

50 Most Memorable Quotes in School Finance

After 25 years as an active proponent of school finance equity, I believe that I have heard it all. The following are 50 of the most remarkable quotes I have heard in Texas between 1969 and 1994 (some are paraphrased).

– Dr. José A. Cárdenas, IDRA Founder

- 1. State Supreme Court:** “The Constitution demands that all districts have the same amount of money. When they all have the same amount of money, then it’s all right for some to have more.”
- 2. Federal Courts:** “It’s an unfair, dirty, stinking, rotten system, but it’s not unconstitutional.”
- 3. State Courts:** “It is unconstitutional, and it must be fixed immediately. We are giving the Legislature five more years to come up with a better system.”
- 4. State political leader:** “I am strongly in favor of equalization as long as nothing changes.”
- 5. Texas legislator:** “The new law is perfect. All districts in the state will have an equal amount of money per child, and those districts which are used to having more money, will continue to have more.”
- 6. Republican:** “Texas will have the finest system of education in the country, if we do not raise taxes.”
- 7. Democrat:** “Education is our highest priority. These new taxes will go for education after we finish building our new highways.”
- 8. A Texas Governor:** “We need a new study of the school finance problem.”
- 9. Out-of-state school finance expert:** “Thank you for the \$5 million for our new study of the school finance problem.”
- 10. Candidate for Governor:** “If you elect me governor, I will call for a new study of the school finance problem.”
- 11. A Texas Lt. Governor:** “Now that we have solved the school finance problem, we can concentrate on the quality of our schools.”
- 12. Texas Senator (1982):** “I know that Texas has a \$2.86 billion surplus, but you can’t fix the school finance system by throwing money at it.”
- 13. Texas Senator (1989):** “How can you expect us to fix the school finance system when we don’t have any money?”
- 14. Texas Representative:** “The present system is bad and it is illegal. If you enact my proposed constitutional amendment, it will no longer be illegal.”
- 15. Texas Attorney General:** “The system may be bad, but it is the law, and I have sworn to uphold the law. The equal protection law? What’s the equal protection law?”

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- 16. Rich man from Dallas:** “It’s perfectly simple. See this line? It’s districts with lots of money. See that line? It’s districts with no money. Now, you just take money from this line and put it in that line. It’s --- just --- as --- simple --- as --- that!”
- 17. City Manager:** “Schools don’t need more money. Schools need good management. Give us the money and we will help them manage.” (Gee, maybe Texas schools will now be able to participate in the South Texas Nuclear Power Project.)
- 18. State educational leader:** “I know that all kids are equal, but the system has to take into account that some kids are more equal than others.”
- 19. Rich school district:** “The solution is to level up. If we increase the state share from \$8 billion a year to \$56 billion a year, all districts will have the same amount of money. Then the rich school districts can add more money.”
- 20. Richest school districts:** “Sure we have more money. But we spend all of that money to develop curriculum materials which we then make available to the poor districts.”
- 21. Rich, low taxing district:** “You can’t raise our tax rate to the state average; our taxpayers won’t like it.”
- 22. Parent in the lowest taxing, rich school district:** “We have lots of money for our schools because we make sacrifices and support high taxes.”
- 23. District with less than 10 students enrolled in grades 1 to 12:** “If we are consolidated with another school district, it will destroy our educational program.”
- 24. School superintendent:** “It’s not fair. If the money appropriated for bilingual education has to be spent on bilingual education, where will we get the money for the new band uniforms?”
- 25. Superintendent in a poor school district:** “I don’t envy the rich districts. Eventually I may get a job in one of them.”
- 26. Superintendent in a poorer district:** “Our district is located on the Rio Grande, just across from Mexico. Sure, we attempted to consolidate with another district; but we’re so poor, the Mexican district didn’t want us.”
- 27. Superintendent in an even poorer district:** “We don’t have to go to Austin to see what the Legislature is doing in school finance. The districts in the Dallas area look after our interests.”



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- 28. Eighth poorest district [out of 1,600] in Texas (1972):** “We have to fight these court suits. The courts are going to take away our money and give it to the poor school districts in the state.”
- 29. Teacher organization (from 1969 to 1994):** “The Legislature must fix the Texas system of school finance. The best way of fixing it is by raising teacher salaries and increasing fringe benefits.”
- 30. Teachers in rich districts:** “The system is good because it allows the districts with the best students to attract the best teachers.”
- 31. Teachers in poor districts:** “Where can I get an application to teach in a rich district?”
- 32. Teacher without a degree or certificate:** “If they keep putting more money into the system all the jobs will be taken by qualified teachers.”
- 33. TEA (Texas Society for the Preservation of the Status Quo, 1970):** “The amount of equity provided under the new law is the exact amount that is needed.”
- 34. TEA (1975):** “The amount of equity provided under the new law is the exact amount that is needed.”
- 35. TEA (1985):** “The amount of equity provided under the new law is the exact amount that is needed.”
- 36. TEA (1993):** “The amount of equity provided under the new law is the exact amount that is needed.”
- 37. Old TEA Deputy Commissioner (1985):** “Money does not make a difference.”
- 38. New TEA Deputy Commissioner (1993):** “Have you noticed how all the low performing kids seem to be clustered in the low wealth districts?”
- 39. TEA statistician:** “There are no big differences in the amount of money available to wealthy and poor school districts. In this chart, we have eliminated the 150 richest and the 150 poorest districts. As you can see, the difference in money in the remaining districts is small. In simple words, the extremes appear extreme because the extremes are very extreme. If you eliminate the extremes, the extremes are not so extreme.”

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40. TEA expert witness: “We already have a perfectly equitable system of school finance in Texas, if no district levies a tax higher than 65 cents, and if districts do not construct new schools, and if there is no increase in the number of students, and if the cost of education does not increase, and if all teachers are paid the state minimum salary, and if…”
41. Expert on school finance: “It’s good to have some children in schools with less money than others because it forces the state to pump in new money each year. The children in poor districts are like rabbits in a dog race. They serve an important purpose giving the dogs something to chase.”
42. School boards (1973): “1,603 school districts is the exact number needed in Texas.”
43. School boards (1983): “1,194 districts is the exact number needed in Texas.”
44. School boards (1993): “1,048 districts is the exact number needed in Texas.”
45. Chamber of Commerce: “We need a plentiful supply of cheap labor in order to attract high-tech industries to Texas.”
46. Farmer: “We don’t need better schools. In a few years cotton will return as the backbone of the Texas economy, and we will again be rich.”
47. Demetrio Rodríguez (1969): “I wanted to have adequate schooling.”
48. Demetrio Rodríguez (1973): “I want my children to have adequate schooling.”
49. Demetrio Rodríguez (1988): “I want my grandchildren to have adequate schooling.”
50. Demetrio Rodríguez (1994): “I want my great-grandchildren to have adequate schooling.”

Written by Dr. José A. Cárdenas, founder of IDRA and a nationally recognized teacher, researcher and pioneer in the field of education for U.S. Latino children whose civil rights work zeroed in on educational justice and equity. He was an authority in school finance reform and early-childhood, multicultural and bilingual education. One of his books, *Texas School Finance Reform: An IDRA Perspective*, documented the 28-year history of school finance in Texas. Today led by Dr. María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel, IDRA advocate for the right of every student to equality of educational opportunity.

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