



*March 19, 2009*

**Letter to Members of the  
House Select Committee on Federal Economic Stabilization Funding**

Dear Colleague,

As the House Select Committee on Federal Economic Stabilization Funding meets to consider how to disburse revenue the state receives under the American Economic Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, we urge legislators to support using “stimulus” funds to:

1. Purchase learning materials such as textbooks and technological equipment that contributes to student learning, including electronic textbooks and other devices appropriate for the use of technology in the classroom.
2. Fund the Virtual School Network.
3. Provide resources for professional development for educators in Texas’ public schools.

On February 11, 2009, the Texas Conservative Coalition Board of Directors urged fellow legislators to ensure that federal “stimulus” funds are used only for “non-recurring expenses for capital outlays [such as transportation and infrastructure construction], equipment purchases, [and] technology enhancements.” The three policy goals listed above meet those requirements:

**Instructional Materials**

- Using some portion of the federal “stimulus” education funding to pay for instructional materials such as textbooks and other learning technologies will help ensure that the “stimulus” funds are not used to permanently grow government or create ongoing obligations for TEA or Texas’ school districts.
- Currently, revenue from the Permanent School Fund (PSF) is used to purchase instructional materials for public schools. However, as a result of declining market conditions over the past year, available revenues from the PSF could leave the state with a shortfall of anywhere from \$300 million to \$1.4 billion. Using “stimulus” funding to purchase instructional materials will help meet this shortfall.

- Using federal “stimulus” funding for school instructional materials will also help the state retain revenue in the Economic Stabilization (Rainy Day) Fund which might otherwise have to be diverted to meet these most fundamental obligations. Retaining revenue in the Rainy Day Fund is a crucial part of ensuring that the state can maintain a favorable bond rating and be prepared to meet any future budget shortfalls.

### **The Virtual School Network**

- Federal “stimulus” funding should also be used to fund the Virtual School Network. The Texas Education Agency has issued an exceptional item request to fund this program in the amount of \$18 million for 2010-11.
- The Texas Virtual School Network (VSN) was created by the 80th Legislature through the passage of Senate Bill 1788 in 2007. The VSN alleviates teacher shortages and scheduling conflicts by providing students access to advanced classes in which they would not normally be able to participate. Funds were used from Rider 31 to establish the network in FY08.
- Fully funding the VSN will be particularly beneficial because it directly addresses the challenges that school districts face with regard to classroom space and transportation. Students will be able to study the very best courses in the state on the virtual school network without placing any burden on a new school in terms of classroom space or transportation costs. Additionally, through a virtual school network, school districts could share the costs of providing courses that they would not otherwise be able to afford.
- Also, VSN enables smaller (mainly rural) districts to gain access to math and science instruction necessary to implement the “4X4” curriculum and help students succeed on end-of-course tests.

### **Professional Development**

- The Texas Education Agency has an exceptional item request for professional development funding in the amount of \$53.66 million for 2010-11. The request is the number one priority of the TEA’s exceptional items. The funds would be used for, among other things, professional training for end of course exams. ”Stimulus” funding for professional development programs would help meet this budget request.
- Professional development funding as requested by TEA will help build the infrastructure necessary for schools to be successful as both curriculum standards get tougher and the state implements end-of-course exams.

- According to the Texas Institute for Education Reform (TIER), professional development is key to improving teacher performance in public schools. In January 2007, TIER recommended that the state:

Improve teacher effectiveness through carefully and independently evaluated professional development that focuses on academic content knowledge, is driven by student needs, incorporates research-based teaching techniques and instruction, and is evaluated for classroom results.

In summary, we strongly urge our colleagues to disburse education-related “stimulus” money accordingly:

1. Instructional tools and materials: \$895 million
2. Technology Allotment: \$271 million
3. Per Capita Distributions to schools: \$267 million
4. Virtual School Network: \$18 million
5. Professional Development: \$53.66 million

Because we are committed to successful instruction and learning, we urge our colleagues in the Legislature to join us in support of this position.

Sincerely,



Wayne Christian  
*House District 9 – Center*



Linda Harper- Brown  
*House District 105 – Irving*



Ken Paxton  
*House District 70 – McKinney*



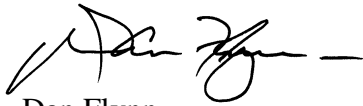
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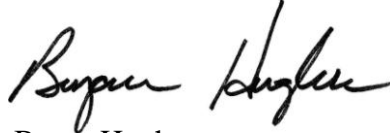
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