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Experts warn cuts are recipe for failure

Slashing programs for at-risk learners could hammer future work force.

By Gary Scharrer And Bobby Cervantes gscharrer@express-news.net Updated 12:00 a.m., Sunday, March 6, 2011

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AUSTIN — Proposed education cuts to help the state's rapidly growing student population that struggles with English — on top of other program cuts to keep at-risk children from dropping out — will have consequences, some experts warn.

Under the House budget plan, dropout-prevention programs such as Communities in Schools would see state funding slashed from about \$16 million a year to zero. Programs to benefit students with limited English proficiency also would be cut.

Altogether, public education stands to lose more than \$11 billion if state lawmakers embrace the directive of Gov. Rick Perry and other state leaders to balance the state's new budget without raising revenue or pulling money out of the \$9.4 billion rainy day fund.

"If you want to set up the state of Texas for failure with a less-educated work force and reduced average income, what the Legislature is considering doing in terms of cutting education is exactly the way you would go," said Albert Cortez, an expert on minority education and director of policy for the San Antonio-based Intercultural Development and Research Association.

Students with limited English proficiency can prosper academically if they get specialized staff and specialized materials, Cortez said.

Over the past 10 years, the number of students with limited English proficiency has jumped to 815,998 from 555,334, according to the Texas Education Agency. The number of children from low-income families has

skyrocketed to 2,848,067 from 1,955,012 during the same period.

Those students are more expensive to educate and failure often results in many dropping out of school, experts said.

Demographer Steve Murdock has long warned that Texas is on track to end up with a much larger low-income population unless state leaders change the trend line. By 2040, 30 percent of all Texas workers will not have a high school diploma, and the average household income will be at least \$6,500 less than 2000 levels unless state leaders address the trend line, he has said. Cortez said he and other officials at the Intercultural Development and Research Association are "horrified" that programs targeting needy students remain on the chopping block.

But some believe the doomsday warnings are overstated.

"The correlation between education spending and student performance is dubious at best,"

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said [James Golsan](#), education policy analyst for the [Texas Public Policy Foundation](#), which promotes lower taxes and less government.

“From 1988 to 2008, Texas increased its K-12 education spending from \$11.8 billion to \$51.3 billion — a 66 percent per-student increase after adjusting for inflation. ACT test scores for Texas students has not improved much during that time,” Golsan said, citing [National Center for Education Statistics](#).

House Appropriations Chairman [Jim Pitts](#), R-Waxahachie, said programs to benefit needy students will be evaluated.

“I hope we can get some more money and bring some of those programs back because it's going to affect Texas in the years and years to come,” Pitts said. “We have kiddos out there that need our help — and the future of Texas depends on it.”

Pitts and several other Republican leaders are starting to publicly declare support for dipping into the rainy day fund. The [Texas Association for Bilingual Education](#) is still assessing the proposed \$50 million a year cut in the [Texas High School Completion and Success Initiative](#) for instructional support and professional development for students at risk of dropping out.

“Should these cuts be final, it would be a harsh blow to the progress that has and continues to be made regarding English-language learners and will no doubt contribute to Texas' rapid downward spiral in education ranking among the states,” said [Jesse Romero](#), a legislative consultant to the Texas Association for Bilingual Education.

Teachers of English-language learners in San Antonio, Houston, Austin and Dallas have been told their jobs are in jeopardy, Romero said.

“Without teachers, no funding or new instructional materials, how are we to keep students proficient, let alone close the achievement gap and reduce the dropout rate? These are critical times for the future of Texas,” he said.



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For the most part, children of legal immigrants from most other countries either come here with the ability to speak and understand English, or learn by full immersion. The programs being cut seem to only apply to one culture, and after 30 or 40 years, the problem has gotten worse, not better. It should be obvious that apply more tax dollars is not the solution.

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How fotunate we are to have a mayor who wants to raise taxes for education. Why can't a politician have an original idea. The solution always seems to be raise the taxes.

The arguement is always the same. Raise taxes for education and education will improve and dropout rates will decrease. Everyone knows the dropout rates have increased along with the money spent.

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