

JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SCHOOL FINANCE
TESTIMONY OF DONNA GARNER
MARCH 29, 2004

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MY PERSONAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION

I am representing myself and those other taxpayers who believe in fiscal responsibility. I believe our education establishment has been allocated enough money to produce well-educated students; the money simply needs to be spent more wisely. When only \$.50 out of each dollar goes to classroom instruction, our Texas schools have some misplaced priorities. The state of Texas may not be able to tell educators exactly how to spend their school financing money; but when they see there is a limited supply of funding, they will be forced to look for inexpensive ways to educate children.

When our own family had financial setbacks, and there were many, we learned to live on the income we had available. In the last six months, I have read many media reports about ways Texas can pump more money into education; but **I have heard few voices suggesting that schools need to learn to live within their means.** Texas needs to set funding priorities rather than simply reshuffling the state's assets.

I taught for over 27 years in the Texas public schools and then taught in a private school for 2 ½ years. I retired from teaching last year. My husband and I both draw teacher retirement which is minimal. The highest teaching salary I ever made was less than \$36,000. I say all this to let you know that I represent the average, middle-income taxpayer who lives on a limited income.

During the mid-90's, I served on the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) writing team; and in 1997 I became the lead writer of the Texas Alternative Document (TAD) for English / Language Arts / Reading. The TAD writers were composed of a group of like-minded classroom teachers and reading experts who created a document that was

based on the National Institutes of Health (NIH) reading research. We objected strongly to the whole-language philosophy which was being promoted by the Texas Education Agency; and we also believed the standards needed to be specific to each grade level, doable in a year's time, knowledge-based, academic, and objectively tested. The TEA supported a standards document which was written in grade-clusters with the emphasis on projects and subjective assessments. The TAD writers utilized Dr. Reid Lyon's NIH reading research; it is his research which has become the foundation for reading instruction in our country because of the No Child Left Behind Act.

We TAD writers wrote the document on our own time and paid for it ourselves. **We offered it to the state of Texas free-for-the-taking; the TEKS, on the other hand, were funded by the taxpayers at a cost of \$1,500 per page to produce.** When the final vote was taken between the TAD and the TEKS in July 1997, the TAD was defeated mostly because it got caught up in the political pressures of the moment. **The TAD document (http://www.educationnews.org/new_home_for_the_texas_alternati.htm) is as viable a standards document today as it was in 1997.**

Part of the reason why school costs have escalated is due to the TEKS. Because the TEKS are unclear, broad, generic, and filled with education jargon, **school districts felt they had to hire a myriad of consultants and curriculum directors to try to interpret the TEKS for teachers.** For example, I know of a Central Texas school district in our area where student achievement had always been far above average and where the student enrollment was stable; yet **six new administrative positions were created after the TEKS became law. Those six new jobs have cost the district at least \$350,000 per year.**

Another financial burden placed on schools due to the TEKS has occurred because of the heavy emphasis in the TEKS elements on performance-based assessments (project-based, constructivist, subjectively assessed). Schools have bought expensive technology which requires the initial start-up costs plus the expense of constant

upgrades and repairs. Schools keep buying technology which is bigger-and-better with fancy software and all the "bells and whistles" that allow students to produce glitzy products which demonstrate little if any substantive educational content. **To keep the technology running and upgraded requires a great deal of expensive technology support.**

ADVANTAGES OF AN INEXPENSIVE OVERHEAD PROJECTOR

Regardless of highly publicized CD/PowerPoint technology, **most classroom teachers will admit that the old-fashioned overhead projector is a far superior teaching aid.** One of the biggest advantages of the overhead is its cost (**\$140.00**), making it possible for each teacher to have an overhead projector in his room. Compare that to the cost of a multimedia center: digital projector (\$2,000), computer (\$1,500), PowerPoint software (\$200) -- totaling **\$3,700**. Teachers are forced to share multimedia equipment because the district cannot afford to have a \$3,700 investment per classroom.

The overhead can be shown on an entire wall, making the text easily read from all parts of the room. The teacher faces the class when using the overhead; and since the room does not have to be darkened to the extent that a PowerPoint presentation requires, the teacher can see the students more readily. This encourages better discipline and interaction with the students. Hearing impaired students are helped because they can read the teacher's lips. The teacher's body language can be easily seen and is helpful for communication purposes.

The biggest advantage to the overhead projector is the spontaneity that is made possible. Teachers can walk over to the overhead and quickly illustrate something for the students without having to waste valuable class time to boot up the computer, pull up the correct document, hook up the projector, check connections, turn off the lights, etc. Students themselves can easily use the overhead because they do not have to have any technical training. Each student in a classroom can produce an overhead transparency by using a simple sheet of plastic and an overhead pen.

The only upkeep to an overhead is an occasional changing of the lightbulb. Consider the difference: With PowerPoint equipment, when something does not work right, teachers have to call technology support personnel to come and fix the equipment. Overhead projectors offer a decided advantage when being used around classes full of children who frequently trip, push, shove, or fall -- sometimes dislodging multimedia connections or breaking the expensive equipment. **Technology does not have to be expensive to be an effective teaching tool.**

FEDERAL MONEY FOR THE SCHOOLS

President Bush's 2005 budget estimates released on February 21, 2004, indicated that Texas is to receive \$13.3B for Title I; \$11.1B for Special Education; \$12.9B for Pell Grants; \$1.4B for Reading funding; \$504M for choice and options for students and parents; \$5.1B for teacher support training, recruitment, incentives, loan forgiveness, tax relief; \$410M for the state accountability system (annual assessments Grades 3 - 8); \$185M for educational research; and \$681M for English language acquisition. **The total increase for Texas is \$7.6B -- 60% more than when President Bush took office** (<http://www.ed.gov/about/overview/budget/statefactsheets/index.html?src=az>).

MONEY -- NOT THE ANSWER

I have taught in thirteen different schools in Texas; **some had lovely buildings where real teaching and learning took place. Some had horrible facilities where real teaching and learning still occurred on a daily basis.**

In one district, bats frequently flew into the gymnasium and left their feces all over the floor. We teachers had to sweep their leavings before allowing our students to take physical education.

Our classrooms in that school district had no air conditioning; and when it rained, out came the buckets. Amazingly, however, this school had the finest reading lab I have ever seen where children K - 8 were taught to master their reading skills before entering high school. The students in that district also benefited from quality math teachers, and many of their

students went on to achieve success at major colleges and universities.

Funding is not the answer to our education crisis: Discipline and curriculum (in that order) are the two necessary ingredients.

FOR THE PRICE OF A GOOD MEAL

Our daughter-in-law who has never had a college education course in her life has taught her three children how to read, write, and spell from a book entitled *Reading Reflex* by McGuinness. This book is complete in itself, is a non-consumable paperback, and costs \$11.20 on amazon.com. In 2002 it was announced that since the late 1990's, **Texas has spent \$550M on programs to improve the reading skills of young children.**

According to the March 2001 report by the Texas Comptroller's office, a third of Texas prisoners cannot read at a sixth grade level and are unable to fill out a simple job application. **For the price of a good meal (\$11.20), these Texas prisoners could have been taught to read when they were little children if their teachers had used the right reading approach.**

NO PROOF THAT FUNDING EQUALS ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Numerous research studies have shown that money does not necessarily equal academic achievement. The American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) completed an extensive research project where they reported, "A key finding of the report shows there is no immediate evident correlation between conventional measures of education inputs, such as expenditures per pupil and teacher salaries, and educational outputs, such as average scores on standardized tests." American Legislative Exchange Council (<http://www.alec.org/>), Nov. 17, 2003, "Report: Increased School Funding Fails to Boost Test Scores -- To view the entire report, please go to the following website:

(<http://www.alec.org/meSWFiles/pdf/2003%20Report%20Card%20on%20American%20Education.pdf>)

THE HIGH NUMBER OF ADMINISTRATORS

After a Texas Legislator did some careful research, she found **Texas has more administrators per pupil than either New York or California.** I believe if a few of the administrative jobs were cut, a school district would go right on functioning as if nothing had happened. The only real change would be that classroom teachers would have more time to spend on their students because the teachers would not have to fill out the tedious reports which an over-abundance of administrators seems to generate. My theory is that superfluous administrator-types want to keep their jobs; and to do so, they have to look busy. What better way to keep themselves looking irreplaceable than to produce impressive looking reports to give to the superintendent and the school board!

Texas didn't get itself in a financial mess overnight. In the **2001-02** school year, the Texas Education Agency through its PEIMS (Public Education Information Management System) report released the following information: "**other support staff**" (not counting supervisors, counselors, educational diagnosticians, librarians, nurses/physicians, therapists, psychologists/associate psychologists) **increased 8,911 persons or an increase of 57.31%. Pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers increased 2.82%, elementary teachers 2.74%, and secondary teachers 2.74%.**

ADDING UP THE COSTS

Diana Lam, San Antonio ISD Superintendent, got in trouble with the district and had her contract bought out in 1999 for **\$781,000**. A person in the Beaumont area sent me the following information: **Carroll Thomas**, Beaumont ISD Superintendent, in a district of 20,500 makes **\$250,000**. According to the local newspaper, his school board paid him a bonus of \$100,000 not to interview for the Dallas ISD job. Thomas was hired because of his connections with Dr. Mike Moses who has a moonlighting job helping districts locate superintendents. **Moses is the highest paid superintendent in the state of Texas (\$322,000 plus benefits).** According to information from a Dallas contact, **Dallas ISD**

paid Stephen Covey \$89,000 to come and do a one-day presentation -- not for teachers but for administrators. The amount was hidden in the June 26, 2003, budget under "Liability Account." Dallas has also paid Voyager Learning Systems \$4M. Voyager is the Dallas-based corporation where some of Moses' best friends work.

Dallas has a six year, **\$18M contract with Hewlett Packard to maintain administrators' computers -- not computers for teachers, libraries, or computer labs. Katy ISD purchased more than \$3M in new Hewlett-Packard technology support. Houston ISD contracted with Hewlett-Packard for what could turn out to be a \$120M deal. Richardson ISD in 2002 passed a \$47M technology bond.**

On March 26, 2004, the **Ft. Worth School Board** decided to pay Superintendent Tocco termination pay of over **\$500,000**. They were dissatisfied with him because they blamed him for the fact that a contractor had embezzled **\$10M** from the district.

Bremont ISD has a **\$500,000 shortfall** this budget year; the previous superintendent resigned under suspicion he had misused district funds. A special audit commissioned by the district found that the superintendent and a former business manager **owe the school more than \$200,000** and that the superintendent had charged on the school credit card such things as alcohol, trips to Hawaii, California, and Cancún.

FEDERAL AND STATE ENTITLEMENTS -- NOT CALCULATED INTO A SCHOOL DISTRICT'S NET WORTH

- Edgewood ISD vs. Kirby, filed in 1984, finally led to what has become known as the Robin Hood system of school financing. **Robin Hood is predicated on the false premise that money is the answer to all education gaps. Evidently nobody bothered to calculate into the Robin Hood funding equation how much extra money public schools receive from the federal government.** By adding in the largesse of the federal government, it could be that some of these "poor" schools

actually have a great deal more money to spend on education than do the "property-rich schools."

Let's apply this situation to a preschool playground. If Sara has 10 lollipops which are given to her, it is not fair to take away Samuel's 1 lollipop and give it to Sara who now ends up with 11 lollipops while Samuel ends up with 0. This would cause Sara to be wasteful with her 11 lollipops while it causes Samuel to be resentful toward Sara.

What the state should have done is to calculate the total amount per student, including federal and state entitlements, which a school district receives before determining how much money to dole out from the state's coffers under Robin Hood. The TEA has posted entitlement data at: <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/cgi/texis/webinator/search/?db=&db=db&query=entitlements/>.

On January 12, 2004, Dr. Shirley Neeley, Superintendent at Galena Park, was appointed by Gov. Rick Perry as the new Texas Commissioner of Education. Dr. Neeley's appointment led me to do some figuring. I wondered how much money in federal entitlements Galena Park ISD received in 2002-03 compared to Katy ISD. **Since federal and state entitlements are not figured into a school's "income" before their Robin Hood funds are doled out, I decided to see how much money per student Galena Park ISD received in federal funding per student compared to that received by Katy ISD.**

I went to the TEA website, typed in "entitlements," and found the following:

GALENA PARK ISD

Title I, Pt. A -- \$2,741,798

Title V, Pt. A -- \$132,137

Title IV, Pt. A -- \$113,529

Title II, Pt. A -- \$797,463

Title II, Pt. D -- \$79,374

TOTAL ----- **\$3,864,301**

According to the TEA's AEIS indicators, Galena Park ISD has 19,986 students. **That means Galena Park ISD received \$193.35 per student from the above-mentioned entitlements in 2002-03.**

KATY ISD

Title I, Pt. A -- \$713,112

Title V, Pt. A -- \$174,346

Title IV, Pt. A -- \$116,832

Title II, Pt. A -- \$580,865

Title II, Pt. D -- \$20,644

TOTAL ----- **\$1,605,799**

According to the TEA's AEIS indicators, Katy ISD has 39,478 students. **That means Katy ISD received \$40.67 per student from the above-mentioned entitlements in 2002-03.**

Therefore, **Galena Park ISD received over 4 X as much federal entitlement money (from the above-mentioned federal programs) per student as did Katy ISD.**

Galena Park ISD has many more impoverished students living there than does Katy ISD; and I concur with those who believe that students who come from impoverished homes require more funding to educate them.

However, before the state decides how much money to dole out in Robin Hood payments, I really think all the federal and state entitlement monies need to be added to the mix first.

Using the TEA entitlement website (Title I, Pt. A; Title V, Pt. A; Title IV, Pt. A; Title II, Pt. A; Title II, Pt. D), I found the following per-pupil

federal entitlement figures:

Dallas -- \$389.77
Houston -- \$424.58
San Antonio -- \$628.46
Waco -- \$512.37
Ft. Worth -- \$396.80
Killeen -- \$208.94
Temple -- \$380.66
Belton -- \$218.52
Austin -- \$268.75
Midway -- \$49.25
Plano -- \$51.37
LaJoya -- \$359.29

When I divided the total number of enrolled students into the amount each district received in 2002-03 for **Title I, Pt. A** (IDEA Disabilities Education Act, Carl Perkins Voc. & Tech. Ed., Head Start, Adult Ed. & Family Literacy, and McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance), these are the results per student:

Dallas -- \$298.83
Houston -- \$328.03
San Antonio -- \$487.46
Waco -- \$394.17
Ft. Worth -- \$302.02
Killeen -- \$152.19
Temple -- \$287.85
Belton -- \$159.40
Austin -- \$199.27
Midway -- \$22.24
Plano -- \$23.62
LaJoya -- \$275.68

Please notice the wide disparity between **Midway (\$22.24 per student)** vs. **San Antonio (\$487.46 per student)**. From my own personal experience as a teacher in the Midway ISD, the district certainly does not under-identify Special Education students. The parents in the district are very well informed about Special Education issues, and they demand that their students be tested and placed in the program if they qualify. Therefore, I would bet that the percentage of IDEA students in Houston and Dallas (based upon their total student enrollment) is not as great as the percentage at such schools as Plano and Midway. Of course, we don't know how much of the Title I, Pt. A funding for each district is solely designated for IDEA since the Title I, Pt. A throws together five different programs. **If we knew the IDEA figure for each district, we could see how well each one is utilizing its IDEA funding.** At first blush, **it appears since Plano and Midway probably have a high percentage of IDEA students yet receive a very small Title I, Pt. A entitlement, those two districts in comparison with the other districts are having to come up with sizable local funding to cover their Special Education students.**

WASTED FUNDING ON PLATO COMPUTER LABS

Plato computer labs are an example of a boondoggle. A nearby high school decided to buy an expensive Plato computer lab for its at-risk students. Half the time the lab didn't work, and the other half the feedback from the Plato software was meaningless.

Before the district decided to buy the Plato lab, I researched Plato and presented my findings to the board members. What I found was that the system did not increase academic achievement, that the students simply "played" on it, that the software was very hard to manage and operate because of glitches, that many of the answers to the questions were wrong, and that the software did not align with the school's curriculum. Of course, nobody listened to me; and the superintendent convinced the board to buy the system anyway.

The high school teachers had a whole day of in-service dedicated to a

hands-on experience with the Plato sales persons. None of the English teachers were convinced that the system would result in students gaining grade-level skills, and the teachers' prognostications proved to be true. At the time, the staff who ran the Plato lab for the at-risk students was supposed to report back yearly so that the school board could monitor student progress; but as always, nobody held anyone accountable. **The system has now been discarded completely -- more taxpayers' money wasted.**

A TERRIBLE DISTANCE LEARNING MODEL

Distance learning has been touted as a way to bring inexpensive courses to e-students, giving them the opportunity to take such courses as Advanced Placement classes. **Some Legislators have even suggested giving e-students a publicly funded voucher.**

In a district with which I am familiar, the superintendent approached the school board last summer with an idea. He had a great plan for helping the district and some of its teachers to make money. **The plan was for eight e-teachers to be chosen to offer e-students Advanced Placement courses.** The e-teachers were to have individual carts in their classrooms from which they would tape their presentations, and then upload their presentations to the e-students.

The e-teachers were to earn \$80 per e-student up to \$8,000 per year. The school district was to earn \$80 per e-student with no limit on income. The district was to buy the carts; but if the district did not earn its cost back in three years, the company stated they would buy back the equipment. (Of course, I wonder if the district would be reimbursed for the original cost of the carts or at a depreciated value. In three years, most technology equipment would be almost worthless because it goes out of date so quickly.)

The name of the company which provided the eight carts is **Tegrity** (<http://www.tegrity.com/>). The district purchased eight carts at \$30,000 per cart for a total of \$240,000. The distance learning carts have an out-of-date camera (not digital) that focuses on the teacher's face; a document camera; a computer and screen; and controls with which to manage the two robotic cameras on either side of the room. The teacher is to handle all of these controls from the cart at the same time he is teaching the students the day's lesson. After seeing the DL cart, one

technology expert said he estimated the equipment was probably only worth around \$5,000. **If this is an accurate estimate, then Tegrity is making around \$25,000 per cart.**

The e-teachers are constantly having to stop the class to fix all the many gadgets, and the numerous pieces of equipment are continually in a state of disrepair. The technology personnel are so busy keeping the eight DL labs running that they have been forced to neglect their duties with the school's computer labs and the other teachers' needs.

USA Distance Learning Network (www.USADLN.org) is in charge of the distance learning courses. USADLN told the eight e-teachers (pressured by the administrators to participate) that each e-teacher would be paid per course. Six weeks after school started, the e-teachers were told by the company that instead of being paid for each course, they would instead be paid for only one course even if the e-teachers were uploading two different courses.

The e-teachers kept uploading their courses, waiting to be told where their materials were going. Way into the school year, USADLN finally told the administrators and e-teachers that there actually were no e-students yet but to keep uploading their courses as a trial run for next year. Meanwhile the e-teachers had spent huge amounts of time learning how to run the equipment, taping their courses, and reconfiguring all their curriculum materials for the uploading format. **In fact, the e-teachers have told me they have neglected their own classroom students because of spending so much time in preparation for their e-students.**

Toward the end of the first semester, USADLN held a meeting and told the e-teachers and administrators there would be no money at all coming to them this school year but that they were sure to be paid next school year. "Keep on uploading." When the e-teachers got upset, the superintendent told them, "You knew there was a risk when you decided to participate." However, the e-teachers did not know there was a risk and were pressured by the administration into becoming e-teachers.

What is the classroom like in which the e-teachers are taping their uploads? The students hate the distance learning carts because they take the teacher's attention off the class members. Something is always

breaking; new glitches are constantly popping up. Students have to wait on their teachers to exchange equipment with other e-teachers or to rectify problems with the network. Because the e-teachers are taping their Advanced Placement courses, students who are taking numerous AP classes this year may have as many as four teachers e-taping their presentations.

The regular classroom students have to sit to either side of the cart because the e-teacher's body plus the cart cover the chalkboard on which the documents have to be shown. The chalkboards are treated with a special solution; but because the boards were designed for teachers to write on them with chalk, the boards have been mounted at eye level. When the DL cart projects the slides on the chalkboard, most of the students in the classroom cannot see the material. To make it possible for students to see the board, they have to split their rows down the middle of the room which forces students to sit too close to each other, creating possible discipline problems.

The e-teacher cannot move freely around the room because he is constantly manipulating the equipment on the cart. The microphone in the center of the ceiling does not pick up the classroom discussions very well. The robotic cameras placed in two positions in the classroom are ineffective because of their limited trajectory, and the document camera on the cart can only project documents which are flat -- totally ineffective with textbook pages.

What does the e-student experience? He is basically sitting in front of a computer watching a video and has no interaction with the e-teacher whatsoever. Since the microphone which is placed in the e-teacher's classroom is ineffective, the e-student cannot hear classroom discussions. The two robotic cameras are not quick enough to respond and don't pick up the activities going on in various places in the classroom. The camera on the cart which televises the teacher's presentation is so close to the teacher's face that the e-student viewing the tape sees a bigger-than-normal teacher's face on his screen.

Once an e-teacher begins to tape a certain class period, he must continue with that same class all semester; or else the e-student will experience lack of continuity and flow of the curriculum. If there are interruptions during that particular class, the e-student experiences the interruptions, too. If the regular students go to the library to work on research papers for a week, the e-student does not receive the instruction offered by the e-teacher and experiences a week's gap in taping.

E-teachers have been told that they must send all their tests, keys, notes, lesson plans, and quizzes to the receiving e-student; but who is going to monitor the security of those materials? What is to keep those materials from being sent all over the Internet? If a teacher gives a test one day and goes over the answers with the class the next day, the e-student hears the answers. What keeps the e-student from cheating by looking at his notes, textbooks, etc?

USADLN and Tegrity have evidently given customers the impression that their model is an interactive distance learning system. However, there is no communication at all between the e-teacher and the e-student. The e-teacher does not grade the e-student's tests, compositions, or quizzes; someone working with the e-student will have to do that. What about the expertise of the person monitoring the e-student? Does that person have the ability to grade compositions, research papers, and other subjectively assessed products? **How will there be any security over final exams?** Who makes sure there is daily accountability for the e-student? How will he be held accountable? If the e-student completes the course, he will get the same English credit on his transcript as the English student sitting in the classroom, working hard each day and being held to daily accountability.

The e-teachers were pressured into signing a "secret" contract which the superintendent told them not to make public to anyone. When he was asked about the legalities of teachers making money during the school day by being paid at the same time they are receiving teachers' pay for teaching their own classroom students, they were told everything had been cleared with the attorney. This is similar to a

teacher's holding a second job during the same time in which he is being paid a full teacher's salary.

Since the taxpayers have paid the \$240,000 for the eight carts and the school technology personnel are using their time to fix the carts when they constantly break down, the e-teachers' contracts should have been public information.

Before spending taxpayers' money on distance learning programs, the Texas Legislature, the Texas State Board of Education, and the Texas Education Agency need to seek answers to the following questions:

QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE DECIDING TO FUND A DISTANCE LEARNING MODEL

- How much actual viewing of the computer screen do e-students do per day, and how much interaction with a qualified teacher do they receive?
- What is the distance learning program's previous track record which demonstrates the company is capable of raising e-students' academic achievement?
- Specifically how do individual e-students interact with the e-teachers?
- Are the e-teachers going to be credentialed and experienced teachers in the field in which they are offering instruction?
- Are e-students held to any deadlines? If not, how can we expect students to learn the value of meeting deadlines -- an important life skill when they get out into the real world?
- Who monitors the e-student's daily progress, and how is that monitoring documented?
- Who grades the e-student's subjectively assessed projects such as essays and research papers?
- Who gives e-students their final exams, and who insures the security of the tests and keys?
- What kind of security is provided to ensure the enrolled e-students take daily quizzes and tests under supervised

conditions?

- Since e-students will be getting actual course credit for their classes, who will make sure that e-students do the work themselves instead of cheating?
- Where is the independent research to show that e-students gain increased academic achievement from taking distance learning courses?
- Where do today's students learn the value of handwriting a document instead of always using the computer? What would happen if there were another electrical blackout and people had to write life-or-death messages in longhand (doctors, nurses, pharmacists, etc.)? Is there not some value in teaching all students, including e-students, to function without the use of a computer or a graphing calculator?
- What about the medical concerns which have surfaced in recent years indicating that children who use computers too much have developed carpal tunnel, back, and other physical problems?
- Texas homeschoolers elect whether or not they want to take nationally normed tests; most choose to give their children those tests. However, homeschoolers are completely independent of state control and do not receive any taxpayers' funding. That is a different scenario from state-funded distance learning courses which are paid for by the taxpayers and should require some accountability measures. After all, if a student is going to get credit for English I, how is the state going to verify the e-student has completed the same requirements that a traditionally taught student has completed under the direct supervision of a credentialed teacher?
- What about the TEKS? Do the distance learning courses follow the TEKS curriculum standards? What kind of Pre-K through Grade 3 reading curriculum is used? Is it scientifically and research-based? Does it meet the state guidelines regarding decodable text? How is the program delivered? Obviously there is no way that a computer can teach through direct, systematic instruction.

OTHER WASTEFUL SPENDING -- BLOCK SCHEDULING

Block scheduling costs school districts huge sums of money. In January 2003, the superintendent of the Clear Creek Independent School District said the district needed to cut back on expenses. **She recommended getting rid of block scheduling which would save the district \$3.1M. Block requires many extra teachers and equipment.** Block scheduling has never had any longitudinal, independent research to prove that it increases academic achievement because in actuality, each course loses from 15 to 30 clock hours of instruction. There are numerous independent studies which show that Advanced Placement test scores have fallen in districts where block scheduling has been employed.

WASTEFUL SPENDING -- POOR TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAMS

Flip Flippen of the Flippen Group (<http://www.leadershipsolutions.com/>)

is a psychotherapist and not an educator. Districts all over the state have signed multi-year contracts for their school personnel to go for sessions which **are similar to group therapy, psychological manipulation, and sensitivity training.** Substitute teachers have been hired, fancy resorts (e.g., Salado) have been booked, expensive food has been served -- all at taxpayers' expense. **Because group therapy techniques are skillfully employed through a retreat setting, educators end up telling too many of their intimate secrets; and when they get back to the reality of the real world, they are embarrassed and guilt-ridden that they shared too much information.**

Many teachers who have gone through the Flip Flippen training never implemented a thing he said. The few teachers who did buy into the program soon abandoned it in a few short weeks of implementation because the ideas were impractical. One of Flip's techniques was to have teachers shake hands each period with each student who enters the room. Teachers were unable to maintain that type of practice because the few short minutes in between class are vital moments to wind up the previous class and get ready to teach the next one. Frequently students stay behind after class to ask questions, or

there may be disciplinary referrals which have to be written up and copies given to students. High school students do not wait patiently nowadays; and I am convinced that if a teacher is not ready and standing at the front of the class when the tardy bell rings for class to begin, he has probably lost the momentum for instruction during the remainder of the period. **How can a teacher be ready at the front of the class with everything laid out and set to go if he is back at the door shaking hands with students in between classes?** Teachers who tried the approach told me that their students were backed up into the hall while the teachers shook hands with each student; this caused congestion in the hall and an undercurrent of disruption in the school.

A HUGE WASTE OF MONEY -- THE DIANA DAY DISCIPLINE-MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

Killeen ISD and many other Texas districts have spent large sums of taxpayers' money on the Diana Day Discipline-Management Program(<http://dianaday.com/>). Each teacher received a \$35 teachers' manual + administrators' manuals + cost of teacher training. Before deciding to bring Diana Day into the district, did the board members and administrators see **verifiable research data** on the Diana Day Program to prove that it effectively does what it claims to do?

The Diana Day website has a link entitled "Research Results" with two charts from "Aikin Elementary" and "Dunbar Jr. High School," but **the whereabouts of these two schools is not listed**. Upon exactly what data from these two schools were the results based? (i.e., academic scores, discipline reports, AEP placements, crime reports, police referrals, school arrests, behavioral management referrals, etc.)

No verifiable research data seems to be available under "Evaluation Criteria." **When I tried to pull up the "References" section on the website, I got a notice that stated "The Page Cannot Be Found."** Does Diana Day have any research which has been done by independent researchers? Has the program been replicated and peer-reviewed in other places? Where is the biographical information carried on the

website regarding Diana Day herself? Exactly how many years did she spend as a classroom teacher and when and where did she spend those years? **What documented successes did she have as a classroom teacher?**

According to teachers who have been trained in this Diana Day Program, they are required to implement a "time out" place in their classrooms. They are to name the "time out" place some unique name such as "Mars, Venice, etc." **If a child continues to act up after being placed in the time-out location, he is then to be sent to another teacher's room (someone down the hall), presumably to destroy the discipline in that teacher's room!** A child who wants to get out of a test or a classroom he considers boring could deliberately act up so that he could "escape" to some other teacher's room where there is more going on that he likes.

Each teacher was given a \$35 cheaply produced spiral manual similar to a "diary" in which Diana Day has listed various types of disciplinary problems with an accompanying scripted teacher's response. Undoubtedly when a student is having a violent tantrum of some sort, the teacher is to open to the index, turn to the designated page, and read the scripted response.

Since the Diana Day website is so skimpy, I decided to write the Diana Day Program to request validated research. I received a succinct response with no detailed information. I wrote again and received the same type of bland response.

EGREGIOUS WASTEFULNESS -- TEACHERS ON CARNIVAL CRUISE

On August 17, 2003, in the Waco Tribune-Herald, the Connally School District proudly announced that a federally funded grant from the Texas Education Agency had paid for **40 Connally teachers and staff** members plus **two Apple trainers** to go on a technology training cruise. **The group left on Carnival's cruise ship Celebration from Galveston**

and went to Cozumel, Playa del Carmen, and Calica for five days and five nights. They returned August 6. Connally has the grant money for two more years, and the Connally coordinator said she plans to continue the training on a cruise ship those two years with a different group of teachers and staff members going each time.

Surely these educators could have learned what they needed to know by going to a local computer lab. After all, we have Baylor University, McLennan Community College, and Texas State Technological College all within our city limits. These three colleges have received large amounts of federal and state funds/grants to maximize their technology labs. Must we sit back and smile contentedly while these public school teachers are sent on a Carnival cruise line at taxpayers' expense? Who approved this federally funded Texas Education Agency grant?

QUESTIONABLE SPENDING -- CHARTER SCHOOLS

During the 2001-02 school year in Texas, the top 20 **average charter school teachers' salaries** ran from **\$89,753 to \$35,561**. The salaries of **charter school superintendents** (top 20) ran from **\$185,000 to \$78,000**. The superintendent at **Prepared Table Charter School** in Houston during 2001-02 was paid **\$210,000 per year**, and **\$50,000 was paid to his wife who was the secretary**. For comparison purposes, during that same year, the **average public school teacher's salary was \$39,230; and the average public school administrator made \$62,782**.

SCHOOL DISTRICT EDUCATION FOUNDATIONS

Nearly every middle-size to large-size school district now has a local education foundation to which educators can apply for grants. Funding for the foundations is made by private donations usually from local citizens. A group of English teachers decided to write a step-by-step manual which explains to high school students the proper way to write a research paper. The teachers wanted to apply for a grant to cover the cost of publishing the manual for each student. They were told their

idea was not state-of-the-art enough, had to be more innovative, and must involve technology; their request was denied. **What grant was approved by the foundation? Video streaming equipment was purchased so that students can spend more time concentrating on graphics and visual imagery rather than on reading and writing the printed word themselves.**

Has anyone ever gone back to a school two or three years later to see how much of the innovative, state-of-the-art equipment is still working and being used frequently and effectively? Most schools have warehouses full of unused, outdated equipment -- much of it bought because some pie-in-the-sky teacher thought he just had to have the latest equipment. **How many academic achievement gains made by students can be directly traced to gadgetry; and how much can be traced to direct, systematic instruction where students learn how to read, write, and compute through good, old hard work?**

TAJ MAHAL FACILITIES

To find out whether school districts are spending money wisely on necessary facilities, please go to <http://www.midwayisd.org>, "Virtual Tour," and "The Arena." Midway High School is a AAAA high school.

A PLAN FOR EDUCATION REFORM

On December 7 - 8, 2000, I gave a report at The Lone Star Foundation's Public Education Forum (http://www.educationnews.org/lsf_public_education_reform_in_t.htm) entitled "**An Analysis of English / Language Arts / Reading As the Foundation for Public Education in Texas.**" Because I had no vested interest in education having already retired from the public schools, was not representing any organization, and had no aspirations to run for political office, I was able to give an objective analysis and some helpful recommendations. The report is now four years old, but much of the information is still applicable today. **Most of my recommendations are inexpensive and cost-effective.**

LOOKING BACK TO THE 90'S

by Donna Garner

December 20, 2003

Looking back to the mid-90's, I remember Virginia Governor George Allen, the Virginia education standards, Michelle Easton (Director of Clare Booth Luce Institute), and Cheri Yecke (new Minnesota Commissioner of Education). In fact when I first started serving on the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) writing team for English / Language Arts / Reading, I obtained a copy of the Virginia standards (newly published) and at my own expense, paid for copies to be sent to Gov. George W. Bush and Texas Commissioner of Education Mike Moses (now the superintendent in Dallas ISD). I even called their offices and talked to Moses personally, telling him how explicit yet simple the Virginia standards were. I also made copies available to the person at the Texas Education Agency who was orchestrating the TEKS process for ELAR, Sharon O'Neill. At that time, Allen had refused to take any Goals 2000 funding; and I begged Texas to follow the same plan -- to turn down Goals 2000 dollars because of the strings attached.

The Governor's office got an influential Texas Legislator to testify to the Texas State Board of Education that there absolutely were no strings attached to the Goals 2000 funding; and hence, Texas took the money which eventually paid for all the facilitators of the writing teams to be "educated" on how to use psychological manipulation (the Delphi Technique) on their team members.

Texas also paid \$1.5M to the National Center for Education and the Economy (NCEE) to train the facilitators to force the "national NCEE standards" on us writing members. Minnesota and other states evidently did the same thing. That is why so many states' standards look the very same -- performance-based, subjectively assessed, etc. Minnesota under Yecke's leadership is leading the way for the other states to follow suit by getting rid of the Goals 2000 standards and by writing knowledge-based, academic standards for each grade level.

More power to Minnesota! If they can be successful, it ought to help Texas and other states to realize that they don't have to be stuck with trying to make their miserable standards work. **Standards can be changed; and when the standards get changed, then the state-mandated tests can be changed. We can have explicit goals for teachers and students to reach -- goals which are sensible, built upon actual core knowledge, and able to be tested objectively on state-mandated tests.**

Almost as good, we taxpayers can save thousands and thousands of dollars by making sure the standards direct students to learn basic skills without getting them hooked on "crutches" which make children dependent on gadgets rather than on the knowledge carried in their heads. Children who have a sound knowledge of basic skills don't have to worry if there is a power-outage. They don't have to worry if their computer systems go down. They don't have to worry if their graphing calculator or their laptop gets broken. They don't have to depend on computers and the Internet to think or write for them. They can write correctly and legibly, read complex text and complicated storylines, spell, compute, analyze, evaluate, utilize sophisticated vocabularies, learn foreign languages because they have a firm grasp of English grammar, make decisions based on a broad spectrum of information, vote intelligently, and appreciate the great works and master craftsmen throughout history.

Of course, such an education system could also save vast amounts of money because no longer would schools need to hire highly paid curriculum directors, consultants, and education experts. The goals would be clear, and teachers would know what they needed to learn so that they could teach the material. If the goals were clear, schools could utilize in-house teachers to share ideas and information with their fellow staff members. If teachers are encouraged to share their creative ideas and curricular units, it is amazing how many talented teachers can be found on the average faculty. Why go out and hire expensive

presenters and independent consultants? Based upon over 30 years of classroom experience, I can honestly say that **most of these "experts" have been out of the classroom and in their "ivory towers" for so many years that their ideas are basically useless and impractical; yet schools waste huge amounts of money to hire these outside speakers who invariably come with some sort of expensive program to sell.**

I would love for some independent researcher to go into the average school system, do an open records request of all funding which has been spent on curricular or discipline programs, teacher training, retreats, teacher-requested materials, hardware/software, etc. The researcher should evaluate how much of that "stuff" is still in use after two years and what disciplinary and/or academic achievement gains have come from this "stuff." I can't tell you how much abandoned "stuff" schools have either put in their warehouses or in bookrooms and storage closets. Worst of all, this "stuff" has cost the taxpayers thousands of dollars and is now lying unused somewhere.

If the standards were rewritten correctly, everyone, including parents, students, teachers, and administrators, would know exactly what was going to be tested on the state-mandated tests. **The test questions would have up-or-down, right-or-wrong answers. The tests could be put through Scantron machines for a smidgen of the cost that the present state-mandated tests are costing us, and the test-takers would know exactly what questions they missed and why.** The tests would actually align closely to the standards. Objectively tested questions can be written so that all students are challenged. (Remember the objective tests we had to take in college? One well-written question could cover material that took us hours to learn.) The test results could really end up being a helpful assessment tool.

I know we don't live "in a perfect world," but all it takes is the will of dedicated people to write the standards right. We did just that with the Texas Alternative Document (TAD) for English / Language Arts / Reading. If our group could do it, then other people can, too.

COMPARISON DATA ON HOUSTON AND DALLAS ISD'S

If you would like to receive a series of documents written by me in which I compared the academic indicators of the two largest school districts in Texas, Houston and Dallas, please write to me at the following e-mail address and request a copy:

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