

March 7, 2011

Dear Senate Education Committee,

As the Superintendent of Texas City ISD, I have been informed that you are conducting a hearing on SB 3 (formerly SB 468-Shapiro) at your meeting on March 8, 2011.

The massive budget shortfall being faced by our state will require us all to work together to find solutions that benefit our students. I understand that my district (and all others) will be faced with a decrease in revenue; however, the revenue reductions that are being proposed will forever change the face of education in Texas City ISD and across the state. We must find a way to mitigate the potential damage to our schools—for the sake of the children and the future of our state.

Texas City ISD has been preparing itself for a reduction in funding for the past two years. Utilizing a series of processes including an exit incentive we have reduced our staff of 870 by 12.6% (or 113.5 positions) since the beginning of the 2009-10 school year. Additionally, we have found another \$2 million dollars in savings by the use of various cost-cutting measures. The search continues for additional budget savings.

Even with these efforts, we fear that the approximately \$7 million dollars in savings that have been found will likely come up short of the projected reductions in funding as we are a property-wealthy school district and most models show us bearing a disproportionate share of the costs of reducing the state shortfall.

I am most supportive of the provisions of Senate Bill 3 that support financial flexibility, managerial flexibility, and cost reductions. Key to financial flexibility and cost savings is the repeal of TEC 21.402(d) [Section 13 of current SB 3] that allows the salaries of teachers, counselors, nurses, librarians, and speech pathologists to be reduced to levels below that of 2009-10. Such an opportunity in Texas City ISD allows the district to save between \$305,143 (1% reduction for all employees) to \$1,525,714 (5% reduction for all employees) per year. I have discussed this option with employee groups across our district and, to a person, TCISD employees would rather have their pay reduced than to see the district reduce employees numbers further.

Another key addition to statute is the allowance of furloughs for all employees for up to a maximum of seven (7) non-instructional days per year. A one day furlough in Texas City ISD saves the district between \$167,189 (one day) to \$1,170,323 (seven days). Again, in my discussions with personnel, everyone would rather have extra day(s) off than to further reduce our staff.

These types of flexibility are needed if we are to manage the financial crisis, keep educating children, and keep Texans employed. I also believe that these should be permanent changes to the education code.

Managerial flexibility can be attained by moving the contract notice deadline for term contracts from forty-five (45) days before the last day of instruction to the last day of instruction. Informing employees in early, just prior to the administration of the annual state assessments, is often detrimental to student achievement. Not only does instruction and/or supervision tend to suffer when employees have been non-renewed, many begin to accrue excessive absences between the notice date and the end of the school year. Discussions with teacher groups on this topic are somewhat more difficult than salary reductions or furloughs; however, with time most understand and support this change.

Additional managerial flexibility can be achieved by allowing Reduction In Force (RIF) process to be managed by the local Board of Trustees or their designee as opposed to the for the required hearings to be conducted by an Independent Hearing Examiner (IHE). The IHE process is lengthy and expensive and, often times, the costs of conducting hearings with an IHE are more expensive to the district than keeping the staff member employed.

It is my hope that the committee will take these recommendations seriously and include these as options for local school districts to use should they be needed in financial times such as these. Used as options, ISDs can use these tools to make the best decisions for their local districts as the financial situations in districts are as different as the districts themselves. I am available to discuss these recommendations with you at your convenience and do apologize for not delivering there remarks in person. Local needs have prevented my travel to Austin to attend this committee hearing.

Sincerely,

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