

Educational Institutions Need Protected State Funding

IDRA Comments to House Appropriations, Re: Public Education and Higher Education
Submitted by Chloe Latham Sikes, February 22, 2021

Dear Chairman Bonnen and Honorable Members of the House Appropriations Committee:

IDRA (Intercultural Development Research Association) is an independent, non-partisan, education non-profit committed to achieving equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college.

Public K-12 schools and institutions of higher education (IHEs) have operated on the frontlines of the pandemic response by providing meals, counseling, digital devices and connectivity, health and safety information, and critical student support services in addition to their primary duty to educate students. Schools offer a key to economic recovery and require protected state funding to serve students, make up for instructional disruptions, and make college affordable and accessible.

IDRA recommends that the committee sustain a maintenance of equity to fund public schools and institutions of higher education through the next biennium by:

- **Using the Economic Stabilization Fund (ESF)** to maintain the state's funding to public schools through the promises made in House Bill 3 and sustain funding to Texas' public colleges and universities. Postsecondary institutions provide meaningful economic opportunities to students and their local communities through education, jobs, and social services and health supports.
- **Ensuring state and federal relief funds are targeted toward equitable investments to offset instructional disruption.** Students in early grades, emergent bilingual (i.e. English learner) students, and students in high school preparing for postsecondary college and career opportunities require supplemental funding to address the instructional disruptions to their learning for the past two school years. Federal relief funds should be used to supplement, not supplant, school funding. The state should maintain equity in funding for marginalized students' education.
- **Extending hold harmless funding provisions.** Irregular student attendance and drastic changes in expected enrollment have compromised schools' funding to address the ongoing challenges to finding, educating, and engaging students. The state should fund schools according to past three-years' attendance, with extended hold harmless funding provisions for schools experiencing temporary declines in attendance and enrollment.
- **Delaying the state property tax compressions** of local M&O tax rates to the next biennium, for a savings of at least \$5 billion. These tax compressions inequitably benefit

high property-wealth school districts who already could generate sufficient local tax revenue at lower tax rates, while also demanding a higher price-tag for the state.

- **Supporting positive school climates and school mental health resources.** The contingency provisions for the School Safety Allotment (SSA) should be maintained, with narrowed allowable uses to prioritize mental and behavioral health supports to students. The SSA should be directed toward practices that support positive school climates rather than toward “hardening” responses that are ineffective for safe schools. Positive practices include: hiring trained mental health personnel, social-emotional learning programs, restorative justice practices, culturally-relevant instruction, and robust mental-health supports.

IDRA is available for any questions or further resources that we can provide. Thank you for your consideration. For more information, please contact Chloe Latham Sikes, Ph.D., IDRA Deputy Director of Policy, at chloe.sikes@idra.org.

IDRA is an independent, non-profit organization led by Celina Moreno, J.D. Our mission is to achieve equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college. IDRA strengthens and transforms public education by providing dynamic training; useful research, evaluation, and frameworks for action; timely policy analyses; and innovative materials and programs.