

“INSIDE”

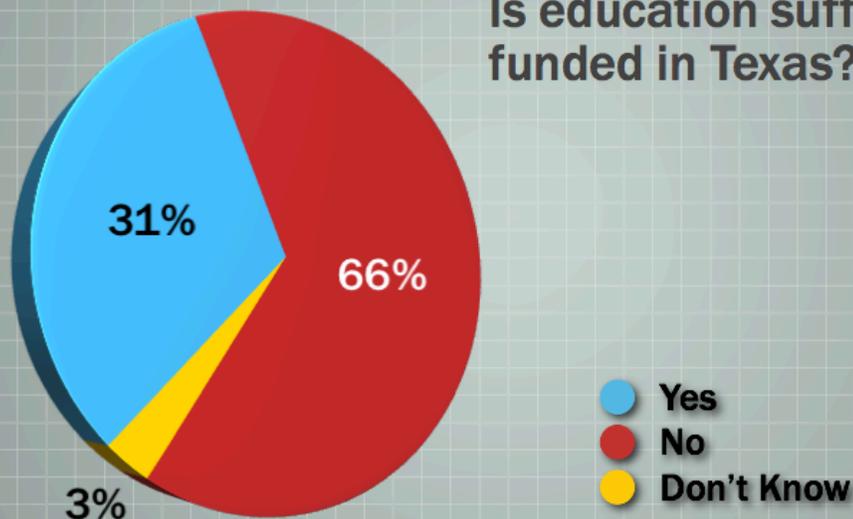
INTELLIGENCE

THE TEXAS TRIBUNE
TEXAS  WEEKLY

The insider's poll for the week of February 21.

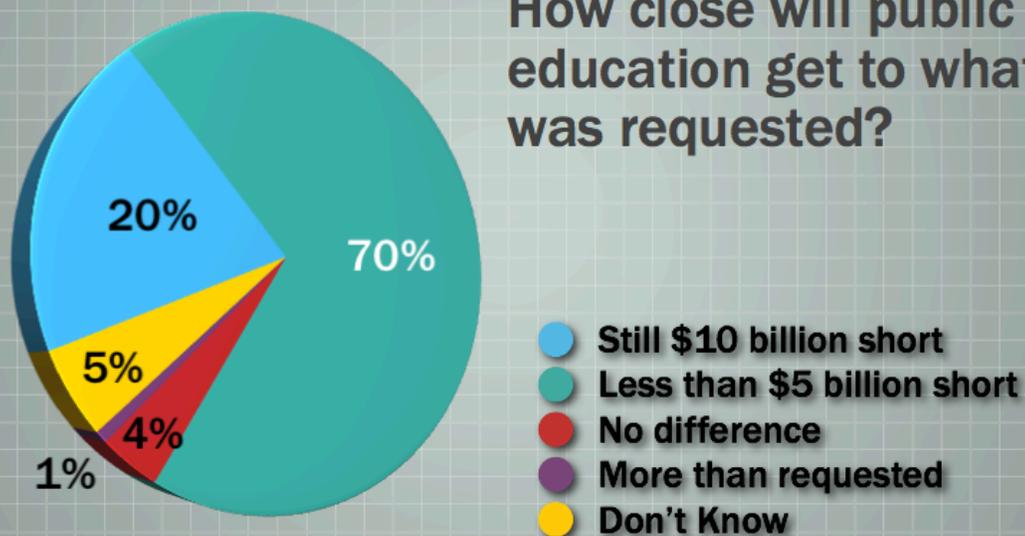
INSIDE INTELLIGENCE

Is education sufficiently funded in Texas?



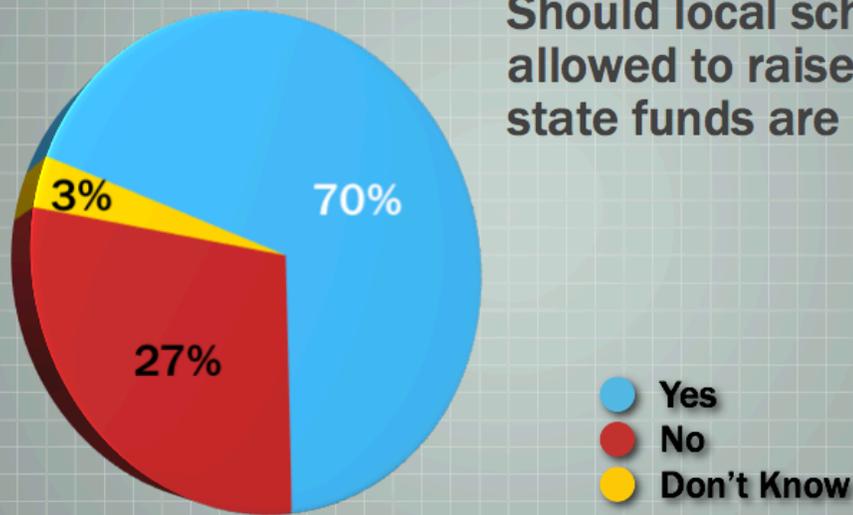
INSIDE INTELLIGENCE

How close will public education get to what was requested?



INSIDE INTELLIGENCE

Should local schools be allowed to raise taxes if state funds are cut?



This week's open-ended prompt was: "What areas of education spending should be on the cutting block?" And here's how the insiders answered:

- "TEA. Regional Centers."
- "Administrative costs."
- "Administration"
- "Nothing you can imagine cutting totals up to much of anything."
- "Nothing"
- "School district administration is bloated, and everything else is starved."
- "Testing for any purpose other than to improve student learning."
- "Only the consolidation of very small districts with larger districts."
- "Administration; non-core programs; discretionary spending on curriculum, test preparation, consultants, public relations, etc."
- "We should be investing in public education, not cutting it to the bone."
- "Funding for TEA central administration. By the way, what if I think it will be more than \$5 billion short but less than \$10 billion short...?"
- "Administration mainly. But every expenditure should be examined."
- "Administrator salaries"
- "Athletics."
- "Administrative staff."
- "The pensions of school teachers. They should have 401k plans like the rest of us and have to pay for their own healthcare."
- "Building stadiums; consolidating school districts;"
- "There should be a base number for an efficient delivery of education. Easy to say, hard to accomplish."
- "General administration, ridiculously expensive and counterproductive pension policies and practices, labor practices that reward retaining ineffective teachers,

inefficiencies due to too many districts, local and state programs with no record of success in boosting student achievement, sports excesses, and inefficiencies due to inadequate use of technology"

- "Administration and non class room spending."
- "Start with non-classroom expenditures. Next: support and administrative staffing has increased 20 percent since 2004, while student population has risen 7 percent. Moving from the current 1:1 teaching/ non-teacher ratio to a 3:2 ratio would produce \$3.25 billion in savings. Force a reduction in administrator pay and bonus packages. Abolish the regional service centers."
- "Administrative expenses which are not directly attributable to the classroom."
- "Non-teacher positions ... Consolidation of superintendent positions and elimination of mid-level bureaucrats ... making property poor districts tax at same level as property wealthy districts to be eligible for property wealthy funds"
- "Need merit pay for teachers"
- "The continued growth of classroom v. administrative expense is always an issue; consolidation is one way to address top-heavy administrative expenses."
- "Incentive pay"
- "Administration, sports"
- "Administration can be cut in a lot of districts, especially the big ones. Superintendents need to work harder and do with less instead of cutting actual educators — which will never happen. ...Consolidating school districts would save a ton of money, especially in East Texas where there are a ton of white flight districts. Again, it will never happen."
- "School districts should be consolidated; excessive bureaucracy (as measured by state efficiency standards) should be penalized; core academic subjects should be emphasized"

• "Programs the state can't prove are effectively helping struggling students; steroid testing; elimination of unfunded mandates throughout the entire education code that drive up cost."

- "Less admin, more teachers"
- "TEA"
- "Anything that does not pertain to academic and arts curriculum."
- "Administration, extracurricular, travel, consultants and class size in grades 6 and up. Moves to technology that will require high upkeep costs should be delayed or limited. What should not be cut are early childhood efforts to assimilate kids of different cultures and backgrounds into the education system to give them a chance to succeed. if we fail to fund the early opportunities to get kids into an environment where they can learn English as well as skills to help them survive, our economy is going to suffer in the future as we have fewer educated workers."
- "None"
- "The legislature should prohibit use of any tax funds for athletic programs. Then we will test the resolve of those who choose to maintain the ad valorem tax cap."
- "Sports"
- "The Target Revenue entitlement should be eliminated first (total elimination saves about \$4.5 billion per biennium). Second, outside the system grants should be eliminated (saves about \$2 billion). Delaying the July and August payments to districts moves another \$3.7 billion into the 2011-2013 biennium."
- "Athletics and athletic facilities"
- "End the salary schedule"
- "Non-teaching administrators, high coach salaries. Focus on teaching not sports"
- "The size and cost of administration and support functions in Texas' public education system should be reduced. The number of support and administrative staff in Texas'

public education system has increased by more than 20 percent since 2004. The number of students, however, has only increased by 7 percent over that same timeframe. Reducing non-teaching staff to a point where the teacher to non-teacher ratio is approximately 3:2, would not affect classroom instruction, while the state would save \$3.25 billion in general revenue funds over the biennium. In the aggregate, this reform would require school districts to eliminate approximately 80,000 non-teaching staff in total, including coaches, librarians, counselors, nurses and educational aides, as well as campus and central administrators."

- "Those having the least impact on student learning. If cuts must be made, the protect those programs providing direct instruction to students."
- "Administration. Before a single teacher is fired, the Superintendents and Asst. supers need to be trimmed."
- "State Board of Education"
- "Wrong question, Texas ranked in the bottom quarter of states in per capita student funding throughout the 20th century and into the 21st century. Given the demographic changes taking place Texas needs to step it up, not cut back."
- "The discretionary boutique programs."
- "Rural ISD consolidation, TAKS, TEA Administration"
- "Administration and football stadiums"
- "Everything. Cut salaries & benefits, consolidate school districts, increase class size, delay book purchases, etc."
- "I'm not sure cuts serves the interest of Texas. Texas' long history with Edgewood litigation lead to the current Robin Hood school funding plan. While nearly everyone acknowledges that the future economic security of Texas rests in developing a quality workforce, the notion of "equalized funding" or redistributing funds from property rich school districts to the poorer ones has been an abject failure and the poster child for NIMBY. Any new school funding plan should begin

by raising the state cap on property tax, since getting a 2/3rds vote on a statewide property tax is to steep a political hill to climb. Reliance on property the tax will remain problematic, given to fluctuations in the economic climate, but this would seem the best short-term solution."

- "Football."
- "22 to 1"
- "Administration, Tenured Teachers that don't perform should be fired, poor performing schools should rapidly be forced to perform or their students must be given vouchers to attend a school that does perform."
- "The current monopoly is too inefficient. The state should allow vouchers (for less than the cost per student) and let interested parents use that toward private ed while keeping the rest to make up shortfalls for the remaining students."
- "2% teacher pay cuts instead of furloughs or layoffs"
- "Administration"
- "High school football and other sports are essentially the farm team for our colleges. Public college and university athletic programs should cover the costs of running K-12 sports in proportion to the size of each institution's athletic budget."
- "All non-core curriculum"
- "Fed stabilization funds"
- "The non-teacher to student ration needs to be reduced.The lege should also allow school districts to sell beer at HS football games to help make up the shortfall."
- "Well now, that question reveals the conservative bias in the media! Do we just assume that we're getting overeducated in Texas, and it's time to trim it back a little? I know it's pointless to ask Who's taxes should be raised so that our kids are a little smarter when they get to tomorrow? But still! The arrogance of the assumption that, without

question, some education should be cut back is just more than I can stomach."

- "State Board of Education"
- "Administration"
- "Top-heavy administrative positions need to be cut first."
- "Administration."
- "None - it should be raised"
- "Admin and executive costs should be limited."
- "Administration, non-teaching positions, textbooks"
- "None"
- "Last session the Legislature funded a pay raise with one-time money it now doesn't have. Give school districts more flexibility to decide what to pay people. Also, halt all state funding for new buildings - both state and local level - until the state budget can recover."
- "Sports"
- "How about requiring that ISDs use their saving accounts, raise class size"
- "Administration; all areas not directly related to teaching in the classroom"
- "Administration"
- "By TEA's own numbers, non-classroom personnel in ISDs have dramatically risen over the past two decades. In many ISDs the non-classroom personnel outnumber the teachers. Cut non-classroom personnel back to a ratio not to exceed 3 teachers to 1 non-teacher. Additionally, increase the size of classrooms and cut programs that deal with early education before first grade. The luxury of having these extras is no longer an option."
- "The insane amount of money districts spend on athletic monuments to their beloved districts should go first. Put it to a pure either

or vote: a new stadium or keeping teachers in the classrooms and let the parents decide."

- "There has to be a less rigid teacher to pupil ratio in high-performing districts, and some reductions in administrative costs."
- "there should be a moratorium on new sports facilities - even those funded through local school bonds."
- "All non-classroom personnel—specifically administrative professionals. Counseling should be an exception."
- "Tenure"
- "Textbooks—should shift to electronic"
- "Absolutely NONE."
- "Districts are way too top heavy. Many local board members I have spoken with say that only 60% of their salaries are for teachers. Too many asst superintendents, communications directors, in house counsel, counselors, curriculum coordinators, etc."
- "Duplication of administration. Many school districts should be consolidated."
- "Intermural athletics, band, choir — non-academic, non-job training functions."
- "Anything related to TAKs; pay raises other than merit-related, including all personnel; legal fees"
- "Anything dealing with TOO MANY CHILDREN LEFT BEHIND"
- "Though a tough political choice, consolidation of the smaller districts is one way to bring huge efficiencies to a bloated mess. Incentives for consolidation - and disincentives for not consolidating - should be in play."
- "Some special items for institutions of higher education. ...Funding for low enrollment community colleges. ...Matching funds to support efforts by 7 universities to achieve Tier 1 status."

- "Admin, admin and then some admin. Service Centers in urban areas; and then some more admin."
- "Steroid testing, TEA discretionary spending, athletic programs"
- "Start with a cut in Superintendents pay."
- "I don't have a specific category to cut"
- "Steroid Testing, Fitnessgram, grant funding. In general, anything that is outside of the Foundation School Program whose non-funding would allow the FSP to be preserved to the maximum extent, although prior-law hold-harmless should be looked at if the FSP has to be adjusted."
- "One way to cut public funding is to give more local control and eliminate unfunded mandates to school districts. ... Eliminate the 22:1 Classroom ration in K - 4 ... Criminal history background check ...Mentor teacher program ...Records management act and retention periods ...Changes to employee benefits: cost of benefits associated with state pay increases; retirement benefits contributions above state minimum salary schedule; retirement benefits contribution during first 90 days of employment; and continued group health benefits after resignation. ...Unnecessary staff training, such as: blood borne pathogens, management of diabetes, sexual harassment, Asbestos Awareness Annual training, mold assessment, waste management, drug and alcohol awareness, and steroid testing. ...PEIMS Reporting and records keeping ...Shall I continue???"
- "I think everything will be on the cutting block whether they should be or not."
- "Administrative layers between the Superintendents and Principals, days of instruction (teaching really ends 2 weeks before end of the school year), pre-kindergarten (high cost day care)."
- "Non-classroom positions."
- "Consolidation of rural school districts ... Sports and sports facilities ... Languages offered"
- "Testing athletes for steroids; abstinence-only programs; any other relatively tiny pet project that was a waste of money, even when there wasn't a huge revenue problem. But those won't save \$10 billion."
- "Standardized testing program."
- "Everything should be on block. Also, consolidation of school districts absolutely has to be considered soon. Multiple administrations for public schools in the same cities is hard to justify anymore."
- "Education needs to be funded. Our children are the engine of our economy. If Texas' economy is to strengthen it will do so because of the number of educated kids we are producing."
- "Every assistant and vice superintendent and principal should be examined and subject to cuts."
- "Should require schools and districts to merge for efficiency. 1-21 class size. Should enact performance pay program for districts & schools"
- "As long as school districts continue to build grandiose football complexes, there will be the perception there is ample money available for the districts' needs. Football is king in Texas, and rightfully so, just play it in modest facilities."
- "Let the schools figure that out. The legislature cannot cut the education budget as effectively or efficiently as the schools themselves can."
- "Administration, bureaucracy"
- "Expenditures not directed at the classroom"
- "Administration, unnecessary classes which are required for graduation, sport team travel"
- "All"
- "SBOE"

- "This is a no brainer. Consolidate school systems and drastically cut administrative expenses. If that doesn't do, fire teachers."
- "Bilingual education, administration expenses"
- "mandates on administration and teacher pay rates, delay textbook purchases, the caps on class size, or the 10-1 teacher-student ratio in remedial learning classes."
- "Textbooks should be delayed. This is really the wrong question if anyone actually believes their campaign statements about the importance of an educated workforce."
- "None. Schools can be improved in many ways, but none are related to having too MUCH money."
- "None — it's underfunded as it is"
- "Athletic programs and other extracurricular activities"
- "programs that only apply to small groups of students"
- "Sports, travel, administrative"
- "None. Our entire education system from pre-K to post-secondary has been on a

starvation diet for far too long. After over a decade of Republican mismanagement, Texas is already seeing the fruits of a policy that is virtually guaranteeing the creation of an entire generation of poorly educated Texans who will be ill equipped to compete and contribute to our state's prosperity. This is the ultimate mortgaging of our future, and I fear we will discover too late that it was a subprime one."

- "Sports facilities; traditional textbooks are obsolete"
- "Athletics."
- "Central Administration"
- "Textbooks are out of date. Reading, (r)writing, and rithmatic are a higher priority than extra-cirricular activities."
- "All of them"
- "Administration, athletics, testing"
- "Interscholastic athletics"
- "Transportation."
- "Not class size "

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