



## **TSTA Legislative Session Update, February 4, 2013**

### **Travis County District Judge Dietz Rules Texas School Funding Inadequate, Inequitable, Unconstitutional**

On a relatively quiet day at the legislature, the big news came from the ruling in the school finance case filed by a majority of Texas school districts, ending a trial that began in October. Judge Dietz ruled that the Texas school finance system is not adequately funded and both financially and quantitatively insufficient to provide the diffusion of knowledge required by the Texas Constitution. Dietz also found the system unequal – citing wide disparities between property poor and property wealthy school districts.

To put it simply, the Judge said “we either want increased standards and are willing to pay for them or we don’t.”

Capitol insiders, expecting Attorney General Abbott to appeal the ruling, have been suggesting that the legislature will wait until the Texas Supreme Court rules on that appeal, a process that could push consideration of adequately funding our schools back until after the 2014 primary election. Anticipating that reaction, TSTA President Rita Haecker issued the following statement, noting that the legislature has the funds to restore the 2011 education cuts now, without raising taxes, and without making students pay the price of those cuts without waiting another year.

#### **TSTA on Judge Dietz’s ruling: Texas school children should not be put on hold for a year**

Texas State Teachers Association President Rita Haecker issued the following statement today:

“State District Judge John Dietz has told us what we already knew. State funding of our public schools is inadequate and inequitable, shortchanging five million school children and undermining their opportunity to reach their potential.

“A long-term solution may require revenue reform to provide funding that grows with the state’s economy, but the state has enough money now, without raising taxes, to restore the \$5.4 billion — more than \$500 per child — cut from public schools two years ago.

“Judge Dietz’s ruling is a reminder that state leaders must do the right thing and provide students and teachers the resources they need to succeed. Conventional wisdom says the legislature will wait a year to act, after appeals and the 2014 primary. But common sense tells us a child can’t wait for pre-K or the dropout prevention programs that were cut in 2011. Today’s ruling is a reminder that children who fall behind or drop out will pay a real price when their education is put on hold for another year.”

## **House Appropriations Committee Hears Overview of Current and Proposed State Budgets**

The House Appropriations Committee met today to discuss the state’s current financial status and how that should impact both the supplemental and the 2013-14 Appropriations Bills in light of additional funds available in both the general revenue fund and the Rainy Day fund.

Much of the testimony from agencies and comments from committee leaders seemed at times to be intended to lower expectations that the legislature could use the current windfall - \$101 billion in general revenue (\$8.8 billion more than expected) and nearly \$12 billion in the Rainy Day Fund - to restore cuts made in 2011. As the process continues, TSTA will press legislators with simple arithmetic: they have over \$20 billion, enough to restore education cuts (\$5.4 billion or \$500 per pupil) and pay for enrollment growth and inflation, cover the \$5 billion shortfall in Medicaid funding for 2013, and have billions of dollars left for other projects (water, roads) and still have enough to leave a sufficient amount in the Rainy Day Fund.