



## **Testimony on Changes to the Public School Finance System Under SB 2145 Before the Senate Education Committee**

**Dr. Jesse McNeil, McNeil Foundation and TLEC, April 18, 2017**

Dear Chairman Taylor and Committee Members,

Thank you for hearing our testimony today. The Texas Latino Education Coalition (TLEC) is a collaborative of organizations that advocates for the rights of Latino students at the local, state and national levels. The coalition was organized to focus on critical educational issues in Texas and to improve the state of education for Latino students in public schools. TLEC is testifying *on* SB 2145.

All Texas students deserve equitable and adequate funding of their public school system. In order to meet this expectation – and constitutional requirement of the state – we must ensure that the students with the greatest needs receive adequately funded educational services. SB 2145 makes necessary simplifying and structural changes to Texas' complex public education finance system by eliminating wasteful elements. Similar to SB 704 and HB 1474, comprehensive bills supported by TLEC, SB 2145 advances an efficient and equitable system by eliminating the 1993 Hold Harmless measures and Chapter 41 school attendance credits and rolling-in the available school fund and high school allotments into the basic allotment.

However, we recommend an additional focus on two components to ensure equity and adequacy in the school finance system:

- 1) Increase the weighted allotments for bilingual education and compensatory education to **0.25**; the weights have not been adjusted since 1984.
- 2) Decrease the allowable indirect costs for both the bilingual and compensatory education allotments from 45 percent to 25 percent.
- 3) Require an **independently conducted, evidence-based cost study** of the public school finance system, with recommendations toward fully funding those costs.

Without an increase to these special program allotment weights, Texas will continue depriving students of the adequate educational services they need to succeed. Past cost studies indicate that costs for quality compensatory education and bilingual education programs in Texas average about 40 percent over regular program costs, but Texas currently provides only 10 percent additional funding for English learner students and 20 percent add-on funding for low-income students. These students are among the lowest performing students in the state. An increase to 0.25, coupled with a decrease in the allowable direct costs, will enhance the equity and adequacy in our school finance system, and, most importantly, will assist the students facing

the greatest needs in our schools.

Additionally, instead of continuing with an arbitrary assessment of how much public education costs, we recommend commissioning an independent, evidence-based cost study of the Texas public education system. Past studies and court rulings have already determined our allotment weights to be grossly insufficient. Rather than taking another stab in the dark at equitable and adequate funding, a commissioned cost study and regular reviews of the real costs of the public education system would support Texas students now and in the future.

Now is the time to make real impacts that matter for Texas students. Texas must ensure all students have access to the educational funding they need to succeed in school.

For questions, please contact Dr. Jesse McNeil, at [jmneil@sbcglobal.net](mailto:jmneil@sbcglobal.net).

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### **Resources**

Texas Latino Education Coalition website

[http://www.idra.org/education\\_policy/texas-latino-education-coalition/](http://www.idra.org/education_policy/texas-latino-education-coalition/)

IDRA's English Language Learner Education website

[http://www.idra.org/education\\_policy/english-language-learner-education/](http://www.idra.org/education_policy/english-language-learner-education/)

Statement, "Supreme Court Ruling in *Horne vs. Flores* is a Missed Opportunity – Fair Funding is Critical to Successful Education of English Language Learners"

<http://www.idra.org/resource-center/horne-vs-flores-statement/>