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Communication

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Communicate – sounds so easy to do. I learned a valuable lesson. During a recent Chamber of Commerce meeting, our local state representative shared a summary of the work completed during the 82nd Legislative Session. As he concluded his presentation, he respectfully asked for questions. I took the opportunity to ask one.

Without previous thought to wording my question, I quickly raised my hand to be recognized. I then stood before a crowded auditorium and said;

“Thank you sir, we appreciate your service. My question is this – Can you give us your perspective as to why our legislators - as a whole - decided to take a cuts-only approach to education instead of addressing the actual broken system of school finance; the system that was created in 2006 when our property taxes were compressed by a third with promises of having the difference made up from a business tax that never materialized....your perspective would be appreciated.”

As I took my seat and listened to his reply, I discreetly glanced at those around me. It was at that very moment when it hit me. Like running into a door, I suddenly realized my mistake. With the exception of school administrators and board members present, only two people in the room understood my question – one state representative and me.

A valuable lesson learned about communicating. It is not what you say but how you say it. My bad – I’m sorry. Simple and clear, I should have asked why our legislature chose not to address the broken school finance system. The Texas Supreme Court forced the issue in 2005. The resulting system was never intended to be permanent.

Educators have knocked on the Capitol’s door for three sessions. The issue is not about additional dollars for a broken system. The issue involves fixing the finance system itself. We now look forward to 2013. It sadness me to hear another lawsuit is being considered to force the state to fix the problem.

Sharing information involving school finance with the public is very difficult. The system is complicated and at times torturous. Legislators, board members and school administrators have the power to glaze eyes over when discussing it. If serious change is to occur in education, a better way to communicate this issue must be found.

Across our great state of Texas, school districts are owned by the communities they serve. A provoking question is this: How can the public at large truly appreciate the responsibility of ownership in their local schools if they don’t understand what they own or how it works?

Legislators, board members and school administrators each hold a duty to communicate with the public. Of these groups, one holds a unique position. Communities elect board members to be good stewards over their local schools. The specific focus of over 7000 school board members in Texas is protecting the

pursuit of quality education. Our beliefs are founded on the principle that a prosperous society is dependent upon an educated public.

School board members must continue to be a positive conduit between local communities served and state legislators. Effective communication must take place if public school ownership is to be appreciated and understood by all involved. Together, we can “Make Education a Priority.”



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