



Board of Trustees

January 11, 2011

Dear Legislators:

Pearland ISD is a large, diverse, Exemplary-ranked school district. In addition, we received a five-star rating in the recently-issued FAST study because of our ability to provide an excellent education cost-effectively. As trustees for Pearland ISD, we feel we know how to wisely spend education dollars. We also understand the current budget crisis and, unlike TASB and other organizations, are NOT asking for an increase in funding to public schools. However, we are making three requests of the Texas Legislature: (1) adopt a more equitable funding system for public schools, (2) avoid making "across the board" cuts (e.g., cutting 5 percent from each district), and (3) ease unfunded and underfunded mandates.

- **Adopt A More Equitable Funding System**

The current target revenue system inequitably distributes the state's education dollars. According to the Equity Center, the current system provides average WADA funding of \$5,340/student, ranging from \$3,777/student (Red Lick ISD) to \$12,845/student (Westbrook ISD). This huge funding gap means that Westbrook ISD receives \$9,000 more per student (or \$200,000 more per classroom of 22 students) than Red Lick ISD.

Even neighboring school districts receive vastly different funding. For example, Pearland ISD (which educates approximately 18,000 students and has a WADA of \$5,011/student) receives \$480 less per student than neighboring Alvin ISD (which educates approximately 18,000 students and has a WADA of \$5,491/student). This amounts to \$10,560 less per classroom -- a discrepancy that makes it difficult for us to pay our teachers a competitive salary and provide students with comparable resources and opportunities (technology, art and music teachers, supplies, etc.). These inequities are not limited to any local area; they exist throughout Texas, are patently unfair to students statewide, and must be repaired.

The most sensible way to repair the inequity would be to cap target revenue at the state's average of \$5,340 and equalize school districts around this number. Thus, children would be treated more equally, and the state would save millions of dollars. This move would also force all districts, not just underfunded ones, to budget their dollars more carefully.

- **Avoid "Across The Board" Cuts To Every District**

Because of the budget crisis, the likely alternative to equalizing funding among districts is to make "across the board" cuts for every district (e.g., cutting each district's allotment by 5 percent). We oppose such an unfair cut because it would only increase the problems faced by districts that currently receive inequitable funding. During the past few years, because Pearland ISD has received considerably less than the state average, we have eliminated excess from our budget. We no longer have any excess to cut.

- **Ease Unfunded and Underfunded Mandates**

Over the years, the legislature has increasingly imposed statewide mandates on local "independent" school districts. Many mandates have been inadequately funded and have reduced the local control and independence of school districts. By imposing mandates without

adequate funding, the state has infringed on local school districts' ability to manage their resources. Eliminating some of these mandates will allow each district to use its funding more wisely and creatively. For this reason, the legislature should consider easing the state mandates (e.g., mandating class sizes) that force school districts to make expenditures locally.

The legislature should also allow a school district to charge for certain expenditures. For example, school districts should be permitted to recover the full cost of transportation from students who use bus services (Pearland ISD spends \$5.6 million per year transporting students and recovers only a fraction of that cost because the state reimbursement has not changed since 1984). By enacting these changes, the legislature will allow each school district to allocate money as it deems best for its students.

We believe that true accountability should begin with target revenue. If public education is to receive less funding during the next biennium, then it is only right to begin by reducing the funding of those districts receiving a target revenue greater than the state average. Across the board cuts in funding will not reward academic achievement and will maintain an inequitable funding system. Asking low-funded districts to develop a lower-than-low-funded budget is not a fair answer to the state's budget shortfall. Because we are a district that has shown exemplary academic achievement and sound financial management, we ask you to consider implementing our successful ideas statewide.

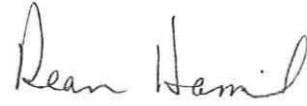
Sincerely,
Pearland ISD Board of Trustees



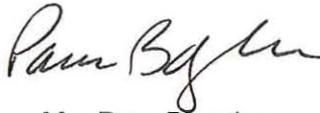
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