

Rhetoric Is Clouding the Facts

Legislature Must Be Cautious of Distortions

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With a looming deadline on public school finance, lawmakers and the general public must let facts—not rhetoric—guide important decisions affecting education spending and taxes.

Though the State Supreme Court found the current funding level adequate, some are calling for a tax system that provides even more revenues to spend on public education.

The following facts, culled from international, national, and state sources, demonstrate that Texas' system of public education does not suffer from a funding crisis. Indeed, the problems plaguing public schools in Texas and around the country stem from a performance crisis that additional spending will simply not solve.

Given the funding levels already in place, there is no correlation between any increase in education spending and greater student achievement.

As the United States Goes, So Goes Texas

- Across the U.S. and Texas, inflation-adjusted per-pupil expenditures more than tripled from 1960 to 2001; over the same period, academic achievement remained flat;
- The U.S. spends 40 percent more per pupil on public education than the average country in the 30-nation Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (including Europe and several developed Asian nations), yet ranks near the bottom on measures of academic achievement;

- The U.S. spends more per student than all but three OECD countries—only Switzerland, Luxembourg, and Norway spend more;
- Korea—a nation that only recently rose above third-world status—spends half what the U.S. does per student, yet comes in 13 places ahead of the U.S. on an international math assessment;
- Many nations' students, including Japan, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and most of Europe, perform better than U.S. students despite significantly lower spending; and
- Even with lower per-student expenditures, Korea pays its teachers about 10 percent more than their American counterparts.

And in Texas...

- Texas' education system costs more than \$10,000 annually per student;
- Texas ranks 2nd among the 10 most populous states, or 12th among all 50 states, in K-12 total revenues and receipts per student when adjusted for cost of living;
- Of those Texas high school students who take the ACT, only 17 percent demonstrate they are ready for college;
- Spending per student has increased by at least one-fifth in each of the last three decades in Texas, over and above increases for inflation and enrollment;

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- SAT scores have risen only one point over the past 10 years;
- Using the most generous of calculations, barely 60 percent of each education dollar reaches the classroom;
- Approximately half of all students in Texas public universities and colleges need remedial classes;
- Despite ranking near the top in every measure of per-student spending, Texas students boast the 3rd-lowest SAT scores, and the 8th-lowest ACT scores among the 50 states;
- In 2003, Texas ranked third among the 50 states in public education expenditures as a percent of total state expenditures—27 percent of the total state budget;
- If Texas' student/teacher ratio (currently 15:1) were that of 1969 (24:1), the average teacher salary, at today's spending level, would exceed \$70,000;
- There is currently one non-teacher for every teacher in Texas public schools, a non-teacher to teacher ratio that is 20 percent higher than for the nation as a whole;
- For any given number of students, Texas employs 8 percent more teachers than the national average;
- From 1995 to 2001, the number of school employees for a given number of students increased by 14 percent. At the same time, the inflation-adjusted expenditures per student increased by roughly the same percentage. This implies that all additional funds applied to public education in Texas have basically been for the purpose of paying additional personnel; and
- At the current rate, in 42 years there will be one public education employee for every public education pupil.

While the legislature must act on the Court's ruling to remedy the unconstitutional statewide property tax, adding more taxpayer money into the system should not be considered a priority.

Schools will be improved when fundamental reforms shift more resources to the classroom and allow teachers and administrators to emphasize academic effectiveness.

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Sources: ACT, Inc.; College Board; National Center for Education Statistics; National Report Card on Higher Education; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development; Trends in International Math and Science Study; Texas Education Agency; and Texas Public Policy Foundation calculations.

