

## Message from the Board President shared at Feb 22 Budget Workshop:

When this Board passed a deficit budget for this fiscal year, we knew we were faced with funding and revenue issues that were very difficult, if not insurmountable without taking serious action. As a Board, we have challenged Dr. Jenney and the Administration with coming up with ways that we could deal with this financial crisis, and still deliver the best educational product possible to our students. And, we have made it a priority to approach the budget process and these issues in a manner that would have the least human impact possible across the District.

Funding from the state has been effectively frozen for Fort Bend ISD at levels that are equivalent to 2006 revenues. At the same time, our student population has grown in such a way as to cause us to build new buildings when we have campuses that are not full. As a result, our costs have risen to such a level that they outstrip the dollars we receive from the state. This is a fact that should not be taken lightly. We have neighboring school districts that are not facing the same financial issues as us. It is not, as many would love to claim because this Board has over spent, or wasted the taxpayers' dollars. It is because our funding has not been sufficient to meet our needs, and we still have to live under the burden of millions of dollars of unfunded mandates from the state.

Two weeks ago, members of this Board attended a Grassroots session for Region 4 TASB school boards, a forum dedicated to the formulation of a legislative agenda for the upcoming session in 2011. At this meeting, legislators from across the region came and spoke to this group of school board members. Unfortunately, the legislators that represent FBISD were not present at this forum. Mrs. Olivo sent a representative to the meeting, but did not attend the meeting herself.

Over a dozen state legislators spoke at this meeting, including Rob Eissler, Chairman of the House Education and Scott Hochberg, a ranking member of that same committee. The presentations by Representatives Hochberg and Eissler were troubling, particularly for districts like ours. They laid out the "hows" of the development of the education funding process, eventually indicating that they really only met the needs of those districts that had "representation in the room." That is a troubling statement for us, particularly in light of the fact that we are the seventh largest school district in this state. In a brief discussion with both representatives after their presentations, they indicated to me that the truth of the matter was that "leadership" in the House was expecting for school districts to raise their own money and that we could expect no new funds from the state. Just to be clear, the state is telling us that if we are going to get back to our historic funding levels, we will be required to raise taxes on our constituents, an outcome that is highly unlikely since we would need an election to increase our tax rate. And in this economy, no one is looking for ways to increase our taxes.

In the TASB study presented to us several weeks ago, it was stated that if the State would have kept our funding stable, Fort Bend ISD would not be facing the issues now before us, and FBISD would have been in the position to continue delivering instruction at the same high level we are today. Unfortunately, the state legislature arbitrarily lowered our tax rates two years ago impacting our revenues significantly, and then in the most recent session passed a funding formula that put us into a very deep hole.

Today, we are going to discuss the budget for next year. These discussions are very difficult for all of us. Once we start down certain paths, we will not be able to turn back. I have communicated this message to Chairman Eissler in an email last week, but have yet to receive a reply. We as a Board continue to hope for a positive solution to appear, but that does not seem to be happening.

With that, I would now like to turn this workshop session over to Dr. Jenney.