

The Quorum Report

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January 24, 2006 11:02 AM

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SENATE SELECT COMMITTEE READY TO LIMIT SCOPE OF ED REFORM

Shapiro sticks to a short list of goals for the committee.

The *Senate Select Committee on Education Reform and Public School Finance* will tackle two or three tasks over the next two months and do them well, **Chair Sen. Florence Shapiro (R-Plano)** told her committee at its first meeting this morning.

The message on the special session's real purpose – school finance, education reform or a mix of both – has been mixed in the last month. **Speaker of the House Tom Craddick** told the *Texas Public Policy Foundation* he wanted to see many of the reform issues of the last session addressed again during the special session. **John Sharp**, who serves as chair of the *Texas Tax Reform Commission* at the leisure of the governor, countered the following day that a bill bogged down by reform could easily die in the Legislature. Sharp would prefer a clean tax bill to address the *Texas Supreme Court's* school finance ruling.

This morning, members of the Senate weighed in on the issue. Asked a pointed question by **Sen. Kim Brimer (R-Fort Worth)** as to the clear goal of the committee, Shapiro said the charge from **Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst** was broad but that she would prefer to see, first and foremost, a proposal to address the school finance ruling. Once that is addressed, the committee would tackle reform that would improve the classroom, with Shapiro's own preference being measures that improve the quality of teaching in the classroom.

Shapiro said the Senate attempted to accomplish too much during the regular session. She focused her own concerns on high schools, saying that more students needed to graduate and that those students should be properly prepared for college. Too many students must rely on remedial courses before they take college coursework, Shapiro said.

Other Senators offered comments. **Sen. Royce West (D-Dallas)** said he did not want to get bogged down in issues that were a subject of dispute between Democrats and Republicans and clearly had no answer, such as the November election dates. **Sen. Eddie Lucio (D-Brownsville)** stressed the equity issue, especially on facilities. **Sen. Tommy Williams (R-The Woodlands)** said the Senate had lost its focus on the issue and that Senators needed to “keep their eyes on the ball.”

Sen. Robert Duncan (R-Lubbock) said the public's perception, when the Legislature left in August, was that the school finance issue had turned into a debate and a battle rather than an effort to improve education and morale. If the Senate could come together and agree that any measure should improve education and morale, the details on the actual education bill will fall into place, Duncan said.

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