

FIVE QUESTIONS WITH...

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PUBLIC SCHOOL FUNDING

Q. As a public education advocate, can you share a little about yourself?

A. *I was raised in the small, rural Texas community of Milano. As with most places across the state, the local public school played a significant role in the lives of everyone who lived there. Everyone's first teacher is their mother. In my case, my mother was also my first grade teacher.*

In my life, there was never a question about the importance of education. Post secondary education was an expectation – I didn't know there was a choice.

I received a bachelor of science and a master of arts with majors in mathematics from what was then Southwest Texas State University (now Texas State University) and never considered any career path other than teaching. I was superintendent at Rosebud-Lott (where I received my doctorate in education from Baylor University) and Kaufman ISDs. From there, I went to the Equity Center as Executive Director, advocating for fair treatment of Texas school children in school funding. I am now retired from that position, but continue to volunteer for the Center.

Q. Within the conversation about how public schools are funded, we often hear the terms “adequacy” and “equity.” What is the difference?

A. *Adequacy and equity are joined at the hip. You cannot have one without the other. Adequacy is having sufficient resources to provide quality educational opportunities for all children. This allows them to compete with children from all over the world, thus making a world-class education the essential standard.*

Equity is simply the fair treatment of children and taxpayers and the absence of waste, with waste being defined as the expenditure of public funds in a non-cost-based manner.

Q. In 2016, the most recent school finance lawsuit was described as lawful but imperfect with immense room for improvement by the Texas Supreme Court. How did the court justify its position?

A. *In a word, poorly. The court acknowledged the Texas Legislature had a constitutional responsibility to provide an efficient system of public education that provided a general diffusion of knowledge, but then determined that districts forced to tax at significantly higher rates could receive 40% less money and that level of inequity met the constitutional requirement. This remarkable decision betrayed a callous and indefensible indifference on behalf of our highest state court that our legislators must overcome. To think that a 40% difference in funding levels among students — and not even at the same tax effort! — is somehow acceptable is frankly appalling.*

Q. With the 86th Texas Legislative Session scheduled to begin in January of 2019, what are the obstacles to improving our school funding system, and how confident are you that improvements will be made?

A. *Our system inefficiently distributes public education resources; that is clear to any objective analysis. The problem is that those inefficiencies benefit some districts at the expense of children in others, and so far, history shows those districts are not willing to accept any solution that does not maintain that advantage. Fortunately, it seems the Legislature is more open to true reform and making the difficult decisions than it has been in many years.*

Q. History provides us with inspiring quotes about public education. What is your legacy quote that we might find inspiring future generations?

A. *“There are no second-class children. Every child is just as precious and their future just as worthwhile as that of any other child. Nowhere is that recognized more than in public education.” – Wayne Pierce, EdD*