

Houston & Texas News

Nov. 9, 2007, 12:38AM

State's voting trend promotes top education

The majority of districts seeking tax rate increases get their money

By GARY SCHARRER

Copyright 2007 Houston Chronicle Austin Bureau

AUSTIN — Voters in nearly eight of every 10 Texas school districts seeking higher property tax rates Tuesday approved them this week.

The overwhelming support reflects and reinforces the public's acceptance of the importance of a quality education and willingness to pay for it, some education experts said Thursday.

Advocates for limited government, however, expressed doubt that voters fully understood the proposals, which some school districts described as "rollback" elections.

Most of those school tax rate elections were Tuesday. Galena Park voters in Houston will decide next month. Of 118 school districts that asked voters to approve higher property taxes, 92 saw them pass and 26 failed.

The only places where more school districts rejected tax rate proposals than approved them were the San Antonio and San Marcos areas.

"This underscores the fact that communities understand that the state has not provided adequate funding and that the only recourse is for them to bite the bullet and do it themselves through a tax increase," said Wayne Pierce, executive director of the Equity Center, a consortium that represents hundreds of mid-wealth and property poor Texas school districts.

Informing taxpayers

The consensus is clear, said Joe F. Smith, a retired school superintendent, who runs a Texas public education Web site at www.texasisd.com.

"If you identify needs in your local school district, the taxpayers are willing to raise their taxes to meet those needs if the school administrators can show the taxpayers how it's going to help their children," Smith said. "That's the key."

Forced by the Texas Supreme Court to create a new school-funding system, state lawmakers 18 months ago reduced maximum property tax rates and generally restricted school tax rate increases to 4 cents per \$100 valuation without voter approval. Higher increases require voter approval and, generally, cannot exceed \$1.17 per \$100 valuation for maintenance and operations.

Many school districts that won voter approval for higher tax rates have now reached maximum levels, said Smith, whose Web site serves as an unofficial clearinghouse for public school information.

Waiting for results

But more money is not always necessary, some contend.

"Taxpayers across the state will need to learn more about how their schools are spending their money and whether their schools are truly producing positive results," said David Guenther, spokesman for the Texas Public Policy Foundation, an Austin-based group that supports limited government and school vouchers.

"School districts continue to push the notion that schools can't succeed without more money. The research simply does not back that up," Guenther said. "After adjusting for inflation, per-student spending has tripled since 1960, but that has not produced any overall improvement in student

performance."

Most urban districts eventually will seek higher tax rates, predicted Buck Wood, a school finance expert and lawyer.

"They are not going to be able to live with this much longer," he said.

gscharrer@express-news.net

COMMENTS

Readers are solely responsible for the content of the comments they post here. Comments are subject to the site's [terms and conditions](#) of use and do not necessarily reflect the opinion or approval of the Houston Chronicle.

You must be logged in to leave a comment. [Log in](#) | [Register](#)

Submit

Most recent comments



hans5162 wrote:

The public supports strong public education. If our current political leadership does not understand that, then they are in for a rude awakening during the next election. The Texas Public Policy Foundation is staffed by ideological Wahabbists who are determined to destroy public education. Public school districts spend an average of \$7,500.00 per year to education students. According to the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS), the median tuition for their member private day schools in 2005-2006 in the United States was close to \$14,000 for grades 1 to 3, \$15,000 for grades 6 to 8 and \$16,600 for grades 9 to 12. Getting a voucher for \$7,500 will not afford access to the sort of quality education provided by public schools. The nonsense put forward by the Texas Public Policy Foundation that public school spending has tripled since 1960 fails to take into account the myriad of unfunded mandates imposed by Congress and the state legislature. Additionally, public education is mandated to accept ALL students, regardless of their disabling condition and regardless of whether they have behavior problems. I suspect if the Texas Public Policy Foundation broke whatever figure they are tossing out, you'd find that they're including the cost of special education, free lunch programs, the Head Start programs and bilingual education. It is not possible to say that the expenditures have not produced any overall improvement in student performance, since the beneficiaries of those programs would not have been educated in public schools in 1960. If you evaluate the performance of white and African American English speaking non-disabled students, who were the predominant population of our schools in 1960, you would probably find that they are performing as well or better than they did in 1960. Enough with the ideological garbage. I want good public schools for my children and I would like to focus on making the public schools better for all children, instead of constantly attacking the people who are trying to help kids learn.

11/9/2007 5:14:30 AM

[Recommend](#)

[Report abuse](#)



ADVERTISING: [Contests](#) | [Fraudulent Ads](#) | [Information & Rates](#) | [Place An Ad](#) | [Singles In Houston](#) | [Yellow Pages](#) | [CHRONLINKS](#)

CHRONICLE: [Subscribe Now](#) | [Subscriber Services](#) | [Buy Photos & Page Prints 2005-Present](#) | [Historic Page Prints 1901-2004](#) | [Chronicle in Education](#) | [Public Affairs](#) | [Corrections](#) | [RSS Feeds](#) [RSS](#)

SERVICES: [Copyright Notice & Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms & Conditions](#) | [Help](#) | [Registration](#) | [Report a Problem](#) | [Site Map](#) | [News Alerts](#) | [Newsletters](#)



HEARST newspapers