



Testimony

Testimony on House Bill 879

Presented Before the House Education Committee

by Brooke Dollens Terry
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Thank you, Chairman Eissler and Members of the Committee.

I am Brooke Dollens Terry, an education policy analyst with the Texas Public Policy Foundation. The Texas Public Policy Foundation is a non-profit, free-market research organization guided by the principles of limited government, free markets, individual liberty, personal responsibility and private property rights. I am here today to testify in favor of House Bill 879.

Currently, Texas spends over \$10,000 per student per year for a public school education. While spending, adjusted for inflation, has tripled since the 1960s, SAT scores are stagnant and only 67 percent of students graduate from high school in four years. That means 33 percent of students dropout of high school. Or looking at it in another way, 93 students drop out every hour of every school day.

In addition, too many high school graduates require remedial education. According to Higher Education Coordinating Board, more than 40 percent of high school graduates entering two and four year public colleges are enrolled in remedial courses. That is over 200,000 high school graduates in 2002.

So, we believe it is time for a change. As the 1983 *A Nation at Risk* report said, “educational leadership is a key to education reform.” We believe we need fresh leadership in our schools to overcome these challenges. We need to reduce certification barriers because certification does not necessarily mean the individual is an effective leader.

A recent survey of school superintendents said fewer than two in five were satisfied with their principals’ ability to make tough decisions, to delegate responsibility, to engage teachers in developing policies, or spend money efficiently. Sixty percent said they must “take when they can get.”

We support giving local school boards the tools to bring in new management from outside the education community. HB 879 allows school boards to bring in leaders from the military, from the government, from non-profits, from higher education, and from the business community with significant management and leadership experience—as defined by the school board, providing a new source of leadership and management in our public schools.

Today’s principals and superintendents shoulder a greater responsibility than ever before. They deal with politics, student security, public relations, finances, personnel and technology. Essentially, they are CEO’s.

What better way to bring fresh and creative ideas into schools than by bringing in individuals from the outside and giving them support to lead and tryout new ideas?

Five other states do not require certification at the state level. Florida, Hawaii, North Carolina, Tennessee, Wyoming and the District of Columbia do not require licensure for superintendents. The local school boards in these states establish superintendent standards. In addition, local school boards in Florida establish principal qualifications and standards.

HB 879 gives school boards the ability to bring in an individual with a college or advanced degree and significant management and leadership experience to be a superintendent, a principal or an assistant principal.

The Foundation supports giving school boards the ability to make decisions on the local level that will improve education in Texas public schools. We believe HB 879 is a necessary tool to improve the leadership and management in our public schools. 