

## PRESENTATION TO THE MCALLEN ISD BOARD OF EDUCATION

BY MCALLEN AFT—SEPTEMBER 22, 2014

My name is Ruth Skow, and I represent the McAllen AFT and the Rio Grande Valley AFL-CIO Central Labor Council. I'm here tonight to talk about the recent District Court decision that finds that the Texas school funding formula is unconstitutional on the grounds that funding for school districts is neither equitable nor adequate. I am here to ask the members of the McAllen School Board to draft a resolution calling on state lawmakers representing this district to act without further delay to address this ongoing crisis.

The Texas Constitution requires the state to provide a free and effective system of public schools for all our children, not just some. The decision by District Judge John Dietz held that the state system of school finance leaves our schools underfunded, deprives our schoolchildren of equitable access to educational opportunities, and improperly burdens local taxpayers—all in violation of clear constitutional requirements.

Let me note some of the factual findings that support Judge Dietz's ruling:

- (1) the performance of economically disadvantaged students and ELL students is seriously lagging; gaps between these students and their peers have grown;
- (2) student performance overall is flat;
- (3) hundreds of thousands of high school students are not on track to graduate;
- (4) and overwhelming number of Texas graduates are not on track to attend college and succeed without remediation;
- (5) Texas public schools are still receiving \$600 less per pupil in real, inflation-adjusted funding than they did in 2008;

This situation is unacceptable.

State officials should stop trying to defend this indefensible system. Instead of delaying the case as long as possible on appeal, they should face up now to the state's duty to provide each child with a full opportunity to achieve his or her educational potential.

We need to tell our legislators how this situation looks from the classroom perspective: The kids are worth it, and they shouldn't have to wait any longer for the state to do what's right, fix this problem, and fund their education adequately and equitable as required by law.

The timing is right. The state economy is booming, and the state treasury is overflowing with available revenue. Lawmakers have the wallet, if they have the will, to give our students the education they deserve. On behalf of the Texas AFT, I implore the McAllen ISD School Board to pass a resolution to our area state representatives demanding that the legislature take seriously its responsibility to provide adequate and equitable school fund without further delay.

Thank you for your time and attention.

## **Resolution on School Funding**

WHEREAS the Texas Constitution requires the state to provide a free and effective system of public schools for all our children, not just some;

WHEREAS the 5.1 million students in Texas public schools should not have to wait any longer for the state to do what's right, by funding their education adequately and equitably as required by law;

WHEREAS the August 28, 2014, decision by state District Judge John Dietz holds that the state system of school finance leaves our schools underfunded, deprives our schoolchildren of equitable access to educational opportunities, and improperly burdens local taxpayers—all in violation of clear constitutional requirements;

WHEREAS the legislative appropriations request proposed by the Texas Education Agency for 2016-2017 would continue the current underfunding of our public schools and accordingly projects that only 64 percent of Hispanic students, 58 percent of African-American students, and 60 percent of economically disadvantaged students would meet all state passing standards;

WHEREAS the TEA budget request for 2016-2017 also would fail to restore hundreds of millions of dollars in funding for full-day pre-K expansion and for extra help for struggling students under the Student Success Initiative;

WHEREAS average per-pupil funding for Texas school districts in real, inflation-adjusted dollars remains \$600 below the level reached in 2008;

WHEREAS the deficiency of state funding forces local property taxpayers to bear the brunt of the effort to cover the rising costs of meeting rising state standards;

WHEREAS rather than delaying a final judgment in the school-finance case as long as possible on appeal, state lawmakers should face up now to the state's duty to provide every child with a full opportunity to achieve his or her educational potential;

WHEREAS the moment is right for the state to meet its responsibilities, because the state economy is booming, and the state treasury is overflowing with available revenue, enabling lawmakers to give our students the education they deserve.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT this Board calls on state officials to stop defending the indefensible, broken school-finance system and to negotiate promptly a settlement based on compliance with the state's constitutional obligation to provide for equitable and adequate funding of full and equal educational opportunity for all Texas students in our public schools.