

Scaled-back school finance measure on table in Senate

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AUSTIN – The latest school funding proposal would pay for textbooks that are due in classrooms this month and a pay raise for teachers, but it wouldn't restructure how the state finances education or give homeowners property tax relief.

The Senate bill is an apparent last-ditch effort to find a solution in the faltering special legislative session called on the issue, but the chamber's presiding officer, Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst, is still hoping for a broader measure.

"It has become more and more apparent that the Legislature cannot come to an agreement on school finance until we adjust our parameters of what we hope to accomplish," said Sen. Rodney Ellis, D-Houston, who helped craft the scaled-back plan. "The things we all agree on are being held hostage by the issues we cannot yet find consensus."

With slightly more than two weeks left in the year's second special session, a consensus looks impossible on a plan to overhaul school funding, enact several education initiatives, and trade property tax cuts for higher levies on consumers, smokers and some businesses.

Still, legislative leaders and some conservative watchdog groups are urging legislators to keep trying.

"We, as Texans, expect results and not political excuses," said Brooke Rollins, president of the conservative Texas Public Policy Foundation. "There needs to be a concerted effort to reform public education before this state pours more money into the system."

Mr. Ellis' bill, authored with Sen. Kevin Eltife, R-Tyler, would fund \$295 million for those textbooks, give teachers a pay increase of about \$1,000 each year and restore a \$1,000 health care stipend that was cut in half by lawmakers two years ago.

Gov. Rick Perry said Monday that he's ready to consider such a bill, but Mr. Dewhurst wants to address the larger issues as well.

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