of high-quality educators. Do you support a state-funded across-the-board pay raise for all Texas educators?**

Yes.

**7. The high cost of health insurance available to educators is a significant factor decreasing their take-home pay. How would you address the challenge of rising health care costs facing Texas educators and ensure access to affordable health care?**

As a member of the Legislature, I would support the continued use of money from the state budget to reduce or prevent premium increases for active and retired educators.

**8. What do you feel is the proper role of standardized testing in the Texas public education system? For instance, should student test scores be used as a metric in determining teacher pay, school accountability ratings, evaluating teachers, measuring student progress, etc.?**

There is valuable information to be gained from testing. Some testing is essential to measuring schools' performance, particularly among specific student populations. Much can be learned from accurate test results to inform school improvement.

However, Texas must move away from the current testing system with high-stakes penalties for educators, students, and families based on a single test score as the indicator of success.

**9. In your opinion, what is the proper balance between accommodating an individual parent's or student's wishes and the taxpaying community's interest in directing and maintaining an optimal educational environment for the student population as a whole?**

The only response I can give in earnest is that I will not make our public schools a partisan issue. I have watched communities divide over the debates of individual vs. community. That is simply an untenable situation for our school's teachers and staff. I would hope to play a leadership role in bringing differing views to the table to determine a list of community priorities and the role of schools. We can plan and prioritize accordingly.

To reiterate, schools are critical infrastructure to support our economy. We all benefit when local communities lead the way.

**10. Do you believe the Teacher Retirement System (TRS) should be maintained as a traditional defined-benefit pension plan for all future, current, and retired educators, or do you support converting TRS to a defined-contribution structure that is more like a 401(k) plan, in which future benefits are not guaranteed?**

I do not see a compelling financial reason to abandon defined-benefit pensions.

**11. State law allows educators and other public employees to voluntarily choose to join professional associations such as ATPE and have membership dues deducted from their paychecks at no cost to taxpayers. Do you support or oppose letting all public employees continue to exercise this right?**

I do support voluntary contributions.