



The Denton ISD supports the efforts of the Texas Association of School Boards, the Texas Association of School Administrators, and other educational agencies in the development of Core Principles.

Additionally, the Denton ISD has identified the following legislative priorities that reflect its local needs and concerns:

- 1. The Denton ISD directly opposes Vouchers, School Choice, Taxpayer Savings Grant Programs, and the expansion of Charters** – *There is no conclusive evidence that vouchers improve the achievement of students who use them to attend private school. Nor is there any validity to claims that by creating a competitive marketplace for students, vouchers force public schools to improve. The absence of public accountability for voucher funds contributes to rampant fraud, waste, and abuse in current voucher programs across the country. Vouchers do not reduce the cost for public education, in fact, the costs increase by requiring tax payers to fund two school systems. Vouchers do not give parents real education choice, as private schools can pick and choose which students are admitted, such action will widen the achievement gap rather than close the achievement gap. The public disapproves of vouchers. Since 1966, vouchers or voucher related measures have been placed before voters in 13 states 22 times. Voters have rejected public funds to private schools every time. In those 22 elections, nearly two out of three voters cast “no” votes. The effectiveness of charter schools is sketchy at best and public schools in Texas are collectively out-performing charter schools in all academic areas.*
- 2. Make Education Funding a Priority** – *All Texas school districts are reeling from the 5.4 billion dollar cut to public education in the last legislative session. It is the recommendation of the Denton Independent School District that the state make appropriate budget adjustments to reinstate funding levels to both the Foundation School Program (FSP), and the Education Programs outside the FSP. However, if school districts will be required to finance this loss of funding, it is recommended that they be allowed to increase taxes without a Tax Ratification Election in an effort to meet mandated spending levels for current educational programs, provide*

intervention to students in need of assistance, and meet the demands of a more rigorous assessment system.

- 3. Provide Adequate Funding for Early Childhood Programs** - *The need urgently exists for a more comprehensive approach to provide services to prekindergarten students. Eligibility requirements for prekindergarten should be broadened so that more children are eligible for state funding. Funding should be provided to support full day service, including facilities for students with additional developmental need. In order for students to graduate high school post-secondary ready they must first be school ready. As a further consequence, the transportation allotment needs to be adjusted to support student transportation needs.*
- 4. Provide Adequate State Funding for Programs Positively Impacting Student Achievement** – *As a result of decreased funding by the State of Texas, funding sources such as the Student Success Initiative (ARI/AMI) were eliminated, without additional funding, the opportunity and achievement gap will only widen for socio-economically disadvantaged students. In addition, additional funds should be allocated to ensure high school graduates are post-secondary ready. .The state should financially support effective dropout prevention programs, effective use of virtual coursework, and effective career and technology programs leading to certification.*
- 5. Review and Upwardly Adjust Weighted Funding for Special Programs** - *The weighted allotment system for Special Education, Bi-lingual, and English as a Second Language (ESL) programs is beneficial to eligible school districts. There is a specific need for review and adjustment of the weighted funding for all these special programs. These students are currently served in a variety of settings and programs. Adjustments to weighted funding are necessary due to the population shift of students in our state.*
- 6. Amend the “50-Cent Bond Test” the Attorney General Uses to Approve Voter-approved Bond Issues** - *The District supports legislation to amend the “50-Cent Bond Test” to provide the necessary bonding capacity to allow school districts to cost-effectively construct voter-approved school facilities to meet the demands of a growing student population and to address the increasing school construction costs, unfunded facility mandates and declining state funding assistance faced by school districts.*
- 7. Increase Transportation Allotment** - *The district supports legislation that updates funding and increases services to students for school-provided transportation. This update would occur each legislative session and reflect actual transportation costs, i.e. include increased allotments and improved means of fund distribution for hazardous routes and special program services (special education, bilingual education, magnet programs, and career and technology programs). This*

legislation also would change the current two-mile regular education requirement for transportation services to one mile.

UIL travel allotment should also be considered. The district supports legislation that requires the University Interscholastic League (UIL) to place local district schools in a geographically advantageous alignment, to reduce transportation costs. Under the current UIL alignment policies, the first criterion considered is school size. The district also supports subsidizing local school districts whose travel budgets are adversely affected by district realignment. The district supports any activity of the UIL to help alleviate economic and travel burdens faced by local districts related to UIL activities based on the bi-annual district placement.

8. The Denton ISD supports the efforts of the Fast Growth Schools Coalition in the six areas of interest by advocating for legislation to

- a) *Modify or eliminate the “50-cent debt test” that is used by the Attorney General to evaluate new bond issues before bonds are approved for issuance.*
- b) *Increase the guaranteed yield for the Existing Debt Allotment (EDA) and Instructional Facilities Allotment (IFA) so that more students are beneficiaries of the program.*
- c) *Create a fast growth allotment within any changes to the existing school finance and formula systems.*
- d) *Ensure that a full range of fast growth issues are considered as the Instructional Materials Allotment (IMA) is implemented by TEA and further refined by legislators.*
- e) *Fund the New Instructional Facilities Allotment (NIFA) in the 2014-15 biennium and establish funding levels that maintain the pace of escalating start-up costs.*
- f) *Maintain the use of prior-year state property values that are determined by the Comptroller’s property value study.*

9. The Denton ISD supports efforts to modify to improve the Assessment and Accountability system. *The district supports repealing the statutory requirement that end-of-course exams (EOC) count for 15% of a student’s grade. We support developing alternative assessments for English Language Learners at the secondary level. We support reducing the number of STARR exams in grades 3-8. We support a system that ensures accountability ratings are reflective of overall student achievement at campus and district levels and not limited to the lowest performing students. We support the work of the Texas High Performing Schools Consortium in making recommendations regarding digital learning, learning standards, multiple authentic assessments, and local control.*

10. The Denton ISD supports the continuation of the current defined benefit pension program for TRS eligible employees.

*The TRS fund is one of the **healthiest and most stable** funds in the **world**. Without any changes, the fund could make payments through the year 2075. A few quick facts;*

- *1 out of 20 Texans is a member of TRS*
- *In 2011, TRS paid \$7.2 billion in retirement benefits. 95% of that went directly to retirees who live in Texas.*
- *95% of TRS members do not pay into social security.*
- *Defined benefit plans (TRS) help recruit and retain high quality Teachers as compared with defined contribution plans.*
- *In 2008, the annual TRS administrative cost was \$24 per member, which was well below the peer average of \$63 for the same year.*
- *TRS benefits provided for 98,900 jobs across Texas in 2011.*

The Defined Benefit Plan is critical to the assurance of lifetime annuity payments for members of the Teacher Retirement System. The DB plan generates a predictable, steady retirement income which is the sole guaranteed income for most Texas retirees. DB plans are pooled which allow for the averaging of risks over a large number of participants. DB plans fund benefits through the average life expectancy of the group. With pooled funds, management fees are lower than maintaining, hundreds or thousands of individual accounts.

Pension assets can be diversified for optimal returns throughout an employee's lifetime. When on a reliable DB Plan pension, retirees are a vital, continuous source of spending in their communities. Given the growth of retirement insecurity, we should be looking at ways to ensure all Americans have access to adequate and secure pensions.

PRIORITY #1
Opposition to Vouchers

There is no conclusive evidence that vouchers improve the achievement of students who use them to attend private school. Nor is there any validity to claims that by creating a competitive marketplace for students, vouchers force public schools to improve. The absence of public accountability for voucher funds contributes to rampant fraud, waste, and abuse in current voucher programs across the country. Vouchers do not reduce the cost for public education, in fact, the costs increase by requiring tax payers to fund two school systems. Vouchers do not give parents real education choice, as private schools can pick and choose which students are admitted, such action will widen the achievement gap rather than close the achievement gap. The public disapproves of vouchers. Since 1966, vouchers or voucher related measures have been placed before voters in 13 states 22 times. Voters have rejected public funds to private schools every time. In those 22 elections, nearly two out of three voters cast “no” votes.

The Denton ISD opposes vouchers and voucher-like programs that divert public tax dollars to private schools which are exempt from accountability requirements. Vouchers would be yet another state funding cut. Currently, over 240,000 students attend private schools in Texas. State funds are not contributing to the education of those private school students, and a voucher established at \$5000.00 per student would cost the state 1.2 billion dollars. The state previously cut public schools by \$5.4 billion in the last legislative session In Denton ISD that equates to \$17 million in funding cuts. Public schools should be funded **adequately**.

School choice is a wide array of programs aimed at giving families the opportunity to choose the school their children will attend. As a matter of form, school choice does not give preference to one form of schooling or another; rather it manifests itself whenever a student attends school outside of the one they would have been assigned to by geographic default. The most common options offered by school choice programs are open enrollment laws that allow students to attend other public schools, private schools, charter schools, as well as tax credit and deductions for expenses related to schooling, vouchers, and homeschooling.

Texas has had school choice in the form of transfer students for years. Additionally, recent legislation gave parents the right to transfer students out of low performing schools. Charters are open enrollment public schools without boundaries.

The use of vouchers would send public funds to private schools without holding those schools accountable for their results. Under most plans, the voucher/taxpayer savings grant would not completely fund tuition at a good private school. Only parents who can afford the rest of the tuition could take advantage of such programs. Most private schools do not provide transportation for students, so only students coming from a family of means could benefit.

The money may follow the student, but the cost will not. In reality the state will be funding two separate systems which is not an efficient use of dollars. The cost of operating schools does not decrease proportionally when a student leaves the public school. There must still be a teacher in every classroom, transportation across the district, lights and electricity in the buildings, etc. Fixed classroom costs do not leave when the student does.

Public funds belong to all of the population, not just parents. Public funds are contributed by all taxpayers for the purpose of educating all children. This purpose is outlined in Article 1, Section 7 of the Texas Constitution, "A general diffusion of knowledge being essential to the preservation of the liberties and rights of the people, it shall be the duty of the Legislature of the State to establish and make suitable provision for the support and maintenance of an efficient system of public free schools."

A voucher program would harm all Texas school districts. A voucher program would reduce the amount of state funding provided to Chapter 42 (property poor) districts. Chapter 41 (property wealthy) districts would be supporting private schools in the urban and suburban areas through recapture

PRIORITY #2

Make Education Funding a Priority

All Texas school districts are reeling from the 5.4 billion dollar cut to public education in the last legislative session. It is the recommendation of the Denton Independent School District that the state make appropriate budget adjustments to reinstate funding levels to both the Foundation School Program (FSP), and the Education Programs outside the FSP. However, if school districts will be required to finance this loss of funding, it is recommended that they be allowed to increase taxes without a Tax Ratification Election in an effort to meet mandated spending levels for current educational programs, provide intervention to students in need of assistance, and meet the demands of a more rigorous assessment system.

In 2006, Texas Legislation implemented a school finance system that has failed to work properly. The 2007, 2009, and 2011 legislative sessions failed to address the shortcomings of the current funding system. The 83rd Legislative Session in 2013 is fast approaching. Currently, equity and adequacy in funding for the public schools of Texas is at the center of litigation.

A sense of responsibility must be shared between educators, the public, and our elected officials to make education funding a priority in our state.

School districts are limited in the ability to generate funding from property taxes due to the Property Tax Relief efforts at the state level three sessions ago. It will be imperative that school districts have the ability to increase tax rates, at least the \$.02 Golden Pennies without voter approval, in an effort to maintain programs and meet maintenance of effort and mandated spending levels for all programs.

The Legislature should study carefully and consider the funding necessary to implement the recommendations on school funding from the Texas Association of School Boards. By providing adequacy and equity throughout the funding formulas in a consistent and understandable format, school districts can better plan and prepare long-range budgeting forecasts. Planning for the future will allow districts to meet the needs of students by providing opportunities, materials, and delivery methods that are consistent with technology advancements and requirements now prevalent in the workforce. Our students must have these skills if they are to be ready for post-secondary success.

PRIORITY #3

Provide Adequate Funding for Early Childhood Programs

The need urgently exists for a more comprehensive approach to provide services to pre-kindergarten students. Eligibility requirements for pre-kindergarten should be broadened so that more children are eligible for state funding. Funding should be provided to support full day service, including facilities for students with additional developmental need. In order for students to graduate high school post-secondary ready they must first be school ready. As a further consequence, the transportation allotment needs to be adjusted to support student transportation needs.

There is sufficient research to show that pre-school programs help underachieving children and are essential to providing a competitive workforce for the future. Currently the program in Denton ISD serves 839 students on a half-day basis. Our best estimates suggest an additional 225 four year olds and an additional 1000 three year olds are in need of early childhood education. These numbers are based on current qualification standards using state guidelines for the program. The numbers of students meeting the requirements for the program will continue to grow across the state. In Texas, over 1000 children are born daily, and 50% of those children are Hispanic.

Longitudinal research has shown conclusively that adequate developmental pre-K and kindergarten programs have produced students who are academically, socially, and economically successful in ratios far superior to those cohorts who have not had the opportunities that such programs offer. Consequentially, the lower drop-out rates for the favored developmental programs are sustained through high school graduation.

The Denton ISD realizes the need to provide preschool programs and has accepted the challenge of providing this service to its pre-kindergarten age students. The District currently has pre-kindergarten half-day programs at seven of its campuses and needs to expand services at two or more campuses to additional students who meet state requirements for enrollment. DISD has constructed and opened a 600+ capacity preschool campus for qualifying students; however, with half-day programs the campus will not reach full capacity for several years, depending on growth.

There is a need for full-day state funded programming for many of the district's students who qualify as low income students. Currently full-day programming is available only for students in Head Start and for Deaf Education pre-kindergarten classrooms. The current half day program simply is not enough support for our students in the greatest need. Our students and their families need a full day

program to ensure our children are school ready before they can ever be college and workforce ready. Creating a program focused on ensuring children are school ready is paramount.

The need also exists for an increased transportation allotment to help support the needs of families who are working and need help getting the pre-kindergarten students to school. The majority of the cost burden is on local districts to support student transportation. Expanded bus service for pre-kindergarten would give more students a greater opportunity to participate and benefit from the current high quality pre-kindergarten programs.

Priority #4

Provide Adequate State Funding for Programs Positively Impacting Student Achievement./Readiness for College and Career

As a result of a decrease in funding by the State of Texas, funding sources such as the Student Success Initiative (ARI/AMI) were eliminated, without additional funding, the opportunity and achievement gap will only widen for socio-economically disadvantaged students. In addition, additional funds should be allocated to ensure high school graduates are post-secondary ready. .The state should financially support effective dropout prevention programs, effective use of virtual coursework, and effective career and technology programs leading to certification.

Funding for socio-economically disadvantaged students comes through a variety of means such as Title I, Part A (federal) funding and State Compensatory Education (state) funding. It is essential such funding continues as the number of students reaching poverty level increases. Currently, Denton ISD utilizes State Comp Ed funds to support initiatives, programs, and/or services designed to supplement the regular (state-funded) education program for students identified as at risk of dropping out of school. Title I, Part A funds have been allocated to eligible elementary schools (14 of the 35 Denton ISD campuses) to supplement both the regular (state-funded) education program and the supplemental (State Comp Ed) programs. For Denton ISD schools, Title I, Part A funds provide additional Reading and Math Interventionists, additional Reading Recovery teachers, additional before and after-school tutoring and supplemental supplies and materials to provide differentiated instruction for students at risk of failing to meet proficiency on state academic assessments.

Reinstitute SSI funds

With the increasing requirements from TEA requiring accelerated services for students, the need for Student Success Initiative funding (ARI/AMI) is imperative. School districts are finding the need to provide instruction and support for all students to be academically successful in mathematics and reading to be increasingly expensive through personnel cost, technology, and other instructional support resources. Beginning in 2011-12, SSI funding was suspended. We request that the SSI funding be reinstated as soon as possible so that our most struggling students will receive adequate and appropriate acceleration services.

In 1999, the Texas Legislature enacted the Student Success Initiative requiring school districts to provide appropriate opportunities to be successful in mathematics and reading. Significant changes were made by the 81st Texas Legislature in 2009. Funding has been appropriated to school districts during the past ten years through

the Accelerated Reading Initiative/Accelerated Mathematics Initiative (ARI/AMI) to assist in providing the needed instruction for any student failing to meet proficiency in either or both the TAKS Reading and Mathematics exams. As school districts move into the second year of administering the STAAR, students in 5th and 8th grade will again be required to meet the passing standard in reading and mathematics on the STAAR assessments to be promoted to the next grade level.

Accelerated instruction allows students to receive additional instruction in a manner that is differentiated and on-grade level. Providing additional instruction typically requires students to participate in individual, small group, or other instructional arrangements outside of the school day. Whenever students need additional help, the assistance must be received from a certified teacher who is considered Highly Qualified by definition of *The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*.

*Beginning in spring 2010, the SSI grade advancement requirements apply to the TAKS Mathematics and Reading tests at grades 5 and 8. If a student does not demonstrate proficiency on one or both of these tests, the student may advance to or be placed in the next grade level only if (1) he or she completes **all** accelerated instruction required by the Grade Placement Committee, and (2) the GPC determines that the student is likely to perform at grade level.... (2009-2010 Grade Placement Committee Manual)*

There are several instances whereby a student is **required** to receive accelerated instruction:

- a) After the first TAKS administration and the student failed to reach proficiency;
- b) After the second TAKS administration and the student failed to gain proficiency; and,
- c) After the third administration and the student failed to reach proficiency, regardless of the decision to retain or place by the GPC.*

Because the number of students requiring accelerated instruction is always an unknown during budget building time, local funding may likely fall short. The required amount of accelerated instruction is dependent on the performance of students near the end of the school year and in some cases, at the end of the summer. Furthermore, accelerated instruction is required regardless of local dollars. Moreover, the ability to access ARI/AMI greatly enhances the opportunities for districts to provide sufficient amounts of accelerated instruction to better ensure student success.

*Verified through phone conversation (9-20-12) with a TEA representative, districts can expect documents to be posted on the TEA website in the future that will exchange TAKS language for STAAR.

It is both urgent and imperative for the state legislature to advocate for adequate state and federal funding to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education. In the *A Blueprint for Reform: the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act* released in March 2010, President Obama states, "Today, more than ever, a world-class education is a prerequisite for success." A world-class education does not come without a significant investment at both the state and federal level. As the President shares in his blueprint, "this effort will require our best thinking *and resources* [emphasis added].

Drop-out Prevention Programs

All school districts understand the value of the high school diploma and are committed to ensure every student receives one. However, this is not done without strategic Drop-out Prevention Programs. Adequate funding is necessary to plan and implement multiple systems and structures to effectively combat potential drop-outs from occurring. Most districts have multiple-pronged approaches such as:

- Safe School Learning Environments---a safe learning environment that prevents bullying and violence, enhances positive interactions, interpersonal skills, engagement, and attitudes of well-being among students;
- School Community Collaboration---collective support for children in a community provides more opportunities for students to thrive;
- Family Engagement---the most accurate predictor of student success is family engagement in a child's education;
- Early Childhood Education---interventions that occur from birth to five years have proven to enhance the number of students who will graduate from high school;
- Intense Literacy Development---ensures that all students have the necessary reading, writing, and speaking skills that provide the building blocks for all other learning;
- Mentoring and Tutoring---builds supportive one-to-one relationships that address social or academic needs;
- Service Learning---connects learning with real-world work environments
- Alternative Learning Environments---non-traditional schools (such as Fred Moore High School in Denton ISD) provide an avenue to graduation by providing a variety of options that serve student's individual social and academic requirements;
- After-School Opportunities---allows additional time to enhance learning around work or activity schedules;
- At-Risk Professional Development for Staff---provides teachers innovative strategies and skills for working with at-risk populations;

- Technology---adapts instruction for multiple learning styles and provides high engagement in an authentic manner;
- Career and Technology Education---provides necessary school-to-work skills; and,
- Personalized/Individualized Counseling and Instruction--- provides for unique interests and allows for differences in students.

Virtual Coursework

The funding for virtual school/learning should be increased rather than reduced. The financial support of Texas Virtual School should remain in place as well as financial incentives for school districts to develop virtual courses.

With the emphasis on preparing students for college and career, there is no better way to give an authentic learning experience than through the virtual learning courses. The benefits to the students of Texas are immense. When a student participates in an on-line virtual course, some of the benefits include:

- Earning extra credits;
- Recovering lost credits;
- Preparing for 21st learning and college;
- Making room in the schedule for other courses;
- Taking more elective courses;
- Advancing to a higher level course such as AP or Dual Credit;
- Flexible scheduling for students that need to work;
- Flexible schedule that allows the course to be taken at school, at home, or while traveling; and,
- Allowing students to learn innovative technology, time management, and real-world applications.

Further, the need for students to be able to learn “anytime, anywhere” is greater than ever before. Virtual learning provides the advantages and benefits that students of the 21st century require. School districts desire to facilitate this style of learning and must have the appropriate funding and support from the state level to ensure our students are able to access virtual courses.

Career and Technology

One of the most costly, yet beneficial programs for students is Career and Technology. The courses provided by the Denton ISD LaGrone Advanced Technology Center are nationally recognized for their innovation and effectiveness. This award-winning center provides a necessary service to not only the students of Denton ISD, but also for many

students in neighboring school systems. A world-class program is expensive to maintain, however, the benefits far outweigh the costs. Funding for Career and Technology programs should not be decreased in a time when real-world application courses require complex technology systems. The advantages of a Career and Technology Program are vast:

- Increases the earning potential for students after graduation;
- Students are typically more engaged;
- Increases retention and persistence among CTE students;
- Involves students more directly in problem-solving;
- Connects students to potential employers;
- Supports life-long learning;
- Provides opportunity to “apply” learning;
- Constructs learning that is directly applied to their choice of career;
- Provides Real-world, authentic, learning experiences;
- Creates Hands-on learning opportunities;
- Allows students to collaborate with adults in career experiences;
- Creates opportunities for students to Interact with community members and potential employers;
- Develop opportunities to become members of organizations with similar career/vocational interests; and,
- Enables 21st Century technology access.

To continue to provide visionary college/career readiness opportunities, additional funding is required to maintain and increase Career and Technical Education programming. This is critical for Texas school children if we are to remain globally competitive, a worthy goal for all Texans.

PRIORITY #5

Review and Upwardly Adjust Weighted Funding for Special Programs

The weighted allotment system used for Special Education, Bi-lingual, and English as a Second Language (ESL) programs is beneficial to eligible school districts. However, there is a specific need for review and adjustment of the weighed funding for all these special programs. These students are currently served in a variety of settings and programs. Adjustments to weighted funding are necessary due to the population shift of students in our state.

Special Education

The weighted allotment system currently funding special education and related services for students with disabilities is beneficial to eligible school districts. However, there is a specific need for review and adjustment of special education weights for districts using an inclusionary model for instruction of special education students. Such a model is used to ensure that students are educated in the least restrictive environment with their nondisabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate as determined by the Annual Review and Dismissal (ARD) committee. Currently students receiving special education services in a resource room instructional arrangement setting receive a weight of 3, whereas students supported in the general education setting through the implementation of inclusionary practices receive a weight of 1.1. For district implementing this model, students with disabilities are educated in the general education setting with non-disabled peers 100% of the instructional day in the least restrictive environment as deemed appropriate by the ARD committee. These special education services and support systems for this population of students are provided in the general education classroom by highly qualified special educators. Educating students with disabilities in the general education setting is **highly effective in improving student performance** and complies with the Individuals with Disabilities Act 2004 (IDEA), 300.114 LRE Requirements. However, such a program is costly and involves **the need for additional personnel to support students**, to the maximum extent appropriate, in the general education classroom.

At the present time, based on the 2011-2012 Summary of Finance, Denton ISD has approximately 321 students being served in resource classrooms and approximately 723 students being served in the mainstream classrooms (general education setting) Based on the Summary of Finance Report, September 17, 2012, this equates to approximately \$7,489.15 Adjusted Basic Allotment (ABA) per student being served in resource rooms and approximately \$5,762.90 Adjusted Basic Allotment (ABA) per student for mainstream (inclusion) for an approximate total of \$4,166,576. By increasing the funding weight for students served in the mainstream instructional arrangements

from 1.1 to 1.3, DISD could potentially receive an additional \$758,043 to provide additional staff to support students in an inclusionary setting which research indicates better prepares students with disabilities. Based on these amounts, ARD committee student placements from resource room to regular classroom inclusion yield an approximately \$1700.00 negative net difference of funding per student.

It is important to note that all districts who participate in the implementation of inclusionary practices models serving students in the mainstream classrooms are experiencing similar losses in Special Education Funding. Currently special education funding for districts complying with IDEA 2004, by educating students with disabilities in the general education setting with instruction by highly qualified content area teachers and the required special education teachers, are greatly underfunded. Research and state assessment test results indicate an inclusionary model is highly effective in improving student performance. However, it is costly and in the majority of cases involves the need for more personnel to support students in the regular classroom than in a resource setting, where students are in larger groups. As a result of the special education weighted funding formula utilized in Texas, funding is inadequate to provide special education personnel to ensure education in the least restrictive environment to the maximum extent appropriate.

Bilingual Education

According to Chapter 29 and Chapter 89, bilingual education is required to serve our special language population. To fund it, a weighted allotment system is used. The district receives an annual allotment of basic allotment multiplied by 0.1 per student average daily attendance in a bilingual or special language program. This money is used to cover salaries, stipends, and a few instructional materials. During the school year 2011-12, the allotment for bilingual/ESL was \$1,682,423 and the actual spent was \$2,821,498 to serve 3,593 students.

Over the past 5 years, the district has implemented a dual language program using both one-way and two-way models. Currently the district is phasing out the early transitional bilingual program and adding dual language one grade level at a time each year. Longitudinal studies indicate dual language model are more successful than traditional transitional programs and bilingual students make long-term progress that surpass their native speakers up to two grade levels. Dual language programs comply with the state and federal requirements of offering language programs that facilitate the learning of the English language but it does so maintaining the primary language and demonstrating a respect for the culture. A recent study found dual language resulted in an increase in

academic performance for students in the program during three consecutive years as seen in state-mandated testing results (Gomez, 2006). However, the implementation of such programs is costly, requiring purchase of additional resources, training, monitoring, and support of the programs to be implemented effectively and with fidelity. In 2012-13 our dual language program has gone from 909 students to 1,206 students and it is expected to increase to 1503 students for 2013-14 school year.

The two-way dual language program is another innovative initiative of Denton ISD. It consists of having two groups of students with different native language in the same classroom. English native speakers and Spanish native speakers are taught in both languages. As a result, both groups of students learn from each other, as well as from the teacher. This model is encouraging because it creates bilingual individuals who will be able to interact positively in our global society. In an unprecedented move, the district has continued offering dual language two-way at the intermediate level. It will be in the student's cohort best interest to continue offering two-way dual language program through grade 12. With further funding, it would be possible to open more dual-language classrooms and extend both dual language one-way and two-way to more schools as the number of students needing bilingual education rises.

Although the success of the dual language program is evident, the cost of staffing alone is overwhelming. As the number of bilingual students increases throughout Texas, districts struggle to provide bilingual education as required by law with limited funding. Bilingual teachers are scarce making it necessary to offer additional teacher incentives to be able to retain the current teacher population and remain competitive. Funding is also needed to cover the cost of adding and retaining qualified bilingual paraprofessionals. There are other hidden costs to maintaining special language programs. For example, it is necessary to have personnel for the following: testing newcomers, for keeping track of the new students in the information system, and to deal with compliance issues.

English as a Second Language (ESL)

ESL education is funded using a weighted allotment system. Since the system was put in place, the cost of education has risen. The formula, once sufficient, is no longer reflecting the reality of educational costs.

Denton ISD serves 1686 ESL students from 42 languages. That number increases yearly as students whose native language is not English arrive from all over the world. ESL students receive accelerated instruction using second language learning strategies to ensure students are learning both the language and the academic content. Studies show it takes up to 5 years for students to learn the social language and up to 10 years

to learn the academic language. ESL programs use specialized methodology to scaffold learning so that students are acquiring language skills while having access to the needed academic skills.

This year, new state requirements for bilingual and ESL were put in place. All teachers working with ESL and bilingual students must be trained in sheltered instruction. While sheltered instruction training would undoubtedly benefit the ESL student population, training all teachers requires time and funds.

As it is, special language programs are underfunded. Increased funding would enable the district to better serve the ESL population. For example ESL students would benefit from smaller size classes, additional materials, and more specialized teacher training. Additional funding could be used to pay for teacher ESL certification and sheltered instruction training as well as on-going ELPS training.

PRIORITY #6

Amend the “50-Cent Bond Test” the Attorney General Uses to Approve Voter-Approved Bond Issues

The District supports legislation to amend the “50-Cent Bond Test” to provide the necessary bonding capacity to allow school districts to cost-effectively construct voter-approved school facilities to meet the demands of a growing student population and to address the increasing school construction costs, unfunded facility mandates and declining state funding assistance faced by school districts without the alternative choices of:

- Structuring the repayment of a portion of its bonds over a longer time period (i.e. up to 40 years), thereby increasing the cost to the district and taxpayers;
- Pledging the use of Tier I state funds to the payment of bonds, thereby potentially further reducing the funds available for instruction, etc., and/or
- Delaying the construction of already voter approved school facilities.

Under current law, prior to the issuance of any voter approved bonds, a school district must demonstrate to the Attorney General that it has the ability to repay such bonds and its existing bonds from a maximum Interest and Sinking (“I & S”) tax rate of 50-cents. The growth in a local district’s tax base historically has resulted in an adopted tax rate below this level, but with the number of school districts having an I & S tax rate of 40-cents or higher and increasing by 305% over the last 3 years, some fast growth districts currently are faced with poor alternatives.

The Denton ISD is considered to be a fast-growth district and is approaching the 50-cent cap. Denton ISD recommends the 50-Cent Debt Test be revised so districts can be provided with the better local option of increasing their I & S tax rate above 50-cents to shorten the repayment period on new bond sales and to reduce the interest costs of school districts and their taxpayers.

Assuming Denton ISD had an additional \$250 million bond sale (i.e. the approximate dollar amount required to be sold over the last 5 years), the district could comply with the existing 50-Cent Debt Test, but would need to repay the bonds over a 40-year period and have an I & S tax rate of 49.9 cents. The District’s interest cost would be \$732 million under the terms of the existing 50-Cent Debt Test.

In comparison, with an amendment to allow the local option, Denton ISD could use a repayment period of 30-years for a \$250 million bond sale. Denton ISD's I & S tax rate would be approximately 57.5 cents; however, the interest cost incurred by Denton ISD and its taxpayers would be reduced by over \$450 million. These savings would provide additional bonding capacity for future voter-approved school facilities without the need to increase the district's I & S tax rate and/or allow the district's I & S tax rate to be reduced in subsequent years.

PRIORITY #7

Increase Transportation Allotment

The district supports legislation that updates funding and increases services to students for school-provided transportation. This update would occur each legislative session and reflect actual transportation costs, i.e. include increased allotments and improved means of fund distribution for hazardous routes and special program services (Special Education, Bilingual Education, magnet programs, and career and technology programs). This legislation would also change the current two-mile regular education requirement for transportation services to one mile.

The district supports legislation that requires the University Interscholastic League (U.I.L.) to place local district schools in a geographically advantageous alignment, to reduce transportation costs. Under the current U.I.L. alignment policies, the first criterion considered is school size. The district also supports subsidizing local school districts whose travel budgets are adversely affected by district realignment. The district supports any activity of the U.I.L. to help alleviate economic and travel burdens related to U.I.L. activities based on the bi-annual district placement

TEA's transportation funding formula has not been modified or updated since 1985. For the last 25 years the reimbursement rate for transportation programs has remained inadequately at the same level while the diminished effects of the actual funding received are as follows:

- Increased fuel cost
- Increased vehicle insurance rates
- Increased transportation staff wages & benefits cost
- Increased vehicle & equipment maintenance cost
- Increased staff, equipment and program cost due to ongoing requirements to be in compliance with local, state, and federal unfunded mandates.

The current method to establish reimbursement to a district for hazardous transportation is based on TEA's dated 10% rule. A district's hazardous funding is determined by calculating 10% of the district's regular education allotment. This amount does not cover actual hazardous transportation needs. Denton ISD is able to fund fully 1 hazardous route when, in fact, the district needs funding for an additional 25-30 hazardous routes. These additional routes, which are indeed hazardous, currently are locally subsidized by funds that should be directed to instructional programs.

The current regular education funding formula only addresses students living two miles or more from their assigned campus. Given our changing society and concerns for student safety, the two-mile limit should be reduced to at least one mile.

Transportation costs should be updated each biennium based on actual costs and market conditions.

Every two years, the University Interscholastic League (U.I.L.) realigns Texas high schools into districts based on school size first, followed by geographical distribution. These realignments place some local school districts in a transportation funding dilemma because current funding does not take into account increased travel costs associated with the realignment.

Local school districts that are required by realignment to travel farther than in previous realignments experience a further financial burden for which there is no additional funding to cover the increased travel costs.

Because local taxes are used to meet increasing academic demands and requirements, the ability locally to fund additional transportation costs related to U.I.L. realignments increasingly has become difficult. The financial burden is inequitable in that it only imposes additional costs to those districts adversely realigned into districts requiring significantly more travel distance. Moreover, the districts that do not travel as far are immune from the financial ramifications associated with the U.I.L. realignment thereby creating increased inequity in the financial system. Therefore, school districts with minimal travel costs are more favorably prepared to dedicate local funding for educational priorities.

PRIORITY#8

The Denton ISD supports the efforts of the Fast Growth Schools Coalition in the six areas of interest by advocating for legislation to

- a) *Modify or eliminate the “50-cent debt test” that is used by the Attorney General to evaluate new bond issues before bonds are approved for issuance.*
- b) *Increase the guaranteed yield for the Existing Debt Allotment (EDA) and Instructional Facilities Allotment (IFA) so that more students are beneficiaries of the program.*
- c) *Create a fast growth allotment within any changes to the existing school finance and formula systems.*
- d) *Ensure that a full range of fast growth issues are considered as the Instructional Materials Allotment (IMA) is implemented by TEA and further refined by legislators.*
- e) *Fund the New Instructional Facilities Allotment (NIFA) in the 2014-15 biennium and establish funding levels that maintain the pace of escalating start-up costs.*
- f) *Maintain the use of prior-year state property values that are determined by the Comptroller’s property value study.*

PRIORITY#9

The Denton ISD supports efforts to improve the Assessment and Accountability system

The district supports repealing the statutory requirement that end-of-course exams (EOC) count for 15% of a student's grade. We support developing alternative assessments for English Language Learners at the secondary level. We support reducing the number of STARR exams in grades 3-8. We support a system that ensures accountability ratings are reflective of overall student achievement at a campus and district levels and not limited to the lowest performing students. We support the work of the Texas High Performing Schools Consortium in making recommendations regarding digital learning, learning standards, multiple authentic assessments, and local control.

The STAAR/EOC replaced the TAKS accountability system.

- STAAR tests are more rigorous and complex, have more questions per test, and have a 4 hour time limit.
- Promotion requirements for fifth and eighth grade students taking the STAAR reading and mathematics tests will resume in 2012–13.
- High School students graduating on the recommended plan or distinguished plan must pass 15 end of course (EOC) exams to graduate, as opposed to the 4 exit level exams under the TAKS system.
- EOC exams count as 15% of the student's final grade in a course. Unless the 15% requirement is repealed by the 2013 Texas Legislature, local authority over course grades, class rank, and GPA will be diminished by the state-imposed requirement
- Standards for STAAR will not be released until December of 2012, although we have been under the system for a full year.
- The various levels of scoring, and requirements for graduation purposes, relative to the EOC's are complex and difficult to understand and explain.
- School districts are penalized for having too many special needs students take the modified version of the STAAR, regardless of whether or not that is what their Individualized Education Plan (IEP) stipulates.
- Students must graduate recommended or higher to be eligible for enrollment in a 4 year university in Texas.
- Students take multiple tests, every year beginning in the 3rd grade.

PRIORITY#10

The Denton ISD supports the continuation of the current defined benefit pension program for TRS eligible employees.

The TRS fund is one of the **healthiest and most stable** funds in the **world**. Without any changes, the fund could make payments through the year 2075. A few quick facts;

- 1 out of 20 Texans is a member of TRS
- In 2011, TRS paid \$7.2 billion in retirement benefits. 95% of that went directly to retirees who live in Texas.
- 95% of TRS members do not pay into social security.
- Defined benefit plans (TRS) help recruit and retain high quality Teachers as compared with defined contribution plans.
- In 2008, the annual TRS administrative cost was \$24 per member, which was well below the peer average of \$63 for the same year.
- TRS benefits provided for 98,900 jobs across Texas in 2011.

The TRS issue is worthy of discussion on two fronts; first, TRS retirees have not received a permanent increase since 2001. The value of the retirement benefit available for TRS members is 36% less than the average benefits available to other state teacher retirement systems. DISD would support legislation to address annuity levels for current retirees. Next, the defined benefit plan provides benefits at a lower cost than alternative plans. The current defined benefit plan structure is the most cost efficient for the state and taxpayers.

In fact, changing TRS to a defined contribution plan would immediately add \$11.7 billion to its unfunded liability. One of the greatest benefits of having a defined benefit plan is the ability to pool assets and have the system itself assume the risk of investing while ensuring monthly annuity for its members. With a defined contribution plan, that risk shifts onto the retiree who may outlive their benefits. Such an occurrence may shift the financial burden to other social services. TRS saw the plan's value erode from \$112 billion to a reported \$67 billion in February of 2009. Today, the TRS pension trust fund has reclaimed those losses through professional investing and the ability to weather difficult economic times. The trust fund is again worth over \$112 billion.

Alternative plan structures carry differing levels of risk for the state and for TRS members. Defined contributions plans may shift risks away from the state, but are far riskier for the retiree. However, this shift does not solve the issue of the plan's unfunded liability.

The Defined Benefit Plan is critical to the assurance of lifetime annuity payments for members of the Teacher Retirement System. The DB plan generates a predictable, steady retirement income which is the sole guaranteed income for most Texas retirees. DB plans are pooled which allow for the averaging of risks over a large number of participants. DB plans fund benefits through the average life expectancy of the group. With pooled funds, management fees are lower than maintaining hundreds or thousands of individual accounts.

Pension assets can be diversified for optimal returns throughout an employee's lifetime. When on a reliable DB Plan pension, retirees are a vital, continuous source of spending in their communities. Given the growth of retirement insecurity, we should be looking at ways to ensure all Americans have access to adequate and secure pensions.

The Denton Independent School District supports legislation to maintain the current defined benefit plan utilized by TRS. The Denton Independent School District also supports legislation to address annuity increases for existing retirees.