

Testimony of Lynn Moak before the Texas School Finance Commission, 3/19/18
Linking Performance Aspirations to Funding Realities

From the words of the 1876 Texas Constitution calling for the “general diffusion of knowledge” to the latest accountability system, the Legislature has emphasized the need for comprehensive improvement in the education system. Section 4.001 provides the objective that “all Texas children should have access to a quality education that enables them to achieve their potential.” Section 28.002 expands the commitment to provide a comprehensive curriculum. Chapter 39 establishes accountability systems for both academic and financial performance. Finally, Sections 42.001 and 42.002 set forth a financing system that meets standards of adequacy and equity. Designing a finance system to support these statements of educational and financial need is a vital part of this Commission’s charge.

Texas has ambitions for the public school system to perform at a level never before expected in this state. The new standards for all student groups are ambitious and culminates in the highly desirable goal of 60x30 (60% by 2030). In the cohort class of 2005, only 21% of the students attained an associate and/or a bachelor’s degree by 2016. The expectation of college and career readiness for all students creates a new definition of the “general diffusion of knowledge” that meets 21st century requirements. What remains to be determined is the level of resources to be made available. We urge the Commission to request the Legislative Budget Board, the Governor’s budget office and others to participate in examining the financial requirements of the new, more comprehensive system.

Inflation and enrollment growth will continue to add to funding requirements. At a 4% growth level (1.6% for enrollment growth and 2.5% for inflation), the annual cost of maintain the system will average over \$2 billion per year for the decade 2020-2030. Additional funding will be necessary if the goals and objectives of the current statutory framework are to be met.

The funding system in place is designed for a series of adjustments directly related to the funding areas discussed above. The “weights” for the Cost-of-Education Index, Limited English Proficient students and At Risk (or Compensatory Education) students are all designed to meet changing expectations, targets and costs. We stand ready to assist the Commission in reviewing these linkages.

Moak, Casey & Associates is a consulting organization assisting school districts in school finance, economic development and accountability matters. The firm also assists several organizations including the Texas School Alliance, Texas Association of School Boards, Texas Association of School Administrators, Texas Association of School Business Officials, and South Texas Association of Schools.