



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. Make Education Funding a Priority** – *All Texas school districts now are facing a “funding cliff” because of the loss of federal stabilization funds. It is the recommendation of the Denton Independent School District that the state make appropriate budget adjustments to reinstate funding levels. 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. These currently are funded by the Stabilization funding.*
- 2. Provide Adequate Money 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. As a further consequence, the transportation allotment needs to be adjusted to support student transportation needs.*
- 3. Provide Adequate Money for Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Students** – *As a result of a decrease in funding by the State of Texas, such as the Student Success Initiative (ARI/AMI) funds, the State’s use of federal stimulus funds to replace funds previously provided by the State, and the use of “50 –Cent Debt Test”, school districts cannot respond adequately to supplemental assistance to socio-economically disadvantaged students who traditionally have benefitted from such funding sources. Without more funding, the opportunity and achievement gap only will widen for socio-economically disadvantaged students.*

4. **Review and Upwardly Adjust Special Education Weights for Inclusion Districts** - *The weighted allotment system is beneficial to eligible school districts. However, there is a specific need for review and adjustment of special education weights for districts that are using the inclusion model for instruction of special education students. This model is supported by the least restrictive environment of special education students. Placement in the least restrictive environment is an unfunded Congressional mandate. These students currently are served in resource classrooms and should be a part of mainstream classrooms with special education.*
5. **Amend the “50-Cent Bond Test” the Attorney General Uses to Approve Voter-approved Bond Issues** - *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.*
6. **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.*
7. **Realign UIL Travel Efficiency** - *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.*

PRIORITY #1

Make Education Funding a Priority

All Texas school districts now are facing a “funding cliff” because of the loss of federal stabilization funds. It is the recommendation of the Denton Independent School District that the state make appropriate budget adjustments to reinstate funding levels. 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. These currently are funded by the Stabilization funding.

The State of Texas used the Stabilization funding from the Federal Government to complete the cost of funding the public school system during the last biennium. During the 09-10 school year, this funding was \$6.6 million for the Denton Independent School District. The Stabilization funding is estimated to be \$6.5 million for the 10-11 school year. During this same time the funding formulas resulted in much higher funding levels for the mandated programs i.e. Special Education, Gifted and Talented, Bilingual Education, State Compensatory Education and Career and Technology Education. Although these programs do need additional funds, it should not be at the expense of the basic program. The funding of schools needs to increase globally. School districts were allowed to use the Stabilization funding to meet the mandated funding levels for the 09-10 school year. For the next biennium there is an anticipated “funding cliff” projected that is a result of the loss of funding from the Federal Stabilization. In addition, it is our understanding that due to the shortages in the state budget, there is no funding available to cover the “funding cliff” created by the State’s use of the Federal funding in the prior biennium. School districts are limited in the ability to generate funding from property taxes due to the Property Tax Relief efforts at the state level two 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, schools districts better can 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 successful in today’s information society.

PRIORITY #2

Provide Adequate Money 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. 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.

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 prekindergarten 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. This district 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 prekindergarten classrooms.

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

Priority #3

Provide Adequate Money for Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Students

As a result of a decrease in funding by the State of Texas, such as the Student Success Initiative (ARI/AMI) funds, the State's use of federal stimulus funds to replace funds previously provided by the State, and the use of "50 –Cent Debt Test", school districts cannot respond adequately to supplemental assistance to socio-economically disadvantaged students who traditionally have benefitted from such funding sources. Without more funding, the opportunity and achievement gap only will widen for socio-economically disadvantaged students.

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 and middle 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.

In 1999, the Texas Legislature enacted the Student Success Initiative (SSI) requiring school districts to provide appropriate opportunities to be successful in mathematics and reading. Funding known as Accelerated Reading Initiative/Accelerated Math Initiative (ARI/AMI) was appropriated to Texas school districts to assist in meeting the requirements set forth in the Student Success Initiative. The ARI/AMI funding has been eliminated beginning in the 2010-11 school year. Without this funding source, the school districts further must stretch local dollars to meet the accelerated instruction mandate.

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]."

PRIORITY #4

Review and Upwardly Adjust Special Education Weights for Inclusion Districts

The weighted allotment system is beneficial to eligible school districts. However, there is a specific need for review and adjustment of special education weights for districts that are using the inclusion model for instruction of special education students. This model is supported by the least restrictive environment of special education students. Placement in the least restrictive environment is an unfunded Congressional mandate. These students currently are served in resource classrooms and should be a part of mainstream classrooms with special education.

Currently students who are served in the resource room instructional arrangement receive a weight of 3.0, whereas students who are served in the mainstream (inclusion) instructional arrangement receive a weight of 1.1. At the present time, Denton ISD has approximately 573 students being served in resource classrooms and approximately 891 students being served through mainstream classrooms through the inclusion model. Based on our present Summary of Finance Report, April 27, 2010 this equates to approximately \$8,434.27 Adjusted Basic Allotment (ABA) per student being served in resource rooms and approximately \$5,474.75 Adjusted Basic Allotment (ABA) per student for mainstream (inclusion). Based on these amounts, ARD committee student placements from resource room to regular classroom inclusion yield approximately a \$3,000.00 negative net difference of funding per student. A total of 891 students are placed in mainstream Inclusion model classes from resource classrooms. This amounts to a LRE requirement placement in funding to DISD of \$2,673,000 for the current year budget.

It is important to note that all districts who participate in the inclusion models serving students in the mainstream classrooms are experiencing similar losses in Special Education Funding. Research and TAKS Tests results indicate that the inclusion 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, wherein students are in larger groups.

PRIORITY #5

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 3 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.

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PRIORITY #6

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.

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.

Priority #7

Realign UIL Travel Efficiency

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 faced by local districts related to U.I.L. activities based on the bi-annual district placement.

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.