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ATPE: “An Across-the-Board Approach to Budget Cuts Could Hurt At-Risk & Disadvantaged Populations”

State’s largest educator association recommends more strategic approach to cuts to maintain educational equity for Texas students

AUSTIN, Texas—The Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE)—the largest educator association in Texas—has reviewed a document from the Texas Legislative Budget Board revealing state agencies’ plans for cutting costs amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The nearly 400-page document comes after state leaders asked agencies to trim their expenditures by 5% this year due to the economic effects of COVID-19.

As one of Texas public education’s strongest advocates, ATPE is grateful that much of the state’s critical public education spending has been exempted from the call for cuts this year. We also appreciate the opportunity to review the detailed plans for cutting costs in areas of the education budget not exempted so that we can better understand their potential impact. This allows us the opportunity to suggest alternative paths when certain decisions might be unnecessarily detrimental.

ATPE has long believed that when budget cuts are necessary, the goal should be to minimize the negative impacts on vulnerable populations, such as at-risk or economically disadvantaged students. This means state agencies need to take a more considered approach to cost saving, rather than simply reducing their spending on programs across-the-board.

An across-the-board reduction in spending from Article III funds budgeted for K-12 public education may unnecessarily hurt programs that serve our state’s most vulnerable populations. This includes state-funded programs such as Communities in Schools (CIS), which provides mental health services and runs dropout prevention efforts, or the Windham School District, which serves incarcerated youth.

By making strategic cuts to programs that primarily impact adults or serve less critical needs, the state could reduce harm to higher-need students served by programs such as Windham and CIS. Funding for the alternative certification program Teach for America or physical fitness assessments, for example, could sustain larger cuts with fewer negative impacts to students. Ceasing unnecessary charter expansion is another way the state can reduce costs at a time when revenue is limited.

ATPE understands the COVID-19 pandemic has forced us all to make difficult decisions. Before executing the proposed reductions in spending, we urge state officials to consider more strategic decisions that won’t hinder efforts to maintain educational equity for Texas’ most vulnerable students.

About the Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE)

Founded in 1980, ATPE is the leading educators’ association in Texas with approximately 100,000 members statewide. With its strong collaborative philosophy, ATPE speaks for classroom teachers, administrators, and future, retired, and para-educators and works to create better opportunities for Texas’ five million public school students. | atpe.org

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