



FINN Partners' State of Education Marketing: Texas

A Guide for Education Marketers Navigating the Texas K-12 Market
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“Texas, like many states, is in the midst of a tectonic shift in its education policy landscape. Marketers need to understand that as the state moves away from a narrow focus on public schools and embraces an approach that includes greater school choice, highly-structured curriculum, and legally fraught cultural debates, they are entering a new reality of opportunities and risks. Trusted marketing and communications partners will win on nuanced and thoughtful solutions that meet customer and community needs in real time.”

– Marina Stenos, Managing Partner, Global Education, FINN Partners

Executive Summary

The Texas K-12 education sector, like many states, is in a period of transformation and transition, presenting a dynamic landscape for product and service providers. This guide synthesizes key findings from state-level reports, cross-district analyses, and a 12-month media review, conducted in August 2025, to better equip education marketers with actionable intelligence.

Important takeaways feature the considerable alignment between state and district priorities in critical areas: teacher compensation and retention, special education reform, and school safety. Additionally, the introduction of the upcoming statewide Education Savings Account (ESA), a voucher program which allows parents to use taxpayer funds to pay for private school tuition, homeschooling resources, or other educational expenses, is notable. ESA adds a new layer of complexity for districts, which stand to lose funding, while simultaneously establishing a parallel, potentially well-funded market of private and homeschool buyers.

Recent legislative redistricting efforts in Texas are also worth noting. While school district boundaries remain unchanged, new legislative maps may change which elected officials represent a district's schools and the population demographics of their

constituencies. This important shift will affect school districts and marketers seeking to provide services and products due to the potential changes of the political and demographic makeup of the communities being served.

To succeed, marketers must adopt a flexible, multi-pronged strategy:

- 1. Align with unified priorities:** Focus offerings on shared, well-funded mandates like teacher support; academic improvement; special education; College, Career, and Military Readiness (CCMR); and comprehensive school safety.
- 2. Acknowledge differing realities:** Tailor messaging and sales pitches to address the unique financial and cultural situations of large, medium, and small districts.
- 3. Address the Public vs. Private market shift:** Diversify strategies to serve both the public school system and the growing private / homeschool market empowered by ESA funds.

This report is designed to help you navigate these dynamics by providing the insights and tactics necessary to position your company as a trusted, valued and strategic partner in the future of Texas education.

Get to Know Texas:

State Education Background



Population Breakdown

1,200

Independent School Districts (ISDs) + Charters

5,600,000

Public + Charter School Enrollment (2024/25)

~340,000

Private School Enrollment (unofficial)



Public School Demographics

51% Hispanic / Latino

28% White

12% Black / African American

4% Asian

5% Other



State Basic Allotment

\$6,215

(per-student funding) for 2025-26:



School Calendar

Earliest District Start Date: Mid-June

Typical District Start Date: Mid-August

Latest District End Date: Early June

Typical District End Date: Mid-May



Texas State-Level Education Priorities: Teacher Talent, Safety, and ESAs

At a time of increased state-level oversight in Texas education, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and the state legislature are driving a strategic and well-funded agenda that sets the tone for the entire K-12 system.

Key Legislative and Funding Initiatives

The passage of House Bill 2 (HB2) has been described as the most transformative education plan in Texas history. This budget was passed in May 2025 and is directed toward several key areas starting in the 2025/26 academic year:

- **Teacher Compensation and Retention:** Teacher pay is a major focus, with billions allocated to provide ongoing raises of \$2,500-\$8,000 for experienced teachers, depending on district size. The Teacher Retention Allotment (TRA) alone increased by 50% to \$150 million annually.
- **Special Education Reform:** The funding model is undergoing a notable structural overhaul, shifting from a time-based model to an “intensity-based” one that accounts for individual student needs. Instead of providing funding based on how much time a student is in a program (time-based), Texas will now give money based on the student’s specific and intensive needs (intensity-based). This allows for a more precise alignment of funding with the actual services a student requires and is backed by an additional \$850 million in funding.
- **School Safety:** The School Safety Allotment has roughly doubled to \$21.10 per student, suggesting the state is committed to creating secure learning environments.
- **The Education Savings Account (ESA) Program:** This statewide school choice initiative, beginning in the 2026-2027 school year, may significantly change Texas education dynamics. It will provide families with more than \$10,000 per child for private school tuition or educational expenses, potentially creating

a rapidly expanding parallel market for private and homeschool education. Capped at \$1 billion for the first year, there is no spending limit in the following years.

Texas Education Agency (TEA) Strategic Goals: CCMR and Increased State Control

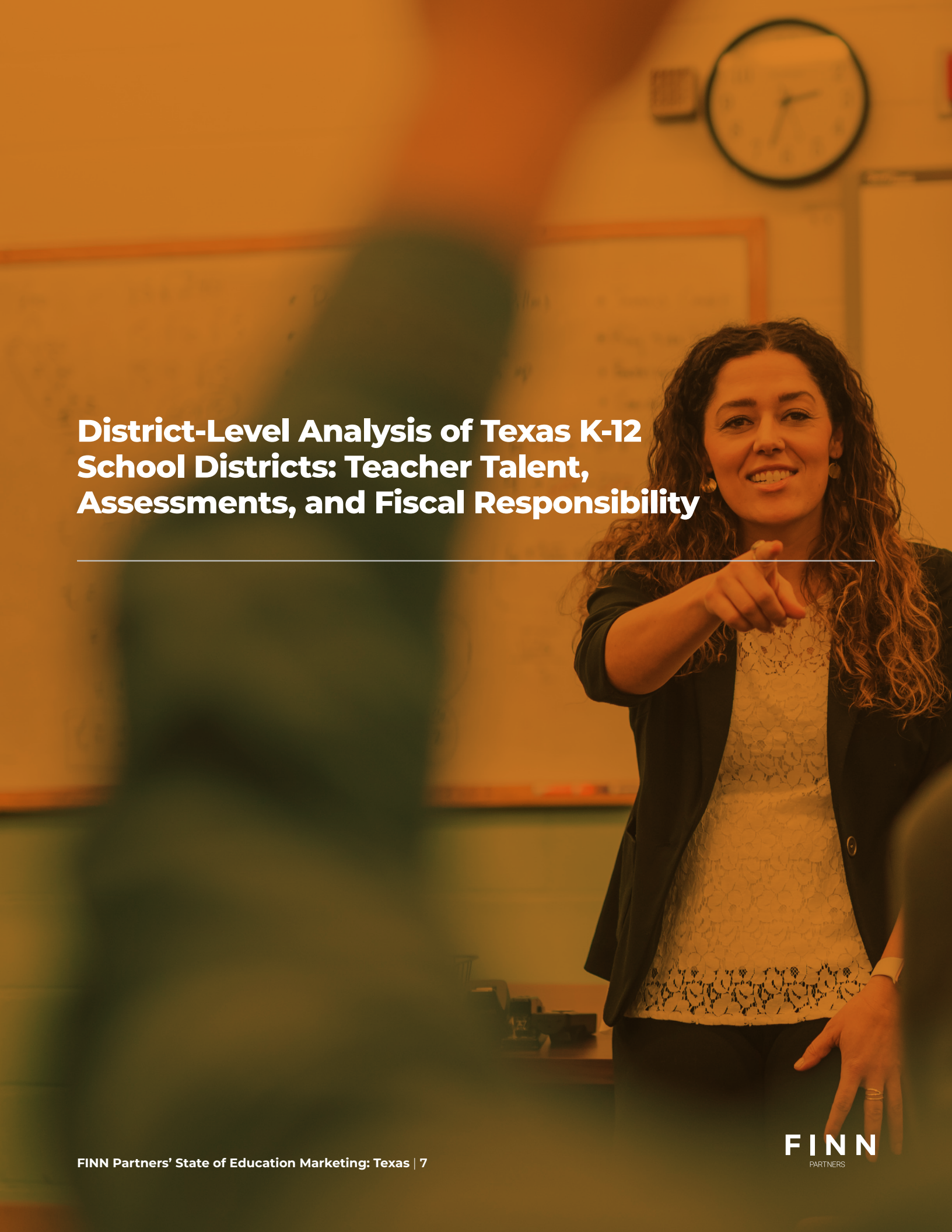
In addition to the above specific investments and initiatives, the state's priorities are guided by a clear, overarching vision: College, Career, and Military Readiness (CCMR). This vision extends beyond traditional academic achievement to encompass a comprehensive set of skills for diverse post-secondary pathways.

In 2023, Texas established the “Bluebonnet Learning” initiative, which signaled a move towards more state control of local education. It involves the state’s development and deployment of instructional materials to build foundational skills in reading and mathematics. While this centralized approach limits opportunities for core curriculum providers, it provides opportunities for supplemental and intervention products, and professional development offerings tied to implementing state materials.

Implications for Education Businesses

These legislative and strategic actions are driven by public concerns and systemic challenges. The state is engaged in an educator “talent war,” with persistent teacher shortages and high turnover rates, especially in rural districts. And the state’s investment in CCMR reflects a broader economic imperative to prepare a skilled workforce.

For marketers, this means positioning products and services as solutions that directly address the high-stakes issues of accountability, talent retention, and economic development through CCMR.



District-Level Analysis of Texas K-12 School Districts: Teacher Talent, Assessments, and Fiscal Responsibility

While state mandates create a foundation, realities within Texas’s school districts are shaped by their size and unique circumstances. We reviewed a cross-section of Texas ISDs—small, medium, large, urban, suburban, and rural—to determine commonalities and differences that will help businesses tailor their marketing and sales approach to different environments.

Common Challenges and Goals Across All Districts

Regardless of size, all districts share a set of universal strategic priorities, established by the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills Standards (TEKS)—adopted in 1997 and updated in 2021 (science), 2022 (technology) and 2023-24 (CTE)—signaling a strong, unified market demand in these areas:

- **High-Quality Staff:** Attracting and retaining high-quality teachers and staff is the most consistent priority across all district enrollment sizes, often linked to competitive compensation and professional development.
- **Student Achievement:** All districts have goals to improve student performance on state assessments (STAAR/EOC) and increase the percentage of graduates who are CCMR.
- **Fiscal Responsibility:** Many districts, both large and small, are focused on managing deficits and ensuring long-term financial sustainability.
- **“Whole Child” Development:** There is a consistent emphasis on “whole child development,” “social-emotional learning,” and student well-being. However, there is also an ongoing tension between the recognized

importance of holistic development and creating robust, measurable KPIs.

- **One Surprise:** Districts did not frequently mention chronic absenteeism (defined as a student missing 10% of the school year with both excused or unexcused absences), a notable national challenge in recent years. It is estimated that Texas’ chronic absenteeism stands at 20%.

Deep Dive: Large Urban & Suburban Districts

Large districts in Texas (enrollment over 25,000) often face a complex financial paradox. While many large urban districts have strong economies and tax bases, they are burdened by massive recapture payments to the state (see sidebar). These payments are a primary driver of financial challenges and projected deficits. In response, these districts are actively streamlining central administration and reallocating resources to classrooms—a “central to campus” shift.

Several of the new Texas education policies do currently face legal challenges, with lawsuits and court battles primarily focused on issues of religious freedom, DEI bans, and the state’s accountability system. Critics argue that new policies blur the lines between church and state and violate First Amendment rights.

In practical terms, initiatives like those run by the newly renamed Office of School Improvement, which formerly ran various racial equity efforts, continue to look for ways to provide culturally responsive programming while staying within compliance of current policies.



Deep Dive: Medium-Sized Districts

Medium-sized districts (enrollment 5,000–24,999) demonstrate a strong focus on Career and Technical Education (CTE) and community partnerships. Many districts in this category are experiencing shrinking General Fund revenues and are actively consolidating schools or seeking cost-saving innovations to manage deficits. Their budget priorities are often centered on investing in specialized programs and targeted professional learning to maintain a competitive edge. Because they are often located in suburban areas, they face educator and staff recruitment competition from both nearby larger and smaller districts.

Deep Dive: Small Districts

Small districts (enrollment under 5,000) face amplified versions of statewide challenges. Teacher recruitment and retention is a particularly acute issue, with many districts offering lower salaries and struggling with a limited local talent pool. Nearly 75% of new hires in rural areas for the 2023-24 school year were unlicensed, indicating an urgent need for better recruitment and upskilling, and an opportunity for vendors of those services.

Some small districts champion “local control and flexibility” through “District of Innovation” (DOI) status. The DOI program allows public school districts to gain flexibility from certain state education mandates, similar to charter school waivers. Recent legislation has begun to limit the exemptions districts can seek, however, and there is growing concern that increased state control over K-12 education in Texas could threaten the program.

Unpacking Recapture Payments

Recapture is a Texas school funding model introduced in 1993. It is designed to equalize funding among school districts. “Property-wealthy” districts, those with a high property tax base per student, are required to send a portion of their local property tax revenue to the state. The state then “recaptures” these funds and redistributes them to “property-poor” districts.

Texas’ largest districts, including Houston, Dallas, and Austin, typically face significant recapture payments.

An overhead view of a classroom with three students at their desks. The student on the left is a woman with blonde hair wearing a yellow sweater, using a silver laptop. The student in the middle is a woman with dark hair in a bun wearing a light blue shirt, using a tablet. The student on the right is a woman with dark hair wearing a white sweater, using a black laptop. Each desk has various school supplies like folders and pens. The floor is made of light-colored wood.

Education Media Coverage in Texas: Accountability, Workforce Crisis, and Governance Shifts

To understand which education topics Texans are exposed to most, we analyzed state, metropolitan, and rural news outlets from the past year (July 2024-July 2025), identifying several themes that are shaping the discourse and priorities of Texas K-12 education. These themes provide marketers with timely insight into what is most important to districts, parents, and the public.

Dominant News Coverage Themes

The most-covered topics closely align with the state and local priorities we outlined above:

- **Accountability, Assessment, and Ratings:**

The news cycle was consistently dominated by debates over the state's A-F accountability ratings for individual schools and the STAAR test. Legal challenges and delays in releasing ratings underscored the intense pressure on districts to demonstrate success. News reports highlighted that Houston ISD and Austin ISD, for example, faced state intervention due to poor performance. Districts are incentivized to seek solutions that can tangibly improve student outcomes and school ratings that will garner positive coverage.

- **Teacher Workforce Crisis:** A critical and persistent theme was the “talent war.” News outlets reported on teacher shortages, high turnover rates (especially in Houston ISD), and the reliance on unlicensed teachers in rural areas. The move towards performance-based pay, as seen in a lawsuit against Houston ISD, also created friction. This shows that

districts are in urgent need of solutions that reduce teacher workload, provide professional development, enhance well-being, and aid in recruitment and retention.

- **School Finance and Budgetary Uncertainty:**

Media coverage highlighted a landscape of financial uncertainty. Many districts faced budget deficits, and federal funding cuts led to program cancellations. This means districts scrutinize every purchase and are receptive to solutions that offer cost savings, efficiency, or alignment with specific bond projects.

- **Student Well-being and Safety:**

Student mental health and physical safety were prominent topics. News reports covered a lawsuit against social media companies over youth mental health and the development of new safety technologies, such as drones for active shooter response. This reflects a holistic approach to student needs, creating a market for products that integrate physical security with mental health support and counseling.

- **Policy, Legislation, and Governance**

Shifts: News repeatedly covered new state mandates, including a statewide cell phone ban and a law requiring the display of the Ten Commandments in classrooms, which is being challenged in federal court in San Antonio. The ongoing debate over school voucher programs and leadership changes in districts under state intervention (like Houston ISD) highlighted a trend of increased state control. Districts are likely to need solutions that help them navigate and comply with new state directives and a changing political landscape.

A young man and woman are smiling and looking at a laptop in a library. The man is on the left, wearing a grey t-shirt and a smartwatch, pointing at the screen. The woman is on the right, wearing glasses and a dark polka-dot top, also smiling. The background is a bookshelf filled with books, and the lighting is warm and yellow.

Adapting Your Marketing Approach to Align with Texas Strategic Priorities

To succeed in Texas' large and varied market, businesses need strategies that are universal enough to address common needs across the state, and flexible enough to adapt to local nuance.

First, Align Your Messaging with Common Statewide Concerns

Focus your broad messaging on these key areas:

- **Teacher Support and Professional Development:** Given the widespread teacher shortages and high turnover, solutions that ease teacher workload, provide high-quality professional development, and support instruction that meets performance metrics are key. District leaders understand that they cannot continuously fund substantial pay raises. Connect with them by showing how your offerings can tangibly improve educator satisfaction by making their days easier, more productive, and more enjoyable.
 - **Academic Improvement:** With intense focus on accountability, prospects will prioritize offerings that demonstrably improve student outcomes in core subjects, particularly in math, where scores lag behind pre-pandemic levels. Efficacy studies, testimonials, and case studies showing improvement in similar districts will have the best success. The continuous focus on A-F ratings and STAAR performance, coupled with the threat of state takeovers, reflects that Texas K-12 schools operate under intense public and state scrutiny regarding student outcomes.
- Consequently, districts will prioritize products and services that can clearly demonstrate a measurable, positive impact on student achievement.
- **Fiscal Efficiency and Funding Maximization:** In an environment of budget deficits and fluctuating federal funds, position your products as cost-saving, efficiency-enhancing tools. All proposals should clearly articulate a strong return on investment.
 - **Student Well-being and Safety:** With the School Safety Allotment now twice as large, marketers should highlight how their solutions improve physical security and/or mental health support. If your solution isn't directly tied to those areas, emphasize how it leads to better student behavior or enhances classroom management—key contributors to safer classrooms.
 - **Workforce Readiness and CTE:** Align your offerings with the state's emphasis on preparing students for the workforce, not just college. Position your products as stepping stones to building academic and vocational readiness, and consider how they help develop skills of the future (like STEM, AI aptitude, and critical thinking).
 - **Special Education:** The new model inherently necessitates more robust and precise assessment tools to accurately determine the intensity of individual student needs. Businesses offering specialized instructional materials, assistive technology, and compliance tracking will be in high demand.

Next, Tailor Your Communications for Different District Types

Prospects can spot a one-size-fits-all approach and know when you haven't taken the time to understand their particular circumstances—particularly in this fast-moving environment. Instead, tailor your messaging and outreach based on a district's specific financial reality and strategic mindset.

For Large Districts: Focus on scalability, data-driven results, and return on investment (ROI) at an enterprise level. Your solutions must demonstrate how they can streamline operations or manage deficits in a financially strained environment. Recapture payments are hitting many district budgets hard, and they are cutting central office staff. How can your solution make administration dollars and resources go further?

For Medium Districts: Emphasize collaborative solutions, ease of implementation, and community-building aspects. Position your products as tools that help manage shrinking revenues while expanding specialized programs like CTE.

For Small Districts: Highlight simplicity, cost-effectiveness, and the potential for a personal, supportive relationship. These districts may have more flexible budgets for expansion, so present your solutions as tools for growth and innovation. Since these districts face some of the most urgent teacher recruitment and retention needs, emphasize how your solution helps attract and retain educators.

Adapt to the Evolving Role of Community Engagement

District leaders recognize that simply communicating is not enough to secure community support. Failed bond referendums in some small and medium districts illustrate the need for engagement that goes beyond sharing information to genuine collaboration and deeper partnerships.

Marketers should consider how their solutions can facilitate this deeper engagement, such as platforms that empower parents, gather stakeholder input, or support community-building initiatives. Support current and future customers by showing them how you've helped other districts win over stakeholders in support of your solution—don't leave them to do the difficult work of persuasion themselves.

El Paso ISD: A Unique Approach to Public Engagement

Due to factors like politicization, failed bond initiatives, and more competition from private schools, some districts are proactively courting more public support.

For example, a long-term goal for El Paso ISD [enrollment 49,000] is the guiding principle: "Public Support: 90%." While most districts focus primarily on internal metrics or student/staff outcomes, "Public Support: 90%" reflects the district's commitment to building strong, trusting relationships with all its stakeholders to ensure the success of its schools and students.

Their efforts include:

- Transparency and communication across channels
- Community partnerships with businesses and non-profits
- Volunteers in Public Schools (VIPs) program

A woman in a grey blazer and white blouse is smiling and giving a high-five to a young girl with braids. They are in a classroom setting. The woman is holding a folder. The background shows other students at desks.

Recommendations and Actionable Steps for Education Marketers

The current federal administration is emphasizing state education governance, and Texas provides one of the largest markets for education businesses looking to efficiently focus their efforts.

To make the most of your Texas marketing efforts, follow these steps:

- 1. Monitor legislative activity and funding cycles as HB2 introduces new complexity and rules.**
- 2. Create district-specific case studies and resources to build relevancy, trust, and credibility.**
- 3. Target districts with approved bond initiatives and structure your pitch accordingly.**
- 4. Prepare for a growing private school landscape with a nuanced understanding of cultural and social norms.**
- 5. Position your solution as a competitive advantage for public schools facing more private competition.**
- 6. Stay current on shifts in language related to culturally responsive education initiatives and update messaging accordingly.**
- 7. Lead with empathy as district administrators have less bandwidth due to “central to campus” downsizing.**

[Visit our website](#) to learn how our decades of education marketing expertise can help drive your impact and growth in Texas and beyond.