

Message to Texas Senate Raises Legit Question: How Much is Enough?

Dear Texas,

My [letter to the Texas Senate](#) dated 3/27/2015 condemning its destructive rhetoric about our public schools has received more attention statewide than I ever imagined. My email inbox has been flooded with compliments, criticisms, questions, emotion, and more than a few messages from outer space.

The intent of my letter was not to lobby against voucher legislation. Common sense does not require my two cents on the matter. The intent of my letter was to call into question the motivations and manner of those who so aggressively and recklessly advocate for the diversion of public school funds to private school options.

Right or wrong, voucher proponents should stop slinging mud at our public schools. If their arguments in favor of vouchers are truly made in the spirit of what's best for Texas children then they should not feel compelled to undermine public confidence in our public schools in order to create public support for their vouchers.

One of the arguments frequently made in support of vouchers is that our public schools are failing. I believe I effectively dispelled that argument with numerous points of sourced fact evidencing quite the opposite in my letter to the Senate. Those are posted on our website [here](#) if you'd like a refresher.

Proponents of vouchers are also quick to condemn school leaders when arguing the subject of adequate funding. They not only claim more money is not the answer, but suggest we divert resources away from alleged failing schools (because that makes perfect sense). *Note: Although the sole measure by which our state labels a school, we all know state test scores are inadequate measures of a school's worth.*

If more money is not the answer, then what is? I had a conversation yesterday with Dr. Craig Coleman, superintendent of Harleton ISD in East Texas. He called in response to a post on our [Friends of Texas Public Schools Facebook page](#) by a gentleman who asked and stated, "How much is enough? School funding is out of control." Click [here](#) to read and comment on this Facebook post.

We thought that was a reasonable question. Dr. Coleman suggested we answer it with what it currently costs to educate a student in Texas. In 2006, the State Legislature decided what students were worth by creating a funding formula that established how much a school district was entitled to spend per student. Oddly, that number varies widely from one district to the next, ranging from \$3,633 to \$12,170. The statewide average is \$5,360. *To see how much the state thinks it costs to educate a student in your school district, [click here](#).*

The state believes the 2014-15 cost to educate a student in Harleton ISD is \$4,969. Harleton ISD raises what it can via local property taxes and the state kicks in the rest, not to exceed \$4,969 in total. If local property values go up, or if H-E-B builds in Harleton and Harleton ISD can raise more dollars locally, the state reduces its share by the same amount. No new revenue for Harleton ISD since 2006.

If we divide \$4,969 by 180 school days and divide that by the 7.5 hours in the school day we get the rate to educate a child in Harleton ISD of \$3.68 per child per hour. That's quite a bargain when you consider my 13-year-old daughter makes more than that per hour per child as a babysitter and

includes all academic instruction, extracurricular and club activities, transportation, meals, maintenance, medical, counseling, utility bills, insurance, state-mandated reporting, payroll and benefits, Ad infinitum!

Texas ranks 46th in per pupil spending. In spite of the state legislature's lack of commitment to our public schools, our Texas public schools are outperforming every other state in the nation, again, based on the data I've already shared.

Rather than waste time and dollars arguing over vouchers, perhaps we should get to the real issue at hand, which is adequately funding our public schools as the Texas Constitution requires and the courts have ruled.

The state's role in education, as I understand it, is to adequately fund a free and public school system for all, not an education of any kind for each.

Scott Milder
Founder & CEO
Friends of Texas Public Schools