

School Finance: Questions and Answers

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How can some legislators claim the Legislature added \$1.6 billion dollars for public education in the new state budget compared to the previous state budget when Texas school districts will be receiving less funding?

To answer the question how some legislators can claim adding money to public education over cutting, we need to back up a few years to 2009:

- During the 2009 legislative session, while working on the biennium budget, the legislature used \$3.4 billion “one-time” federal stimulus dollars to fund public schools.
- This was done to shift money already dedicated to education to other state needs while plugging the hole with federal stimulus dollars.
- In essence, the one-time federal dollars became a temporary fix to a permanent school funding problem.

Let’s fast forward to the 2011 legislature’s new budget:

- Without the available federal stimulus dollars as in 2009, a \$3.4 billion gap in public school funding was created.
- The legislature attempted to fill the \$3.4 billion gap by adding \$1.6 billion in state revenue funds.
- As a result, this is why some legislators are claiming the 82nd Legislature increased funding for public education by \$1.6 billion over the last biennium budget.

However, they fail to mention the following points:

- A \$1.8 billion hole in public education funding resulted from the loss of the “one-time” 2009 federal stimulus funds. ($\$3.4 \text{ billion federal stimulus funds} - \$1.6 \text{ billion additional state funds} = \$1.8 \text{ billion shortage}$)
- Approximately 160,000 more students will enroll in Texas public schools during the next two years.
- The cost to educate 160,000 additional students is approximately \$2.2 billion.

Add \$1.8 billion from lost federal stimulus funds + \$2.2 billion cost to educate 160,000 new students = \$4 billion the 82nd Legislature underfunded public education compared to the prior two years.

The \$4 billion figure does not include an additional \$1.4 billion in additional grant cuts to education.

The issues involving funding public schools and balancing state budgets are complicated. No one questions the overwhelming task our legislators have each session. This does not remove our responsibility of holding our public schools and legislators accountable. The actual system of how schools are equitably and adequately funded needs to be fixed. Solutions can be found if we work together. We can Make Education a Priority.

The spreadsheet illustrating the cuts to public schools is available here:

<http://www.tasb.org/legislative/legislative/reports/2011/documents/sb1811runs.pdf>.



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