

April 20, 2006 Press Statement

Seventeen education groups joined together in a capitol press conference room today to outline the education community's position on issues currently being debated by the legislature.

TASA Legislative Chair Mike Motheral, as spokesman for the group, delivered the following statement:

“We stand united today — teachers, principals, superintendents, and school board members — after three years and five sessions, with new revenue options, a substantial surplus, a strong call to act from the people, and a Supreme Court decision demanding action, and ask this question. If not now, when?

The public education community has been working in their communities and with their legislators to identify, illuminate, and solve the issues facing Texas schools. Since 2004, the Coalition to Invest in Texas Schools, representing eleven school leadership organizations, and TSTA, ATPE, TCTA, TFT, TEPSA, and TASSP have joined with other concerned groups and citizens to seek lasting solutions to school funding for the 4.5 million children we serve.

Recent events have raised the need for meaningful action to a critical level. The Supreme Court of Texas has recognized that the current property tax system is so overburdened that it has become unconstitutional, and is clearly not providing school districts the means to fulfill obligations to the schoolchildren of Texas. The court has ordered the unconstitutional system to be shut down on June 1st if real solutions are not provided by the legislature.

The citizens of Texas are making their wishes known as well. Throughout the state, in opinion polls and in the voting booth, Texans are sending the message loud and clear that educating the children of Texas is, as it always has been, a top priority.

We know that legislators and leaders of both parties have recognized the need for action. In legislative districts all over this state, citizens, parents, educators, and legislators have discussed the real issues of school funding. We have seen several new and interesting ideas, from proposals by individual legislators and other state leaders that are good steps toward meaningful dialogue and more lasting solutions. We came to this special session with real optimism.

We are here before you today gravely concerned about the future of the children of Texas. Many of the bills filed and being considered in committees thus far will not accomplish the work required by the courts and demanded by the public.

The legislature needs to accomplish three basic tasks:

- Establish an adequate, equitable school finance system that gives local school districts meaningful discretion in using local property taxes to finance education;
- Provide a meaningful, fully funded teacher pay raise, along with restoration of the healthcare supplement for all school employees; and
- Provide meaningful property tax relief.

None of these goals is more or less important than the other. All three are vital to providing a stable, reasonable, constitutional education system for our children. With an \$8.2 billion surplus and a \$5 billion tax bill on the table, it's time to support the public schoolchildren of Texas. We ask again, if not now, when?"

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