

Educational Institutions Need Protected State Funding

IDRA Comments to Senate Finance, Re: Public Education and Higher Education
Submitted by Chloe Latham Sikes, February 22, 2021

Dear Chairwoman Nelson and Honorable Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

IDRA (Intercultural Development Research Association) is an independent, non-partisan, education non-profit committed to achieving equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college.

We respectfully urge the committee to sustain a maintenance of equity to fund public schools and institutions of higher education through the next biennium.

Public K-12 schools and institutions of higher education (IHEs) have operated on the frontlines of the pandemic response by providing meals, counseling, digital devices and connectivity, health and safety information, and critical student support services in addition to their primary duty to educate students. Educational institutions offer a key to economic recovery as students earn diplomas, degrees, and skill-based certifications. However, schools and IHEs require protected state funding to serve students, make up for instructional disruptions, and make college affordable and accessible.

Recommendations

- **Use the Economic Stabilization Fund (ESF).** The ESF can help maintain the state's funding to public schools through the promises made in House Bill 3, and sustain funding to Texas' public colleges and universities. Postsecondary institutions provide meaningful economic opportunities to students and their local communities through education, jobs, and social services and health supports.
- **Ensure that state funds and supplemental federal stimulus funds are targeted toward equitable investments to offset instructional disruption.** Students in early grades, emergent bilingual (i.e. English learner) students, and students in high school preparing for postsecondary college and career opportunities require school funding to address the instructional disruptions to their learning for the past two school years (2019-20 and 2020-21). State and federal stimulus funds should be targeted to sustain formula funding as well as budget riders that fund critical support programs for students, such as Communities in Schools. Federal relief funds should be used to supplement, not supplant, school funding with a maintenance of equity for marginalized students' education.
- **Extend hold harmless funding provisions.** Irregular student attendance and drastic changes in expected enrollment have compromised schools' funding to address the ongoing challenges to finding, educating, and engaging students. The state should fund

schools according to past three-years' attendance, with extended hold harmless funding provisions for schools experiencing temporary declines in attendance and enrollment.

- **Delay the state property tax compressions** of local M&O tax rates to the next biennium, for a savings of at least \$5 billion. These tax compressions inequitably benefit high property-wealth school districts who already could tax at lower rates, while also demanding a higher price-tag for the state. Delaying the property tax compressions included in HB 3 would retain local and state revenue for public education funding.
- **Support positive school climates and school mental health resources.** The contingency provisions for the School Safety Allotment (SSA) should be maintained, with narrowed allowable uses to prioritize mental and behavioral health supports to students. This allotment can supply necessary supports for student and school health safety, counseling, and restorative discipline practices. The SSA should be directed toward evidence-based, effective prevention practices (i.e. more trained counselors, social workers, social-emotional learning, restorative justice practices, culturally-relevant instruction, robust mental-health supports, etc.) rather than toward “hardening” responses that have not been shown to be effective for safe schools, such as overly-hardened school facilities, unnecessarily invasive surveillance equipment, and increased law enforcement.

IDRA is available for any questions or further resources that we can provide. Thank you for your consideration. For more information, please contact Chloe Latham Sikes, Ph.D., IDRA Deputy Director of Policy, at chloe.sikes@idra.org.

IDRA is an independent, non-profit organization led by Celina Moreno, J.D. Our mission is to achieve equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college. IDRA strengthens and transforms public education by providing dynamic training; useful research, evaluation, and frameworks for action; timely policy analyses; and innovative materials and programs.