Texas Association of School Boards
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Serving Texas Schools Since 1949

April 2013

Mr. Chris Dubois
Crockett County Consolidated CSD
PO Box 400
Ozona, TX 76943-0400

Dear : Mr. Dubois

There has been a lot of talk about the size of last session's school funding cuts, but there have been few details about what these cuts mean for Texas schools. In 2012, Children at Risk, a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the lives of children, decided to conduct a comprehensive research study to see how the reduced funding has impacted Texas's schools and students.

Some of the report's findings:

- Most Texas students started the last two school years in larger classes.
- Upgrades to technology, school buildings, and basic maintenance have been deferred.
- Decreased morale, reduced professional development, wage reductions and freezes, and increased workloads all indicate deteriorating conditions for district employees.
- Districts cut athletics programs, library services, and summer school.
- An overwhelming number of districts cut student supports and interventions designed to reduce the achievement gap among Texas's diverse student population.

With this detailed information now available, it is time for school districts to share this information with their local communities. TASB has created a Web page of resources (**tasb.org/childrenatrisk**) to help you spread the word. Enclosed is a flier detailing the resources available. Also enclosed is a copy of the parent's guide to the report, which is perfect for sharing with your community.

If you have any questions, please contact me at dax.gonzalez@tasb.org or 800.580.4885.

Sincerely,

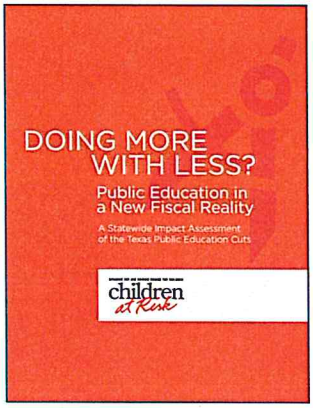
Dax Gonzalez
Communications Manager
Governmental Relations
Texas Association of School Boards

DOING MORE WITH LESS?

PUBLIC EDUCATION IN A NEW FISCAL REALITY

Completed by Children at Risk, this comprehensive research study offers an objective assessment of how the state budget cuts are impacting Texas's schools. With this detailed information in hand, it's time for school district leaders to spread the word.

1. **READ THE REPORT.**
   Access the full report at **tasb.org/childrenatrisk**.



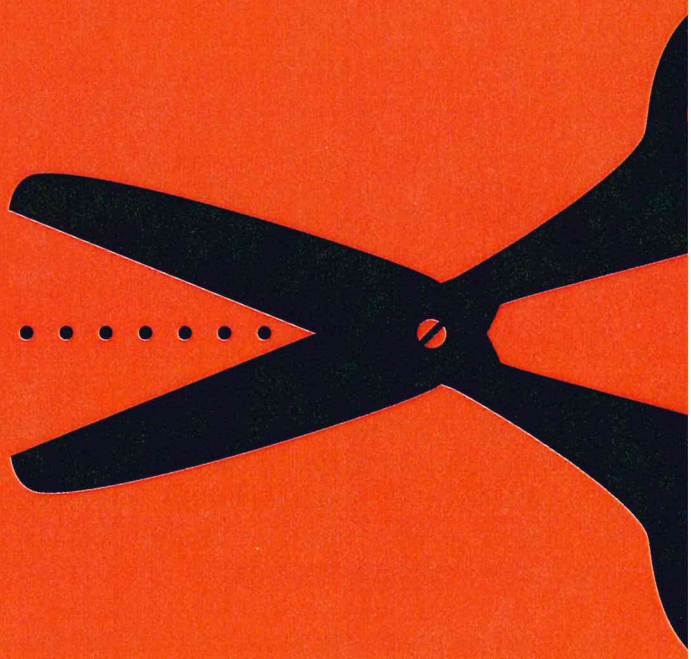
2. **SHARE THE REPORT WITH YOUR COMMUNITY.**
   Children at Risk has prepared a parent's guide that highlights the major findings of the report. Districts are urged to share this report with their communities. To make sharing easier, TASB has developed Web art (badges) in various sizes. Districts can place these images on their Web sites, blogs, and newsletters with a link to **tasb.org/childrenatrisk**.

3. **CUSTOMIZE THE INFORMATION FOR YOUR DISTRICT.**
   Use TASB's funding cuts worksheet to compile specific details on how the budget cuts have impacted your district. Then share the information with your legislators and your community.

Visit **tasb.org/childrenatrisk** to access these resources.

TASB

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW



A Parent's Guide to the Impact of the Public Education Budget Cuts

SPEAKING OUT AND DRIVING CHANGE FOR CHILDREN

children at Risk

BACKGROUND

In 2011 Texas' 82nd Legislature made historic cuts to the public education budget totaling $5.4 billion. Although there has been much discussion surrounding the size of the cuts, little information exists about how the cuts were implemented by Texas school districts and how schools and students were impacted. During the last year, CHILDREN AT RISK conducted a comprehensive research study to provide an objective assessment of the impact of state budget cuts on Texas' schools and students. CHILDREN AT RISK gave every school district in Texas the opportunity to report on the impact of the budget cuts in their district, and school districts that responded account for 65% of student enrollment in the state. This guide highlights the major findings from our research.

HOW IS MY CHILD AFFECTED?

Most Texas students started the last two school years in larger classes, including priority subjects like math and science. Class size increases have occurred at all grade levels, but particular concerns exist about the size of middle and high school classes where districts have the most flexibility for bigger classes.

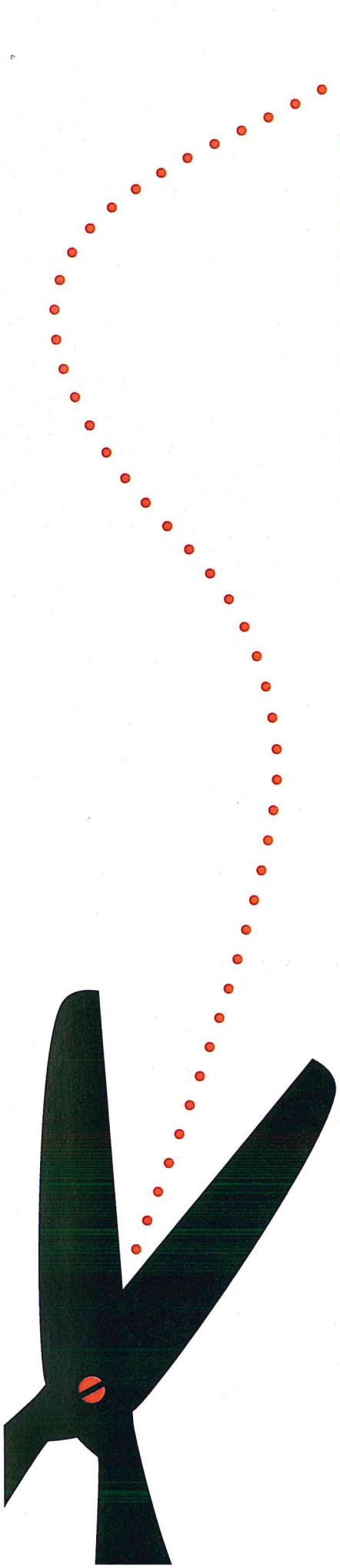
Upgrades to technology, school buildings, and basic maintenance have been deferred. School districts moved quickly to cancel most upgrades to technology and facilities and postpone basic upkeep, possibly resulting in bigger costs later.

Many districts were forced to cut their full-day pre-kindergarten programs and instead offer a half-day program. Some districts cut all but half-day pre-k, which ISDs are required to offer to military, homeless, low-income, and select other children. In addition to complicating the schedules of working parents, the cuts will disproportionately impact the state's low-income pre-kindergarten population.

Athletics programs, library services, and summer school programs were reduced because of state cuts. In many cases districts simply asked staff to do more work for less pay in order to reduce or avoid layoffs.

Districts decreased guidance counseling staff and social work services that connect students with basic needs like food, housing, and mental health care. For some smaller rural districts this was not an option, as many do not offer these wraparound services to begin with. Extracurricular activities and field trips have also been pared down or now require increased parental payment.

An overwhelming number of districts cut student supports and interventions designed to reduce the achievement gap among Texas' diverse student population. Remediation and tutoring services, a much needed catch up component for many students, were also eliminated.



WHAT IS THE IMPACT ON TEACHING AND INSTRUCTION?

A teacher's ability to deliver high- quality instruction has been compromised as a result of the budget cuts. School districts have compensated for the $5.4 billion shortfall by increasing the number of students in each classroom as a cost saving measure. Campuses around the state shed teachers through attrition and simply did not rehire.

With fewer teachers, those remaining have picked up more classes with more students and lost critical planning periods. Teachers have less time to prepare for each class and have less time to provide detailed feedback to their students. Larger class sizes impacts the quality of teacher instruction. As classrooms swell, teachers have less time for individualized, one-on-one instruction and frequently spend more time on behavior management.

Many districts were forced to look at payroll as a means of reducing costs. On average payroll comprises 80% of a school district's budget, leaving many districts little choice other than to make cuts in that area.

The impact of the budget cuts on human capital and staff development is difficult to isolate. However, decreased morale, reduced professional development opportunities, wage reductions, stagnant salary schedules, and increased workloads all indicate deteriorating conditions. Districts have reported an inability to hire and retain good teachers as wages have stagnated in an improving economy. Some districts have stated they are losing their competitive edge, as they cannot entice teachers to their district with lower starting salaries.

DID ANYTHING GOOD COME OUT OF THE BUDGET CUTS?

The budget cuts provided districts an opportunity to review campus and district level operations. In addition to combing through operational expenditures, districts reviewed operations to eliminate redundancies and find room for increased efficiencies. Districts also conducted energy, water and trash audits to reduce usage and conserve funds. Transportation services and bus routes were restructured in order to reduce costs. Smaller rural districts reported implementing distance learning as a cost-effective way to boost enrichment course offerings.

On average school districts spend 3% on central administrative costs and therefore achieve low overhead as a general rule. Where possible districts achieved economies of scale and increased collaboration with other districts.

THE BIG PICTURE

Local response to the budget cuts was as diverse as Texas. However, strategies such as reducing expenditures, containing costs and searching for additional revenue were employed in some combination by most districts. While school districts across the state have responded to and absorbed the lost state revenue, the measures simply address the reduction in funds and are not programmatically sustainable. Districts have dipped into reserves to provide the same levels of service, which is not only unsustainable but could also increase the cost of future bonds. Additionally many districts are maxed out at the local taxing level, unable by law to raise taxes even enough to make up for the loss in state funds.

City and suburban school districts were better positioned to absorb the budget cuts. This is at least in part due to large enrollment numbers, more diversified funding streams and a larger operating budget from which to reallocate resources.

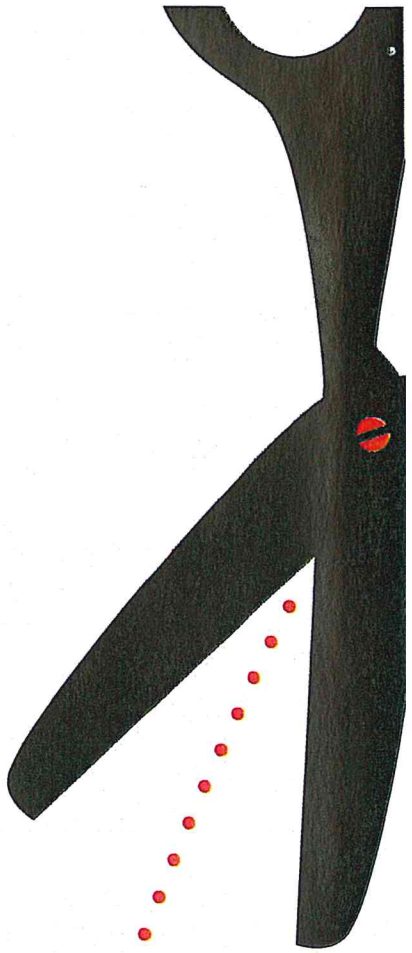
The impact of the budget cuts on student achievement is not immediately identifiable through the use of current assessments. Even in the long run the effect will be difficult to isolate among the myriad of factors that contribute to poor academic performance or increased dropout rates. However many educators have voiced concerns about the long term effects of the budget cuts, particularly if the funding losses are institutionalized and become the new normal in future biennia.

Based on our research findings CHILDREN AT RISK urges the Texas State Legislature to:

1. **Fully fund student enrollment growth.** The state needs to adequately provide funds for current enrollment and the 60,000-80,000 new students Texas gains every year. Asking districts to educate a growing student body on last year's budget will only strain the public education system further.

2. **Restore funding for full day pre-k programs.** Cuts of more than $200 million for full day pre-k programs should be reinstated. The investment in high quality, full day pre-k programs are perhaps the state's best way to reduce immediate and future education spending.

3. **Fund evidence based programs with a proven track record of academic success.** Strategic use of tax dollars is both politically expedient and sound education policy. The state should fund programs with a proven track record of improving educational outcomes.



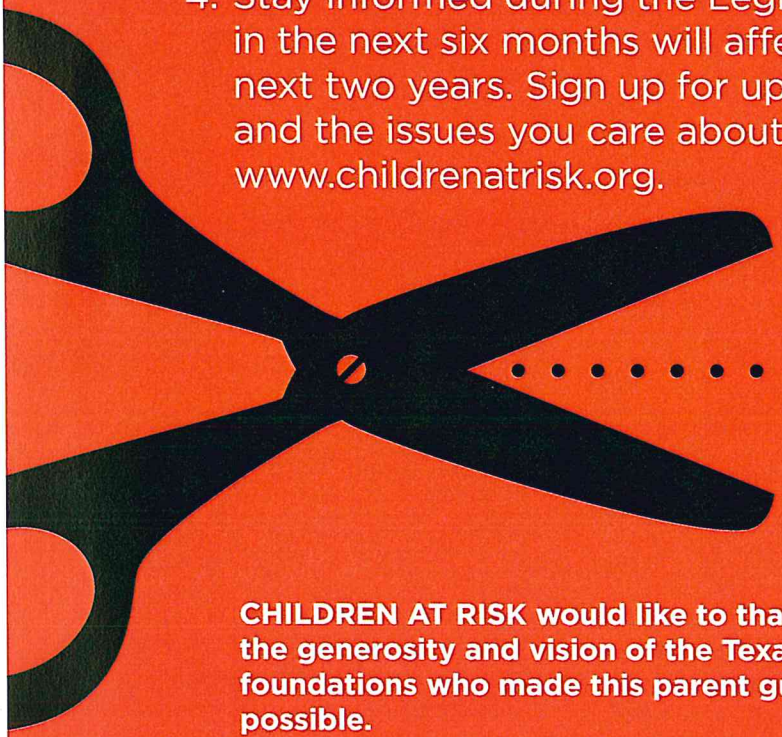
WHAT CAN I DO?

1. Call your state legislator to voice your support for public education, particularly smart education policy and sustainable school funding.

2. Get involved with your local school district and PTA. Attend school board meetings and organize with social media.

3. Share this Parent Guide with your friends and at your child's school.

4. Stay informed during the Legislative session. Decisions made in the next six months will affect every school age child for the next two years. Sign up for updates on the Legislative session and the issues you care about at CHILDREN AT RISK's website www.childrenatrisk.org.



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SPEAKING OUT AND DRIVING CHANGE FOR CHILDREN

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