

Senate Education Committee
February 20, 2007

Good morning, Madame Chair, members of the committee: Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Randy Fields. I am the president of San Antonio's Northside ISD Board of Trustees, a member of the Texas Association of School Boards, and a former Baylor University System Regent. Today, I am here on behalf of the Texas Association of School Boards (TASB) to testify on SB 4.

First, I would like to applaud your efforts to hold charter schools to unprecedented accountability standards. We believe all public schools should be held accountable for student performance. It's in the best interest of all Texas schoolchildren, and it speaks volumes about your commitment to ensure a bright future for these kids.

I am here today to talk to you about facilities funding. SB 4 provides an allotment not to exceed \$1000 dollars per student to a charter school for facilities if that charter school is rated recognized or exemplary for two consecutive years, but what about the public schools that educate 4.5 million Texas schoolchildren? Before you fund charter school facilities you need to look at public schools bursting at the seams and those schools struggling just to fix broken air conditioning units and dilapidated roofs.

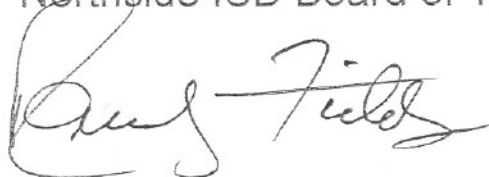
My district, Northside ISD, continues to be the "destination" district in San Antonio for many families seeking a quality school system for their children and for employees seeking a quality place to work. We are the largest and fastest growing "recognized" urban school district. We're growing by 4,000 kids a year and can barely keep up with that growth. That's

4,000 new students, all of whom need a place to be educated. For us, 4,000 new students a year means 6 new elementary schools a year. Northside ISD Voters have passed over \$1 Billion in Bond Construction Programs since 1998, and we're still struggling to meet the demands. In fact, our board has just authorized a May bond referendum for \$692 million, by far the largest in our history. This will build 904 new classrooms, as well as provide for needed renovations and improvements district wide. Because of state facilities funding support, we have been able to keep debt services taxes for our taxpayers lower than they would otherwise be.

For many years, Texas has partnered with school districts to fund facilities by providing equalized support for debt service. Property poor school districts compete for Instructional Facilities Allotment dollars, and all other districts have had Existing Debt Allotment funds to assist them with lowering the cost to taxpayers of new debt that is already on the books. For the 2008-09 biennium, the Texas Education Agency requested \$150 million for the Instructional Facilities Allotment and \$180 to continue the Existing Debt Allotment for another two years. But funds for these two requests were not included in Senate Bill 1.

TASB respectfully requests that the Senate first take action to fund the facilities support programs already in place---the IFA and EDA programs. School districts anticipate 82,000 new students each year of the coming biennium. They are in great need of continued state partnership to fund facilities for those students. Thank you for your consideration.

Randy Fields
Northside ISD Board of Trustees President

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Randy Fields".