

## Task force meets to discuss classroom spending requirement

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Associated Press

**AUSTIN** - Restricting the amount of money Texas school districts can spend outside the classroom would force some schools to cut back on vital services such as security and libraries, a South Texas superintendent warned Wednesday.

But proponents argue that Republican Gov. Rick Perry's executive order requiring districts to spend a minimum of 65 percent of their budgets in the classroom will improve student performance.

A panel of educators and citizens met for the first time Wednesday to discuss the order. It eventually will submit recommendations to the Texas Education Agency to adopt a definition of classroom expenditures and phase in the requirement over several years.

Under the proposed definition, classroom spending would exclude school nurses, librarians, counselors, transportation and security. Extracurricular activities, such as athletics, would be included.

McAllen schools spend about \$2 million a year to place security guards and police officers on every secondary campus, said Superintendent Yolanda Chapa.

"The fact that our students feel safe and we feel safe, that is critical. With the drug incidents what they are and our proximity to the border, it is critical that we continue to do that," Chapa said.

Perry has suggested starting the requirement at 50 percent and phasing it in over time.

Information culled by the TEA shows that Texas schools spend about 63.8 percent of their budgets on instructional costs, but the amounts vary significantly.

For instance, Houston's Alphonso Crutch's Life Support Center, a charter school, spends about 25 percent of its budgets on instructional costs. The Bovina School District in the Texas Panhandle spends about 74 percent in the classroom.

Most districts are so close to 65 percent that cutting school nurses, counselors and librarians is not likely, said Robert Scott, deputy education commissioner.

"I don't think that's going to happen," Scott said. "Districts are able to meet this now, and over time, it is a very achievable goal."

Chris Patterson, a policy analyst for the Texas Public Policy Foundation, cited research showing that increasing resources in the classroom will improve student achievement.

"When you spend more money on the classroom, on students, you're focusing all school effort on students and student achievement," Patterson said. "It makes it the Job One priority, when you put your money where your mouth is."

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