

Testimony in Support of SB 16

Chandra Villanueva, Senior Policy Analyst, villanueva@cphp.org

Money in education matters. Well-funded schools are able to attract and retain high quality teachers and invest in those teachers by providing professional development and other supports. Students in well-funded schools have access to a wider variety of courses and other enrichment activities that keep students engaged. Yet, the last time the legislature engaged in a process to answer the question of how much funding is needed, was over 30 years ago.

Since then, incremental changes and tweaks around the edges have left us with an outdated school finance system bogged down in inefficiency and funding levels not aligned with current costs.

While SB 16 has the potential to bring innovative ideas to the table, the first focus of this commission should be to establish a firm vision for public education.

The Higher Education Coordinating Board is on its second 15-year strategic plan – the first plan was focused on closing attainment gaps between racial and economic groups. A similar strategic plan focused on closing achievement gaps in public education in order to achieve the state's 60x 30 goals for higher education would provide a framework for determining where additional resources are needed and benchmarks for measuring short- and long-term improvements in educational outcomes.

We have done this before, and can be successful in doing it again. The last time was in 1983 when the legislature convened the Select Committee on Public Education – a diverse group representing the House and Senate leaderships, the Governor, business leaders and education stakeholders. At that time, the legislature knew “Serious consideration and long-range planning are necessary to carry the Texas educational system into the 21st Century as a quality, effective system.”

Recommendations from this committee went on to become HB 72 (1984) and created many of the positive elements seen in our school finance system today, such as the equalized basic allotment, weighted student funding, and Prekindergarten.

Once we have our North Star and know what we're trying to achieve, it is possible to develop an adequate and equitable method of finance that shares the responsibility of funding our schools equally between local property tax payers and state revenue sources.

For more information or to request an interview, please contact Oliver Bernstein at bernstein@cphp.org or 512.823.2875.

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