

Tuesday, September 15, 2015



The Student View on School Finance

While many contend that the school finance system in Texas is too complicated even for many educators to understand, two Houston ISD students seem to have a pretty good grasp for its shortcomings—and the [Washington Post](#) noticed over the weekend. It seems Zaakir Tameez, a member of the 2015 class of Carnegie Vanguard High School, and Amy Fan, a member of the 2016 class of Bellaire High School, took an unusual approach in making the Texas Supreme Court aware of their concerns. They wrote and submitted a 35-page brief siding with the more than 600 school districts suing the state for underfunding public education. Their brief explores the ways that many schools for students who live in poverty are inadequately funded and details the consequences, noting that students have a unique view of the case. [See the full brief here.](#)

Spotlight on Region X Schools

Red Oak ISD's STEM program is getting a boost this fall thanks to a \$35,000 grant through [Project Lead the Way](#), the nation's leading provider of K-12 STEM programs. The grant allows Red Oak High School [to formalize a top-notch engineering program](#) allowing students to engage in open-ended problem solving, learn and apply the engineering design process, and develop vital skills such as teamwork, communication, and critical thinking. Related professional development took place this summer, and new equipment—3D printers, a wind tunnel, and virtual reality technology—is on the way. The district hopes to expand the project [into middle and elementary schools](#) with more hands-on working space and project-based learning atmospheres.

Schools continue to expand the use of resources available via the Internet to help students with their school work. But as the number of those resources grows, it can be overwhelming for both students and parents to try to remember multiple URLs and passwords. [That's why Frisco ISD has made it easier for students of all grade levels to only have to look at one place for those valuable web links.](#) They can log on to portal.friscoisd.org to connect to such online resources as Google Apps, the

Student Learning Hub, electronic textbooks, several websites used in classrooms or recommended for homework, student email and the Home Access Center for secondary students.

A dozen school districts from Region 10 were among those who saluted the efforts of local news media in TASB's annual Media Honor Roll program. More than 350 Texas newspapers, radio and television stations, and online publications were named to the 2015 Honor Roll for fair, accurate and balanced reporting of news about public schools. Region districts participating (and building good media relations in the process) were: Anna, Bonham, Coppell, Forney, Garland, Leonard, Mesquite, Pottsboro, Quinlan, Red Oak, Rockwall and Wills Point. [See the entire list of districts and who they honored here.](#)

Scanning the News

Several weeks into a new school year reports are still coming in around the country of classrooms being covered by substitutes. Indeed, [after years of recession-related layoffs and hiring freezes, school systems around the country are in urgent need of more qualified teachers](#). Shortages have surfaced in big cities, as well as in states such as Georgia, Indiana and North Dakota that have long struggled to compete for education graduates. Oklahoma's state school superintendent said the Sooner State was at least 1,000 teachers short, leaving some 25,000 to 30,000 kids without a permanent teacher. [Several schools throughout Texas are struggling](#) to fill their classrooms with appropriately experienced and fully trained teachers because of a statewide teacher shortage in STEM and bilingual areas, according to the TEA. [Experts say the situation may get worse before it gets better](#), and the best solution is to entice experienced educators to stay in the profession.

The future of charter schools in Washington State has been on a roller coaster ride since [the state Supreme Court's recent ruling that the voter-approved initiative is unconstitutional](#). The high court found that the [independently organized schools do not pass muster as common public schools](#) and therefore cannot receive public funding. Some 1,200 students in the state's nine charters are in limbo as [advocates say they will ask the court to reconsider](#), and have called on the governor to convene a special legislative session to address the court's concerns. In addition, backers are rounding up private funding if needed to help keep the schools open. [Gov. Jay Inslee refuses to call a special session](#), instead focusing efforts on improving traditional public schools instead of charters he says "lack public oversight and accountability." Meanwhile, [the state's attorney general says he will ask the court to reconsider](#).

Nevada's liberal voucher program is under attack again by [an education advocacy group that claims state money provided for public schools can only be used to operate those schools](#). The state's new approach to school choice—so-called "education savings accounts" that set aside up to \$5,000 for any public school child's private school tuition, tutoring, homeschooling or other educational use—[was challenged in court last month by a coalition of civil liberties organizations](#). The suit, filed on behalf of a group of parents, clergy, and other taxpayers, opposes the program's effort to divert taxpayer money to private, religious schools which they claim violates the state constitution. Both lawsuits call on Nevada courts to block the program scheduled to begin implementation in January. So far more than 3,000 families have submitted applications to receive money through the program.

Items of Interest

Do you ever wonder whether researchers and professional developers really know what it's like to be a school leader? Do you sometimes struggle to connect articles and conference presentations with the challenges leaders face every day? Award-winning educator William Sterrett had the same questions, so he set out to identify the most important issues facing today's school leaders and to offer practical, effective strategies for success in a new ASCD book. Drawing on his own experience as a teacher and principal and on interviews with nine distinguished practitioners—including Carol Ann Tomlinson, Richard DuFour, Baruti Kafele, and James Popham—Sterrett merges current

research and theory with lessons from successful educators who have truly "been there, done that." [Check out Sterrett's *Insights into Action* here.](#)

Not only are [more American children poor](#) today than before the Great Recession, but poor kids are increasingly clustered with poor classmates at school, according to an analysis from the nonprofit [EdBuild](#). Between 2006 and 2013, the number of students in high-poverty school districts — in which more than 20% of children live below the federal poverty line — increased from 15.9 million to 24 million. That means nearly half of the nation's 50 million public school students go to class with large numbers of peers who are growing up with poverty and all its difficulties. [EdBuild](#), which advocates for more equitable education funding, has produced an [interactive map](#) that shows how poverty levels have changed in each of the nation's 14,000 school districts. It also [shows Census Bureau poverty rates](#) in each district.

Federal health authorities say [American schools are making progress in their efforts to boost the nutritional quality of breakfasts and lunches served in their cafeterias](#), but there's still room for improvement. A recent CDC report found that 79% of schools served at least two kinds of non-fried vegetables and 78% sold at least two kinds of fruits each day for lunch—a substantial improvement from 2006. Schools did an even better job of meeting federal nutrition standards for whole-grain foods, and improved on efforts to reduce sodium in meals. Researchers examined data related to nine specific recommended diet-improving practices, finding that 98% of schools had adopted at least one, nearly 75% had adopted at least four, and 25% embraced seven or more. [See the report here.](#)

Resource Bank

Several weeks into the new school year and the battle of the cell phone is still in high gear. Parents are concerned about [responsible use](#), schools are helping new students (and many vets) learn about [the rules of use](#), and the youngsters are experiencing withdrawal from a summer of unfettered device surfing. Caroline Knorr, the parenting editor for *Common Sense Media*, has some good advice for students and parents, which no doubt will be beneficial for educators. Her [5 Back-to-School Rules for Cell Phone-Carrying Kids \(and 1 for Parents\)](#) is today's [Resource Bank](#) item.



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