

CHANGE STARTS NOW!



save txschools.org

Building Support for Public Education

A guide for small group meetings



March, 2012

How to Use this Guide

This guide gives you simple facts, small group questions and action steps about the current crisis in public school funding. It can be used in a meeting in your home, at PTA, church, neighborhood association or anywhere else people gather who care about the future of Texas children.

One simple tip . . . as much as possible, let people draw conclusions and come up with their own solutions.

Here's a basic pattern you can use for a Save Texas Schools meeting:

1. **Start with introductions**, with everyone briefly saying their name and why they are present.
2. **Set the stage**: use pages 2-8 to understand the current school funding crisis.
3. **Brainstorm about how the group can be part the solution**. Use the suggestions on page 10 as a starting place.
4. **Finally, make a list of action steps** for your group and set a time to meet again.

What You Can Do

- ★ Support pro-public schools candidates, both in your home district and elsewhere.
- ★ Let others know about the funding crisis in public education
- ★ Write to legislators and other public officials in support of funding public schools.
- ★ Sign the Save Texas Schools Petition.
- ★ Take part in candidate forums and other events, including those sponsored by Save Texas Schools.
- ★ Go to “Fair Funding Now” and report on the effect cuts are having on your schools and district.*
- ★ VOTE and get others to vote!

*<https://schoolfunding.crowdmap.com>

Questions to Ask Candidates

- ★ How will you make education a top priority for Texas?
- ★ Will you support restoring the education funding cut in 201, as well as providing sufficient funding for our growing student population?
- ★ Will you support revising school finance laws to be fair to all Texas students?
- ★ Will you work to end the structural deficit that has led to cuts in public education?
- ★ Will you support a re-examination of the use of high-stakes testing in Texas schools?

Brainstorming Solutions

What will you do to make sure that our elected officials support quality public education for all Texas children?

Action Step	Date Completed

How is Texas Doing?

As much as we'd like to believe that we're #1 in everything, the fact is that we're not. By some key measures, Texas is not doing a good job of taking care of its children or its future.

Match the following numbers on the left to the phrases on the right to get a glimpse of how we rank nationally. (See page 5 for answers).

1 Amount spent per student on education (before this year's budget cuts)

1 Teen pregnancy rate

1 Percentage of total jobs that pay only minimum wage

3 Quality of football

4 Ranking on SAT tests

44 Number of people under 25 with a high school diploma

47 Growth rate of children in poverty

50 Amount spent per person on all services (education, health, etc.)

50 Highest number of Fortune 500 companies

Why Cut Education

In January, 2011 we found ourselves facing a **\$27 billion deficit!** How did things get so bad?



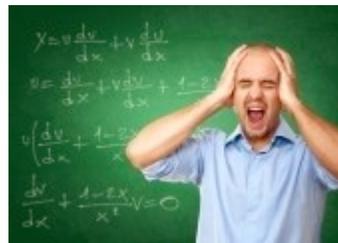
\$27 Billion Deficit Recipe

1/3 cup of lower tax receipts than expected from the recession

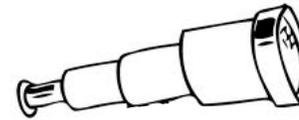
2/3 cup of fiscal mismanagement by the legislature since 2006

So explain this fiscal mismanagement . . .

In 2006, because of a court ruling, Texas lowered property taxes statewide by 1/3, affecting local school funding. The legislature promised to make up the difference through a new business tax (called the margins tax). With so many loopholes, it has been a failure and has brought in \$5 billion per year less than expected (it's called the **STRUCTURAL DEFICIT**). For four years, the difference was covered with putting off payments and federal stimulus dollars. This year, the chickens came home to roost with a \$27 billion deficit. Local taxpayers are already seeing increased property taxes to pay for the state's poor management. Without fixing the system, we will see a \$5 billion structural deficit each and every year, as well as more budget cuts in 2013.



Thinking About the Future



From what you've learned, what do you think our future looks like if we stay on the present course of cutting education funding?

FEWER GRADUATES	
	Businesses Don't Want to Come to Texas

Funding DOES Make a Difference!

According to the TEA, districts rated exemplary spend over \$1,000 more per student than districts rated unacceptable.

- Districts rated Exemplary: \$6,580 per pupil*
- Districts rated Recognized: \$5,751 per pupil
- Districts rated Acceptable: \$5,662 per pupil
- Districts rated Unacceptable: \$5,538 per pupil

What About Testing?

There are conflicting opinions about the value of testing. Everyone agrees that we need to know how schools, teachers and students are doing. It's the HOW that leads to disagreement.

Texas leads the nation in the amount we test our students. With the TAKS test, we were spending, on average, 28 days per year taking state-mandated tests. This doesn't include benchmark tests, field tests, retakes, English Language Learner testing . . . **With the new STAAR and EOC (End-of-Course) exams, the average will move to 40 days per year, equal to 8 weeks of**

Q: What has been your experience with testing?

At the same time we're testing more and making tests harder, we're cutting funding drastically to support student achievement. With 1/3 of it's staff cut this year, the Texas Education Agency is struggling to support the new STAAR/EOC tests. Most schools feel like they are going into the tests with little preparation and lots of questions, including how to implement the 15% rule for EOC exams.



How Much Got Cut in 2011-13?



\$4 Billion in regular funding
+ \$1.4 Billion in grants

(pre-k, career and technology, student support, etc.)

\$1,000 per student (9% of total spending)

Q: What cuts are affecting your school?*

*Help record the way budget cuts are hurting your local schools. Go to <https://schoolfunding.crowdmap.com> and submit a report or e-mail fairfundingnow@gmail.com

Examples of Cuts

- ★ At least 12,000 teachers were cut, with thousands of other open positions left unfilled.
- ★ Dallas ISD is closing 9 elementary and 2 middle schools and adding 45 minutes to the teaching day without additional pay.
- ★ Premont ISD has cut all athletics.
- ★ \$1.4 billion in TEA grants for dropout prevention, CATE and Pre-K classes were eliminated.
- ★ Most Texas school districts face the bulk of cuts in the 2012-13 school year, with more teacher layoffs looming.

Where Does a Dollar Go?

There was talk in the last session that for every dollar of spending, only 50¢ was making it to the classroom. The rest was, supposedly, being spent on administrators. Here's the truth about where a dollar goes:



49¢ for Teachers

Campus Expenses

- 3¢ Transportation
- 9¢ Building
- 3¢ Utilities
- 2¢ Security/Nurse
- 9¢ Aides & Materials
- 3¢ Professional Dev.
- 5¢ Lunch
- 2¢ Library
- 4¢ Counselors
- 3¢ Extracurriculars

Admin

- 5¢ Campus
- 3¢ District

As you can see, 97¢ stays on the campus. If you do look at increased administrative costs over the past decade, most of it can be attributed to staffing for testing and accountability.

Answers to page 2: Amount spent per student on Education (44); Teen pregnancy rate (4); Percentage of total jobs that pay only minimum wage (1); Quality of football (1); Ranking on SAT tests (47); Number of people under 25 with high school diploma (50); Growth rate of children in poverty (1); Amount spent per person on services (50); Highest number of Fortune 500 Companies (3).

Are We Spending Enough?

From 1999-2009, per pupil spending in Texas went from \$8,003 to \$11,642. Some say that we're spending too much for little in return. But let's look at little closer:

1. **Texas is educating over 800,000 more students since 1999**, and continues to grow at a fast pace. 63% of these students come from low-income families, compared to 48% in 1999. More students mean more teachers, more services and more buildings, adding to the cost per pupil.
2. **The state has mandated several pay raises for teachers, as well as other expenses.** The expensive testing system, along with with efforts to increase graduation rates, have also added to costs.
3. **More expensive healthcare, as well as the inclusion of expanded federal programs** to support low-income children, are included in the increased spending.

(For more information, go to Moak Casey & Associates publication "Responses to Questions Regarding Increases in Education Staff and Expenditures.")

Even with these increases, Texas still ranked 44th in per pupil spending BEFORE the budget cuts of 2011.



According to the U.S. Census Bureau, high school dropouts aged 25 or older earned an average of **\$32,598** in 2008. High school graduates, by contrast, earned an average of **\$51,383** – nearly **58 percent** more. Those with a bachelor's degree earn 79% more over their careers than those with just a high school diploma.