

Considering the political climate in Austin toward public schools from past sessions, the passage of HB 3 was a significant accomplishment and a breath of fresh air for educators in Texas. Along with promised property tax limitations, the bill provides for long-overdue and well-earned additional income for teachers, and to a lesser extent, increases for other personnel who are not administrators. Funding in areas of instruction and school safety that have not been addressed previously is included; issues with the Teacher Retirement System were addressed as well as including a 13th check for retirees who have not seen an increase in their retirement in the past fifteen or so years.

Some of our state leaders promised an “average compensation” increase of at least \$4,000 for teachers. This misled many people when they did not focus on the word, “average” or the word, “compensation”. All they heard was teachers would receive a \$4,000 raise. When you factor in all the legislative language, that \$4,000 “average compensation” takes on a different reality.

The Canton Board of Trustees and administration have been smart with the taxpayer’s money. They have provided for everyday operational needs, they have addressed unanticipated circumstances, and they have taken care of the long-term financial outlook for the district. Through the years, the CISD board has worked very carefully to increase teacher compensation and not have to freeze salaries; a step that others have had to do. That careful stewardship continues as the board considers this year’s budget.

For several years, Canton has been considered neither “rich” nor “poor” in the state’s eyes. This means that some districts around us will receive less new money while others will receive more. All of this is determined by a very complicated formula based upon average daily student attendance and property values.

In the past several legislative sessions, the state continually shifted more of the financial burden for schools to local boards of trustees and local property taxpayers. HB 3 goes back the other direction, putting more financial responsibility on the state, creating a better balance. That is a good thing.

While the state assumes a greater share of the costs, a concern arises. Texas now has money in the bank to pay for salaries and other new programs, but that could change. HB 3 provides no new source of money to continue this plan beyond two years.

The long-term sustainability for funding of HB 3, without an additional constant source of revenue, unfortunately, could be impacted by fluctuations in the economy and other factors. A lot could happen in two or four years. Lack of a significant sustainable source of revenue from the state, combined with property tax caps could force school districts into a difficult position trying to fund these new requirements which include the increased “compensation.”

Canton ISD remains committed to every child and to every taxpayer who contributes to the education of those children. The board of trustees is steadfast making sure every CISD employee receives the maximum amount of “compensation” possible while being mindful of the future sustainability of those decisions.

While this session was a great improvement in the atmosphere toward teachers and public education in general, there is still a lot of work to be done by our state leaders. HB3 is not an overall “reform” as some have described. It does not “fix” the finance system. It is not as comprehensive as some would have us believe. It is a start, but only a start in providing an educated workforce for 5.5 million children while reducing some of the burden on property taxpayers.

We congratulate our elected officials who listen to their constituents and take care of the people and the children they are elected to represent. We are grateful and we thank them for keeping their eyes on the future of our great state and our democracy by providing for and supporting Texas public schools.