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Education & Lawsuits: What is it really all about?

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In 2011, the 82nd Legislative Session found Texas school districts distinctly united. Initial threats of cutting education by 10 billion dollars and a lingering 2006 broken school finance system created a collective voice behind a single message – Make Education a Priority.

The 83rd Legislative Session in 2013 will find school districts not only standing together but stepping forward. A majority of districts now support one of four lawsuits challenging the state's failed school funding system. Forcing the state to comply with its constitutional duties through litigation is nothing new. Since 1989, six lawsuits have been used to protect the pursuit of quality education.

By comparison, this round of litigation is magnified. The number of lawsuits and school districts participating is historically unprecedented. The degree to what is at stake is equal to the value we place on the following words; "A prosperous society is dependent upon an educated public."

Lawmakers have had three legislative sessions to tackle the broken finance system. A new approach is needed to solve a repeating problem. In the world of politics, there are times when party influence's seems to supersede the public's interest. When this occurs, we find Republicans on one side and Democrats on the other. This becomes a concern when the subject being deliberated truly qualifies as a bipartisan issue – educating children. Treating education as a neutral topic is not a farfetched idea. Over 7000 publicly elected school board trustees across Texas do this quite successfully.

It raises an eye brow to know there are legislators that actually welcome these educational lawsuits. By using the courts as political cover, party pressures are held at bay while lawmakers can vote their conscience. Nevertheless, whether forced or by courage, we have to believe our respected policymakers will protect education during the 83rd Legislative Session.

With so many lawsuits, what is it really all about? On the surface, it's about money. It is about the cost of education and how those dollars are distributed. Discussions will be centered on the funds needed to educate children equitably and adequately to meet new rigorous standards. The fairness of taxation; what is too little and what is too much will find its place on the table. The spotlight on the dollar will be easy to find.

But, should it be? As a public, we have the power of influence. What if we shifted the focus from the dollar to the topic of education? Think about it. Before stepping into the courtroom, let's ask the following; "What do we really want from our educational system and why?" And equally important, what if we could answer that question with a sense of unified clarity?

We are talking about purpose and benefit. Understanding both adds value to the concept of education. In other words, when we know the value of something, it is much easier to have a serious conversation

about the cost and where the dollars will come from. Otherwise the alternative is clear, as history has proven - another chapter with another lawsuit. We can make a difference - Make Education a Priority.



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