

Talk

about Today's Public Schools

Editor's Note:

STRAIGHT Talk is a publication of Northside ISD (San Antonio, TX) that contains one of a continuing series of articles that is meant to enlighten the public and staff about a variety of issues. STRAIGHT Talk content is either written by NISD or copied with permission from other sources.

For more information, write info@nisd.net.

Exposing the hypocrisy of state funding to education; truly the state's fiscal house is not in order

November 3, 2014

By Brian T. Woods, Ed.D.
Superintendent, Northside ISD

In August of this year, the Executive Director of the Texas Municipal League (a group that represents Texas cities) wrote a letter to state Senator Donna Campbell. Senator Campbell had presided over a hearing that focused on a topic that we hear a lot about from state leadership these days – local debt.

State shifts debt burden to the local schools.

The letter crystallizes my criticism of state leadership when they focus on local debt while both ignoring more rapidly rising state debt and simultaneously refusing to fund necessary services thus passing that burden to local groups like cities, counties and school districts.

The letter cites data from the Texas Bond Review Board that from 2009 to 2012 local debt increased by 12.2% while state funded debt increased by 20.3% during that same time period.

The letter goes on to say, "School funding, as you know, is a constitutional obligation of state government. The state has chosen to discharge that obligation by creating local school districts that levy the needed taxes. In reality, the \$63 billion of school district debt ought to be thought of as state debt because that's how the state has chosen to fund schools. Shift that \$63 billion over to the state debt column and a vastly different picture about which governments may be falling dangerously into debt emerges."

continued



Northside ISD is a good example of the negative impact of the state's short-sighted legislation and vision.

While NISD continues to grow by thousands of students yearly, the state, has failed to increase funding for any support for debt service to build schools or renovate schools. However, NISD taxpayers continue to support the school district's bond elections even though the state has largely abandoned its obligations to the students and taxpayers in fast growth school districts.

In spite of fiscal challenges erected by the state, NISD continues to be one of the most fiscally sound school districts because of a well-thought out and multi-pronged debt management plan. Recently, and based on activity in the 2013-14 school year alone, the NISD Board of Trustees reported \$83.6 million in cost avoidance and savings on the sale and re-marketing of school bonds in direct benefit to the taxpayers.

No matter how many blinders state leadership chooses to wear or the responsibilities they shirk, the reality is that thousands more students will continue to arrive at Northside's school doors and we will continue to meet their needs.

Nothing could be further from the truth!

This puts in specific light the hypocrisy that some state leaders suffer from - that somehow their fiscal house is in order and if it weren't for big spenders in local governments then all would be well. Nothing could be further from the truth!

Back to the letter from the Texas Municipal League: Near its conclusion, the letter states, "TML would suggest that the recent focus on local debt (despite the fact that state debt is growing faster) likely relates to the reality that Texas state government... has gotten out of the business of building new state infrastructure with state dollars. Instead, locals are expected to pick up the slack..."

All I can say is Amen!

