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Education: How Much Are We Really Spending?

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Despite the historic cuts recently made by the Texas Legislature, educators across our state are now focused on children in the classroom. School administrators are shifting through the legislative directives passed by lawmakers as lean budgets are finalized for the new school year.

There are approximately 4.6 million students in Texas. Another 80,000 will join them in the halls this school year. The \$5.3 billion in educational cuts by legislators this biennium will leave visible marks. Increasing class sizes, reducing staff, instituting “pay to play” for extracurricular activities and charging for student transportation are a few of the issues schools across Texas will be forced to consider. I can summarize this paragraph by saying we are adding thousands of students to the already millions enrolled while having billions less to educate them all.

The words thousands, millions, and billions are used so frequently the value of the numbers becomes blurred. This is one reason why the topic of school finance can be so confusing. Let’s step back and see if we can make sense of all the numbers. A good place to start would be with a simple question: On average, how much are we really spending on each student to educate?

In order to digest the answer, we will start with a big number and work down to an average dollar amount that will surprise you. The numbers are rounded for simplicity.

First, the big number - Texas spends around \$50 billion for public schools. This figure includes local, state and federal dollars. \$50 billion is a 50 with nine zeros added to it - I had to look it up. Now, let’s break the number down.

According to the Texas Education Agency, Texas spends on average \$11,000 per student. This figure includes debt service, operating and facility costs. If we divide \$11,000 by 180 instructional days, we are spending about \$61.00 a day per pupil. Using a standard seven hour day, the average cost to educate each student is \$8.50 per hour.

Think about it - we are spending on average \$8.50 per hour to teach our children the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in life. In case you are wondering, Texas ranks among the bottom quarter in the nation in spending per pupil.

When viewing the big picture of education, the figure of \$8.50 gives us a new perspective. It becomes a manageable number to understand - something shared on a personal level. This dollar figure adds value to three areas worth appreciating.

First, the current financial cuts to our educational system are real. Choosing not to fix the broken system of school funding undermines the higher goals and more rigorous accountability standards set by our legislators.

Second, the value of our own education is renewed. The \$8.50 figure represents something greater than monetary value. For a moment, let's reflect back on our own school years. As individuals and with regard to prosperity, we find education as our cornerstone. The investment made in our education years ago is now priceless.

And third, our children's future becomes clearer. The education we provide them today will define their prosperity tomorrow. We must not forget a prosperous society is dependent upon an educated public.

We can all agree education is important. But, is it really a priority? Together, we can raise the value about education through public awareness. A new attitude is needed. We can start by sharing the same message; "Make Education a Priority."



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