

BACKGROUND INFORMATION: Sample Op Ed

30+ Years, 300 Square Miles, & Why It's Time to Stop Penalizing Our Small Schools

Why would the state purposely create a special formula just to penalize a group of districts? This question originated more than 30 years ago and continues to negatively impact more than 460 school districts across the state.

Texas' school funding system is made up of formulas intended to address the cost of educating students in various demographic circumstances across the state. One formula in particular addresses costs specific to small school districts.

It may surprise people to know that over 30 years ago, the state adopted two small schools formulas. One that accounted for the actual cost of operating a small district, and another that intentionally and arbitrarily reduced funding to starve out some small schools and force consolidation. This purely political decision resulted in a reduction in the state-recognized appropriate funding level for small schools...a decision that has continued to penalize children and taxpayers in these communities by depriving them of resources needed to educate their children for over three decades.

Why did the state choose to enact a formula which arbitrarily reduces funding for certain schools, driving up property tax rates for taxpayers in those communities? Why should these schools receive less money than the state recognizes as appropriate for other districts? The answer is because the geographic area of our district is less than 300 square miles.

That's it. It doesn't cost any less for us to run our schools, and it isn't any easier for our taxpayers to pay higher taxes than taxpayers in other districts. Just square miles; nothing else.

This punitive formula has caused local taxpayers to pay higher property tax rates to prevent the loss of key teachers to better funded districts. There have been times we have gone without needed programs due to this punitive formula.

No one can fairly argue there was ever a legitimate reason to refuse funding at the cost the state recognized as appropriate for geographically-larger small districts. After all, communities do not choose to be small. We do, however, choose to have a local school!

If this punitive small schools formula were repealed, _____ ISD would receive an additional \$_____ to be used toward educating the children in our community, without raising any taxes.

All small schools, regardless of whether they are over or under 300 square miles should be afforded the same formula for determining funding. There is no logical reason to continue punishing certain small schools across the state. It should stop now. It's just the right thing to do.