

Texas Classroom Teachers Association

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Comments on SB 8 June 2, 2011

Senate Bill 8 directs cuts to the classroom without requiring districts to first consider less essential areas of the budget. It also fails to recognize the significant amount of local control that districts already have – for example, nothing in state law requires athletic programs or the hiring of positions such as assistant superintendents or public relations directors.

With the passage of HB 1 in the regular session, we now know the level of funding anticipated for school districts. While we will continue to press for adequate funding for schools, it is to the credit of the Senate that the budget cuts are on the low end of the range that had been under consideration during the session. This knowledge, coupled with the significant numbers of employees who were let go this spring, and who represent an ongoing cost savings to districts, mitigates the need for dramatic changes to district flexibility.

Specifically, here are our primary concerns with SB 8:

Sections 2 and 4. Revising the date by which districts must notify employees of a contract nonrenewal to 10 days prior to the last day of instruction is unnecessary and unilateral (there is not a similar change in the deadline by which employees must notify the district of a resignation). It is not necessary because at this time districts should be aware of their approximate financial situations for the upcoming year, and should have planned accordingly.

Section 3. There is no need to change the law relating to continuing contracts, as the decision to issue continuing contracts has always been a local decision. If there is a change, it should apply to prospectively issued contracts in order to avoid litigation.

Sections 5 and 8. Changing the law to allow furloughs and salary reductions provides districts with an easy out: focusing budget cuts on the classroom instead of on the significant portion of the budget that is less essential to the core mission of public education. If this legislature prefers to allow furloughs and salary reductions, those provisions should be temporary, tied to a specific, limited time period, and commensurate with district funding cuts. The law should also ensure that administrators and other professional personnel are subject to the same salary and furlough provisions.

Section 7. Rather than tying the furlough provisions to funding, it is better to have a sunset provision limiting the period in which both furloughs and salary reductions could be used. This keeps pressure on school districts to avoid the “easy out” of targeting classrooms as the source for budget cuts.