



## More Money, Less Education: Texas Schools Must Be Made More Efficient

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If it's possible to do something better, with less time and effort, then we should. It only makes sense, right? Who could disagree? You'd be surprised.

In every aspect of our lives, we know that if a task can be accomplished with less time and resources, that leaves more energy – almost by definition – available for other purposes. Efficiency, no matter where you are or what you do, is a good thing; it is the bedrock of improvement. Efficiency has led to our ever-improving standard of living and quality of life.

In every human endeavor, greater efficiency is prized. Every endeavor, that is, except public education. To suggest public education can be made more efficient borders on heresy.

If it is possible to accomplish the ends of public education with less time, effort, resources and money, we should. Doing so would lower taxes, improve lives and

promote greater academic achievement for kids.

Can we actually provide “public education” at least as well, and possibly better, than today with fewer resources?

The answer is clearly “yes.” Just consider the evidence.

Over the last thirty years we have tripled real, per-student spending in Texas. That is, we've tripled spending on top of enrollment growth and inflation! If we spent today, in today's dollars on a per-student basis, what we spent in 1990, property taxes would

be 40 percent less than they are today!

What have we received for all that spending? The report card isn't encouraging.

The state has seen some improvement in the elementary grades. But where it really counts, at high school graduation, we've had no improvement. SAT and ACT scores are, at best, flat. For minority students, evidence shows their scores are actually falling. We have a huge dropout problem in the higher grades. Remediation for college preparation is big business.

Surely, we can do better!

We spend more per student than virtually any developed nation in the world; yet Malaysia, which spends less than a third as much per student as Texas, outscores American children on international math and science exams. We spend to reduce class sizes in the face of multiple studies showing efforts to reduce class size have essentially no effect on academic performance.

We've given our children new school buildings, computers, multi-media centers, fine arts centers, football stadiums, basketball arenas, and plenty of room to park their cars. We've given teachers broad contract rights, a duty-free lunch, an open class period every day, across-the-board pay raises, and fewer students in each classroom. Administrators are piled on administrators for the sake of administration. Where there once was one non-teaching person

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for every three teachers, we now have a one-to-one ratio.

What have we received for all these programs, employees and spending in the state's public education system? We have a lot more administrators, a lot more fancy buildings, and a lot more employees.

What we don't have are better-educated kids. More spending in public education doesn't give us more education; it just lightens our wallets. We spend more money, providing lots of frills, but very little of academic value.

When we spent a third of what we spend today, there were almost twice as many children for every teacher and school buildings were smaller and often un-air-conditioned. Yet our graduates were demonstrably better prepared for the world after high school.

Public education is a dysfunctional system; it is much better at spending money than doing anything else.

Schools in Texas face a staggering debt of \$48 billion

– more than Iraq owes Arab countries, including reparations to Kuwait – yet they want to spend even more! Curriculum directors ask curriculum providers how much their product costs, not to get the best deal but to find out how to justify bigger budgets. Building superintendents contract for needless “maintenance” for the same reason.

All of this points to the need for fundamental, systemic change. We've tinkered around the edges long enough. There is not enough paper to write enough laws to prevent all the potential abuses when a whole system is focused on spending money. The focus must change.

For once, let's do something that will improve our schools and protect our taxpayers. Let's focus on efficiency.

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