

1925 COMMITTEE NOTES

1925 Committee Meeting No. 4 – Dec. 18, 2024

Transparency in Denton ISD

Denton ISD Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Susannah O’Bara, explained that Denton ISD is focused on ensuring transparency throughout this educational budget planning process. All meeting information can be accessed at www.dentonisd.org/1925.

In addition, Dr. O’Bara also detailed Denton ISD’s on-campus visits with elected officials, including a visit at Rivera Elementary with Representatives Andy Hopper, Mitch Little and Richard Hayes. The presentation was led by Principal Rachel Sullivan, who detailed information about students and the impact the lack of state funding is having on campuses.

Advocacy During the Legislative Session

Dr. Brian Woods, former Superintendent of Schools in Northside ISD and current Deputy Executive Director of Advocacy for the Texas Association of School Administrators (TASA), provided information on how the committee can advocate for public education during the upcoming Legislative Session.

Dr. Woods noted the Comptroller has indicated that the legislature will have another surplus going into the 89th Legislative Session. In addition, the shortage of employees (not just teachers) has forced school districts to keep up with their competition with regard to pay and benefits. He reminded the committee that school districts are funded on attendance, yet staffed on enrollment which causes difficulty in the budgeting process. **Dr. Woods also noted that 80 percent of 313 Texas districts surveyed faced challenges with deficit budgets and need more resources.**

Dr. Woods explained vouchers will almost certainly be a part of any funding discussion despite language about keeping the two separate. The basic student allotment has not increased since 2019, and the comptroller estimates total inflation is above 23 percent. Dr. Woods went on to explain that many districts are operating off fund balance, in spite of some criticism of building a healthy fund balance.

In addition, Dr. Woods outlined various specifics about advocacy, including defining advocacy as involving encouraging voting, telling your story and brand, and meeting needs locally. He also explained what is not advocacy, which is TASA telling people what their priorities are or should be. Anyone who cares about the system can advocate, but it can’t just be the superintendent and school board.

Dr. Woods detailed the following tips for legislative advocacy:

- Have a set of legislative priorities and give them out freely

- Build relationships with members and staffers by meeting with them and inviting them to school events
- During the session, pay attention to legislative action alerts and act on them
- Thank members when they vote to support your priorities
- Be civil
- Educate the community on these complex issues

Reductions and Revenue Priorities

Dr. O'Bara provided information on proposed reductions and revenue priorities. Dr. O'Bara noted that primary deficit areas in Denton ISD include \$2,490,955 in Pre-K programming, \$9,859,333 in special education, \$7,438,226 in transportation and \$4,440,228 in safety and security. Dr. O'Bara explained the preferred method of increasing funding for public education is increasing the basic student allotment, which provides local control. That would facilitate the local school trustees the flexibility to allocate the funds based on locally determined needs.

Dr. O'Bara also detailed a cost estimate of a basic allotment increase, as well as a basic allotment increase for special education, safety and security and teacher pay.

After three meetings, these were the following considerations: class size adjustments for a proposed reduction of \$7,912,924; classroom support professional adjustments for a proposed reduction of \$639,000; extra/co-curricular adjustments for a proposed reduction of \$200,000; non-campus payroll adjustments for a \$2,591,802 proposed reduction and non-campus operating budget adjustments for a \$1,260,000 proposed reduction. Combined, these total proposed reductions equal \$12,604,126 – or 3.6 percent.

Dr. O'Bara noted the three lenses for consideration, which are maintaining a focus on teaching and learning, long-term viability for Denton ISD and making a substantial impact to the district's overall budget.