



PRESS RELEASE

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Houston Education Leaders Call on Legislature to Properly Fund Schools

Presidents of school board and teachers union join HISD parent to ask for adequate education funding

June 6, 2011 – With Texas lawmakers gathered in Austin to adopt a school finance plan for the next two years, Houston education advocates came together Monday to call for adequate funding of public education.

The school finance proposal currently being given the most consideration by the Texas Legislature would eliminate \$4 billion in annual statewide education funding. **Under that plan, Houston Independent School District classrooms would absorb a \$78 million funding cut for the 2011-2012 school year and a \$127 million cut in 2012-2013.** In addition, lawmakers are talking about no longer treating education as a non-negotiable priority and ending the long-standing practice of doing whatever it takes to fund schools at a pre-determined level designed to provide children with an adequate education.

Paula Harris, president of the HISD Board of Education, called on lawmakers to stand up for children and recognize that education is too important to Texas' future to consider cutting.

"It is time for state lawmakers to roll up their sleeves and hammer out a sustainable, fair mechanism for adequately funding education in a way that reflects this state's priorities," Harris said at a press conference held Monday at Pin Oak Middle School. "HISD has the lowest tax rate of any school district in Harris County. ... There are some in Austin who would penalize school districts such as HISD who have managed to operate efficiently without raising taxes to the limit. By their way of thinking, districts such as HISD should be penalized until they raise their taxes. We say our families and businesses deserve better than that."

Parent Sue Deigaard, who has two daughters at Twain Elementary School, said lawmakers have the power to lessen the severity of the budget cuts and that they should approach their job with the same mentality as parents who face tough family budget decisions.

"I certainly wouldn't cut essential things to my children while money sat in my savings account. Our state can make the same choices," Deigaard said. "They can use our state's savings account, the self-replenishing Rainy Day Fund. But they choose not to. They can generate more revenue that isn't a burden on property owners, such as closing corporate loopholes or fixing the business margins tax, but they choose not to."

Gayle Fallon, president of the Houston Federation of Teachers, said lawmakers who believe they were elected because of their promise to curb spending should also "consider whether they were sent to Austin to destroy the public school system."

HISD has already cut \$106 million from the 2011-2012 budget. Over the past two years, HISD has eliminated more than 400 central office jobs. Budget-related teacher layoffs this year topped 700. The Board of Education is scheduled to adopt the final 2011-2012 on June 23. The Texas Legislature should have a school finance plan in place by the time the Board of Education adopts next year's property tax rate in the late summer or early fall.

The **Houston Independent School District** is the largest school district in Texas and the seventh-largest in the United States with 298 schools and more than 200,000 students. The 301-square-mile district is one of the largest employers in the Houston metropolitan area with nearly 30,000 employees.

For more information, visit the HISD Web site at www.houstonisd.org.