

## **TEXAS EDUCATION REFORM**

### **Education – The State’s Most Important Job**

**Texas should have the best public school system in the nation.**

**Instead, we are 43<sup>rd</sup> in per pupil expenditure.**

**Our objective must be to change the priorities of the legislature to put public school funding first.**

Educating our next generation and our workforce is the single most important responsibility of state government. In fact, the Texas Constitution refers to it as “the duty of the legislature”. After decades of neglect, the legislature finally made a small attempt at reforming and improving our school finance system in 2019, but the impact of the COVID pandemic has more than wiped out any gains that might otherwise have been made.

According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress – considered the “gold standard” for determining educational quality, Dallas performed below average compared to other urban districts, to Texas in general and to the overall U.S. average **before** the pandemic hit.

Even more concerning, DISD – and all of Texas – has failed to close the significant performance gaps between students of color and white students or between economically disadvantaged students and their peers. Neither the state nor the district have provided sufficient programs and services to level the playing field.

Then in 2020, DISD average daily attendance dropped by over 15,000 students and still has not recovered. Worse yet, studies indicate that the necessarily hurried switch to virtual education was of limited success in educating many of the students who did attend. Despite the urgency, the Governor Abbott and Republican legislators tried to hold back the federal aid that Democrats in Congress provided, until a massive political backlash forced them to release the funding. While that will help Texas schools develop and offer appropriate programs and services over the next few years, it will run out and the state must step in to continue them.

Testing can be valuable when it is used as a diagnostic tool to help teachers learn where their students’ needs are. This is particularly true in Texas, which has an extremely high mobility rate and large percentages of disadvantaged and English language learner students. When state tests were first adopted in 1984, they were given at the beginning of the year to provide background on students new to the school and district and to evaluate the impact of the “summer slide” caused by ten weeks

with no ongoing education. This also prevented wasting time on “teaching to the test” and evaluated real learning, rather than cramming.

When I previously served in the Legislature, state formula funding for community colleges, together with a low state-regulated tuition, was expected to cover all of a college’s operating costs, with local property taxes only needed to provide facilities. Now, the Republicans have shifted much of the cost to property taxes, with the state and a much higher tuition about equally covering the remainder. Not only has tuition soared, Texas provides very little financial aid for community college students. While we pay a college tax rate of about 12½ cents in Dallas, one third of property in Texas pays no college taxes. Eliminating the freeloaders would raise enough to make tuition free while reducing our property tax rates.



*Woodrow Wilson High School*



*Geneva Heights Elementary*

## **TEXAS EDUCATION REFORM**

### **What we must do:**

- Fix the school finance system to provide school districts like DISD with sufficient funding for programs that assure all of our students receive an appropriate education.
- Provide sufficient revenue to provide salaries that attract and retain the best and brightest as teachers.
- Eliminate the high-stakes testing system that grinds the joy out of learning, wastes precious time on “teaching to the test” and demoralizes our educators.
- Properly fund community colleges to meet our education and workforce training needs and make them tuition free.

### **Fixing the school finance system**

- State funding for English language learners (ELL) (10% more, 15% in dual language programs) is still drastically below the 40% that numerous studies have indicated is minimally necessary to provide appropriate education programs and services for ELL students.
- Funding for special education students is still based on the outmoded “instructional arrangements” weights adopted in 1984 and is totally inadequate for providing appropriate services and assistance to special needs students in the modern primarily mainstreamed environment.
- HB3 improperly eliminated the Cost of Education Index, which recognized that it costs more to employ educational personnel of all types in communities like Dallas than in many other parts of the state. It should have instead been updated and a replacement is sorely needed to adequately fund Dallas schools.
- Index the basic allotment to cover property value growth, helping schools meet inflation and new mandates and preventing the continued shifting of the burden onto local property taxes.

### **Raise teacher pay**

- Average teacher salaries in Texas are more than \$7 thousand below the national average, according to the National Education Association. Texas must adopt a plan to raise pay at least to that level over the next five years.
- Competitive wages in Dallas are well above average in Texas and districts like DISD with high concentrations of disadvantage students must pay even more to compete with wealthier suburban districts. The state must reinstate an updated cost of education index to provide DISD and similar districts with sufficient funding to pay those wages.

### **Eliminate high-stakes testing**

- Move testing back to the beginning of the school year!!
- Stop using test scores as a bludgeon.
- Stop basing salaries on test scores.

### **Properly fund community colleges**

- Restore state funding at least sufficient to cover operating costs.
- Require all property in Texas to help pay for community colleges.
- Make community colleges tuition free.
- Adjust the funding formulas to properly fund the higher costs of educating disadvantaged and non-traditional students.