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Senate finance plan a good start

AUSTIN—While the Texas Senate is to be congratulated for taking an important step on school finance with its vote to restructure the funding mechanism, the Texas Public Policy Foundation said today legislators must not rush to simply “fix the numbers.”

“History should remind us that for every idea on school finance, there is at least one lawsuit waiting to be filed. We must move very carefully on this topic,” said the Foundation’s Michael Sullivan, director of government relations. “The Senate — with its politically diverse membership — has served notice that school finance will be addressed. But rather than simply look at the source of the dollars, Texans must look holistically at education — funding and spending — to ensure our children receive the best educational bang for the tax dollar.”

In a study of the relative merits of government revenue sources, internationally acclaimed economist Richard Vedder, Ph.D., found sales taxes are more economically sound than property or income taxes. A separate study on education financing reported on research demonstrating schools with more local funding have better educational outcomes because the community is more invested, while yet another indicates various funding strategies are more effective than others in promoting academic achievement.

The Foundation’s director of research, Chris Patterson, an expert in educational reform issues, says the legislature must carefully weigh the economic and educational costs of any changes to the system.

“Schools are constantly struggling with a lack of parental involvement,” said Patterson. “We know the more involved parents are in their child’s education, the more improvement we find in both the schools and the results. We also know there’s very good research to guide good policy. School finance decisions cannot be made in a box. The system is extremely complex; decisions about revenue sources and funding do impact academic

outcomes. And we cannot have adequate funding if we don’t fully understand the consequences of the way we spend our education dollars.”

A special session will ensure all the issues surrounding education finance will be addressed without the distraction of other, equally important, state topics, said the Foundation’s president, Brooke Leslie Rollins. She said efforts by the Senate only highlight the need for a special session early next year.

“The Senate has put forward a good starting point on the debate about funding mechanisms, while the House has provided a clear blueprint for addressing the system as a whole with the recently-appointed special committee,” said Rollins. “Texans have made it abundantly clear to the legislature they want school finance to be fixed, but not at the cost of good education.”