

To: Joint Interim Committee to Study the Public School Finance System  
Date: September 24, 2012  
From: Sharon Kamas, President- Science Teachers Association of Texas  
Elementary Science Coordinator, Crosby ISD  
Re: Education Funding

I come to you today not only as the President of an association that represents all levels of science educators in the state of Texas, but also as a teacher, science coordinator, and a mother.

Budgets continue to decrease and expectations increase. Schools all across Texas have been asked to do more with less and on the surface, we are. Teachers and administrators in Texas continue to show up for work each day and stay late in attempts to meet the needs of students. Beneath the surface there lie problems that are insurmountable in many instances. **Yes, we will continue because giving up on children is not an option.** Something is better than nothing, but until we truly begin solving issues, Texas students will continue to be denied opportunities. **By under-funding public schools and universities, we undermine the entire educational process. There is a disproportionate amount of money spent on assessment versus instruction and teacher training.**

A few issues I would like to bring before you today are:

#### **Unsafe/overcrowded science classrooms and laboratories**

For example, in a physics or 8<sup>th</sup> grade class where students need to build a conceptual understanding of the laws of motion by generating graphs and charts from real-time data collected from using photogates and motion detectors and there are six pieces of equipment (if you are lucky) and thirty-two students (in a 50 minute class) - there is little chance that every student gets the opportunity to develop any true understanding. Add the fact that every student, even students that have always struggled academically are now taking physics and you get a formula for disaster. The increasing numbers of ELL students entering the schools at the middle and high school levels have very little support in the science classroom and they are placed with 31 other students.

Most science teachers have one 50-55 minute period to set up labs for 6 classes of 28-35 students. If they wait until after school to set them up, they must wait until after tutoring (45mins. - an hour) that now starts at the beginning of the year. They already get to school between 6:45 and 7:00 in the morning - How much more do we ask of them? The second planning period was taken away several years ago when instead of adding teachers to decrease class size; more teachers were cut, causing science teachers to add a class and increase the number of students to their workload.

#### **Pressure to perform in Math and Reading causes a negative ripple effect for other subjects**

Many schools are double-blocking math and reading classes and taking electives away from students that need them the most. They are the students that most often do not participate in extra-curricular activities outside school. Not to mention the fact that the "12" tests they have to take may very well result in up to 36 tests and an overwhelming sense of failure; students whose talents could be nurtured in other ways. The results we are destined to get are students that leave high school *with or without* a degree and no technical, artistic, or athletic skills developed and no desire to attend a four-year college (more sense of failure). **If we had smaller classes and truly qualified teachers, we may very well be able to meet student needs in a regular class period, eliminating the need to overwhelm them with more hours of math or reading instruction.**

#### **Inadequate number of science lab/classrooms/teaching staff**

Districts are struggling with the increased number of required classes, increased student populations, and finding qualified personnel. Schools have outgrown current facilities. Even new classrooms/labs are not built to meet the number of students enrolled. Instead of being able to decrease the number of students to be safe, they must manage large classes in facilities built for almost half the number. Schools are also required to increase the number of science classes offered with no provisions for hiring qualified staff to teach. In addition to the already challenging situation, schools are also required to remediate for students who are not successful on state assessments. Who will do this?

#### **Insufficient funds for professional development/travel**

Teachers and administrators are required to maintain hours of professional development for certification and yet, travel budgets for professional development have been cut or eliminated. It is crucial that teachers engage in professional growth and networking in order to keep current in their craft.

#### **Eliminated support from TEA**

The critical link between our voice at the state level and the Texas teacher has been stripped, where other areas have been maintained or increase. Districts and campuses have limited support and guidance from the state.