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THE TEXAS TRIBUNE

The BRIEF

Good morning, Texas 🌤️ Here's today's Brief

- Can more discipline stop the rise in Texas school violence?
- Texas lawmakers near $8.5 billion school funding deal
- More Texas children are getting the measles vaccine early

Mae Lackey wrote this edition of The Brief.

Classroom violence went up in Texas after the pandemic. Is more discipline the answer?

STORY BY SNEHA DEY

Since schools reopened for in-person learning after the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers say classrooms have become increasingly difficult to manage.

Students are less attentive and more defiant. In some schools, the misconduct has escalated to physical outbursts like throwing chairs, biting and kicking.

That kind of student violence has been increasingly aimed at teachers. More than 3,300 Texas district employees were the target of a student assault in the 2023-24 school year, a 15% increase from the year before. In one of the most severe incidents, an assistant principal in the Corsicana school district was permanently blinded after an assault.

The classroom tensions are pushing overworked and underpaid educators over the edge, who were already leaving the profession in droves.

Lawmakers are trying to fix the problem with a sweeping package that would give school districts more latitude to discipline disruptive students. They're also considering other legislation they say would give teachers more tools to manage their classrooms: a ban on cellphones in schools, a ban on minors creating social media and a mandate to get more teachers on the path to certification, which legislators say would give them better classroom management skills.

"Kids are going to be kids, but I will tell you that it is not compassionate for kids not to have consequences," Rep. **Jeff Leach**, R-Plano, said last month on the House floor during a heated debate on student discipline. "For a student that comes into a classroom and threatens a teacher ... again and again and again ... the compassionate and merciful thing to do is to punish them."

The legislation might not be enough, according to some teachers and school psychologists, who say discipline alone won't meet the mental health needs at the root of students' behavioral challenges.

Read the full story →

+ Texas lawmakers near $8.5 billion school funding deal

House and Senate lawmakers reached a deal on an $8.5 billion funding package for Texas public schools that would preserve the Senate's push for a modest $55 per–student increase to districts' base funding, while giving schools more than $1 billion to pay for fixed costs like utilities and transportation.

The deal, confirmed by three lawmakers familiar with the discussions, appears to strike a compromise for both chambers, which had been divided by the House's bid to give schools a bigger increase in base per-student funding and the Senate's desire to more narrowly prioritize teacher pay raises.

Read the full story →

More Texas children are getting vaccinated early against measles

STORY BY **TERRI LANGFORD**

More Texas parents are opting to vaccinate their babies early against measles, nearly a 4.5-fold increase so far this year compared to 2019, according to the Texas Department of State Health Services.

From January through April, 7,107 children between the ages of 6 months and 11 months were vaccinated for measles, which is typically reserved for infants about to travel internationally or living in a measles outbreak area. Otherwise, doctors usually administer the first dose of the vaccine when they turn 1 year old.

For the same period in 2019, only 1,591 children between 6 months old and 11 months old were vaccinated for measles.

Researchers and public health officials attribute the rise to more awareness and the availability of the earlier vaccination option in a region where there have already been two deaths attributed to measles. They say **parents are more fearful now**.

The increase comes as the state battles a measles outbreak in West Texas, **where 722 cases have been reported**, most of them involving children. It is **the largest outbreak** since 2000.

Read the full story →