



TSTA NEWS

TEXAS STATE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION

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House budget could cost 100,000 education jobs

A very lean House budget proposal laid out this week could cost school districts 80,000 to 100,000 jobs, according to school finance experts. Their estimates were reported Wednesday by Quorum Report.

Even before that estimate emerged, it was clear that education would be one of the biggest losers under the House plan, which would slash \$31.1 billion, or nearly 17 percent, from current spending. Those deep cuts would be necessary to balance a new state budget without raising taxes or using any of the state's \$9.4 billion Rainy Day Fund.

The House heard an explanation of the budget document Wednesday from Appropriations Chairman Jim Pitts.

The Senate, meanwhile, adopted its procedural rules for the session and, as expected, retained the traditional two-thirds rule for debating legislation on the Senate floor. Also as anticipated, Republican senators carved out an exception to the two-thirds rule to enable the Republican majority to pass a voter ID bill through the chamber.

TSTA President Rita Haecker issued a statement deploring the House budget proposal because, among other things, it would gut public education, jeopardize health care for many thousands of school children and compromise Texas' future.

"If education is the engine that drives future economic growth, this budget would slam Texas into reverse," Haecker said.

The budget plan falls \$9.8 billion short of meeting budgetary obligations to the public schools, making it impossible for many districts not only to meet enrollment increases but also to keep fulfilling educational responsibilities to current students. Untold thousands of teachers and support staffers would lose their jobs, and classrooms would become terribly overcrowded. An estimated 170,000 new students will enter Texas' public schools before the end of the next budget period in 2013.

The proposal also would lower the state's contribution to the Teacher Retirement System to 6 percent, the minimum level allowed by the Texas Constitution.

"Let us hope the itemized, blow-by-blow reality of these spending cuts will make our state leaders understand just how irresponsible it would be to slash and burn their way to a new state budget. Millions of real people would suffer," Haecker said.

The TSTA president urged Gov. Rick Perry and the Legislature to avoid the most devastating cuts by adopting a balanced approach to budget-setting. State leaders should start by using all the money in the Rainy Day Fund, maximize the use of federal dollars and adopt an adequate and equitable revenue stream for meeting Texas' needs, she said.

This budget is a starting point for legislative debate, but it offers a pretty clear picture of the devastating effects of curing a revenue shortfall of as much as \$27 billion with spending cuts alone, the approach advocated so far by the governor and many legislators.

The final budget will be written by a conference committee late in the regular session this spring, or, if the House and Senate can't agree then, in a special session this summer.

Here are some of the proposed cuts in the House bill that would affect education:

- **Is \$9.8 billion short of covering the current school funding formulas, including an estimated 170,000 additional students who will enter public schools during the next two-year budget cycle.**
- **Eliminates funding for remedial instruction for students failing the TAKS tests.**
- **Cuts funding for pre-kindergarten.**
- **\$31 million cut from Communities in Schools, a dropout prevention program.**
- **\$19 million from the Limited English Proficiency Success Initiative.**
- **Lowers the state's contribution to the Teacher Retirement System to 6 percent, the constitutional minimum.**
- **Cuts off financial aid for at least 60,000 college students.**
- **Closes four community college districts – Odessa, Ranger, Borger and Lake Jackson.**
- **Decreases overall Medicaid spending by 30 percent. This is an important health care program for low-income people, including tens of thousands of Texas school children and their families.**