



SB 723

Testimony Before the Texas Senate Committee on Education

by James Quintero, Director

My name is James Quintero, and I am the director of the Think Local Liberty project at the Texas Public Policy Foundation. Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee today. I am here to testify in support of [Senate Bill 723](#).

As many of you may know, superintendents are some of the highest paid public employees in Texas.

After reviewing the Texas Education Agency's [Superintendent Salary Database](#), I've observed the following:

- There are more than 800-plus superintendents who earn six figures;
- Approximately 350 superintendents earn more than the Texas governor (\$150,000);
- Almost 100 superintendents earn \$250,000 or more; and
- At least 3 superintendents earn more than the president of the United States. Those include administrators in Cypress-Fairbanks, Grand Prairie, and Lake Travis ISDs.

Of course, those amounts account for only the superintendent's base salary. When fringe benefits, deferred compensation, and severance payments are accounted for, then many of those aggregate statistics get even larger.

Now, I'm not here to debate whether supersized salaries are a good thing or a bad thing, but rather to say that **large compensation packages demand maximum transparency**.

To punctuate the point and further illustrate its importance, consider the recent controversy in La Joya ISD.

Last year, it came to light that La Joya ISD spent \$20 million to build a water park, with much of the funding coming courtesy of state taxpayers. In the aftermath of that revelation, district officials encouraged the superintendent to "retire," and she did.

However, as a condition of her departure, trustees awarded the superintendent an overly generous severance payment that was initially kept secret.

When local media learned of the payment and tried to get details on it, trustees "[refused to answer the questions about whether or not they approved a severance package that day](#)." It was only after several weeks of persistence that the *Progress Times* was able to obtain the documents.

Having learned of some of the terms of the arrangement, I can understand why officials sought to keep it out of the public's view.

According to the deal, La Joya ISD's outgoing superintendent—again, who was pushed out because of a huge spending controversy—was given:

- A severance package totaling \$467,000. Of that, \$319,069 was awarded on the basis of salary, while \$148,240 was given as compensation for 105 unused leave and vacation days.
- A new job. She is currently listed as the "[Transition Assistant to the Interim or Acting Superintendent](#)."

Situations like this are not unique to La Joya ISD. Many other school districts, including Katy, Grand Prairie, Garland, and others, have become embroiled in high-profile spending controversies involving their own superintendents. And that's a key reason why I believe we need SB 723.

With legislation like SB 723 in place, Texans can shine a stronger light on soaring superintendent salaries, bonuses, and other taxpayer-funded goodies.

Thank you for your time. I look forward to answering any questions that you may have. ★



James Quintero is the director of the Think Local Liberty project at the Texas Public Policy Foundation. He's been featured in the *New York Times*, *Forbes*, the *Huffington Post*, Fox News, and Breitbart.

Since joining the Foundation in 2008, Quintero has focused his research efforts on state and local government spending, debt, taxes, financial transparency, annexation, and pension reform. Quintero received a bachelor's degree from the University of Texas at Austin and an M.P.A. with an emphasis in public finance from Texas State University.

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