

August 3, 2016

To: Texas State Senate Hearing on Public Education

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RE: The Inadequacy of and Inequality of the Texas Public School Finance System

Dear Texas Senators:

Thank you for this opportunity to provide public testimony before this Senate Hearing Committee regarding the need for changing the Texas School Finance System to make it more efficient and effective. It is good to see those of you who I know and to get to meet some of you for the first time.

My areas of comment are that Resources are the primary behavioral purview of the State Legislature. Resources are needed and can really help effective Principals and Central Administrators supporting effective Teachers who are working with the children with the most learning needs. These are the students described in our own most recent Texas Education Agency 2014-2015 Statistical Data. These groups of students are shown below. Let us Face Facts about whom we are serving in Texas Public Schools and about who need more resources, not the same amount or fewer resources, for effective teacher and effective administrator working with them:

Economically Disadvantaged - 58.8% of the student population

Limited English Proficient - 18.2%

Students speaking Languages other than English and Spanish – approximately 4.4%  
(Newcomers speaking Chinese, Vietnamese, Arabic, Urdu, Swahili, Burmese, etc...)

Students with Attendance Rates below the State Average - Below 95.9%  
(African American, American Indian, Hispanic, Pacific Islander, and Econ. Disadv.)

Students with 4-Yr Completion/Drop-Out Rates higher than State Average - Above 6.6%  
(African American, American Indian, Hispanic, Pacific Islander, Econ. Disadv.)

Students with SAT & ACT scores below State Avgs – SAT of 1417 and ACT of 20.6

Substandard Achievement 8.24% of Charter Schools vs. 1.17% Substandard Achievement of Independent School Districts

The low numbers of Teachers overall who hold Masters degrees (23.4%)

Given this low number of teachers with graduate degrees, over 75% of Texas educators are ineligible for administrative leadership certifications. Disaggregated by ethnicity and gender, we can readily extrapolate that the graduate degree level of African American teachers who are 9.9%, of Hispanic teachers who are 25.6%, and of Male teachers who are 23.4% of the Professional Educator Population and expertise is sorely lacking. Said another way, if graduate level education is symptomatic of expertise and professional proficiency and potential advancement, all teachers who know how to work with the majority of our students (68+%), our Urban and Rural and Suburban Poor students - is abysmal. And yet, we have some very competent, caring, committed, and courageous teachers and administrators working successfully in terms of student growth with our children.

Effective Educators know how to put in the hard work to educate their students and to work with the adults nurturing them. We need more Effective Educators. If Effective Educators were given necessary and adequate resources as a normal part of their Campus Budgeting and Decision Making discretion, they could concentrate on doing a much better job in tailoring their programs to the needs of their students. Moreover, since only 23.4% of all teachers have Masters degrees, and .6% have Doctorates, the clear message of the State of Texas Funding System is that it does not expect the types of top level critical thinking, planning, leading and implementing required of Effective Educational Professionals. These are the Professionals who are committed for the long-term and who must do double-duty both as Educators and as Social Services personnel on a daily basis. Too often, we have to act as parents, and family, and police officers, and church/social worker-type counselors in order to achieve a stable culture and climate for academic and socio-emotional growth in our school communities.

Effective, highly competent teachers and campus leaders need the flexibility to educate students in their school communities. They should not have to spend their days chasing down resources or negotiating with entrepreneurial profit seekers who are prepared to sell themselves in order to bargain their products and themselves so that their vendor "bosses" can procure dollars away from limited campus budgets. Effective principals and teachers know how to focus and prioritize their needs for their students given the flexibility to make the most appropriate instructional and social services decisions.

At present, the students most wanting are not getting the resources needed by the effective Teachers and Administrators who know how to customize instruction that keeps them in school, and measures, and increases their achievement rates. Consequently, they have to "hustle" other forms of financial management and support resources *out of their pockets*, through *grants*, and through *community support businesses and agencies, etc...* in order to provide for basic student needs. We have many more students who need more than we did when we educated fewer, less diverse students. At present, we are much more diverse and recognize the need to more fully educate the many, instead of the few. The circumstances are even more dire if we included in the statistical data shown above the percentages of diagnosed Special Education students.

Hopefully, this testimony gives you a campus-based Professional Educator as Practitioner understanding about the inadequacy of funding within the confines of the current School Finance System. The current system has not increased funding for public schools since 2006. Adequacy needs to be re-defined. The onset and evolution of the current Recapture Plan instituted in the early 1990s is inadequate. We face a *new normal* as we educate today's students in this changing climate and culture and set of socio-economic circumstances. The Texas Supreme Court says that our Finance System is in compliance, but it does not account for the changes in Low Wealth vs. High Wealth Demographics facing us as we approach 2017 - 2030. Texas has been averaging an increase of around 80,000 students per year. We have already done more with less. Considering the marginal and sometimes abysmal performances of Charter Schools attempting fully educating the "most needy" and really smart students of Texas, it speaks too loudly that we have a System that does not want to educate all children. If we did want to educate all children, we would provide resources and give the discretion to use them properly to the most Effective Teachers and Principals as models of best practices. Again, these are those Principals and Teachers who know how to tailor or customize Curriculum – Instruction – Staff Development – and Evaluation based on the needs of the students they serve. We need to give resources to our best teachers and administrators who know how to appropriately teach what students need to know, be able to do, and perform in a variety of real life contexts that prepare them both for higher education and life as fully participating, productive citizens after high school.