

# 2007 Legislative Priorities

A group of Collin County leaders traveled to Austin February 19 and 20, 2007, to discuss legislative issues with state elected officials, as part of the biennial program "Collin County Day in Austin." An estimated 250 local education leaders, elected officials, chamber representatives, business owners and residents attended the event.

Following were Plano ISD's priorities for legislators:

- **Vouchers** – School districts oppose private school vouchers because they drain funding from public schools and deplete funds for programs and improvements.
- **School Funding** – Due to no adjustment in the Cost of Education Index with recent legislation, Collin County districts will have difficulty remaining competitive with teacher pay increases, utilities and other inflationary costs. Maintaining a stable tax rate and preserving the ability to access sufficient funding is crucial to the long-range planning process and vision for public schools.
- **Enrichment Tax Rate** – School districts support the elimination of the requirements for voter approval of enrichment tax rates.
- **End of Course Tests** – At the high school level, replace TAKS testing with new end-of-course tests that provide more comprehensive measures of student learning as well as application skills. End of course exams should be limited to core courses in selected grade levels.
- **4x4 Curriculum** – This new state requirement creates a burden on school districts to transition chemistry and physics into courses that ALL students take and experience success. The curriculum also creates an over-supply of IPC teachers and the requirement for teachers to obtain higher-levels of certification. With three of the four math and science courses well defined, it is imperative that school districts maintain flexibility with the fourth course in order to meet students' needs and interests.
- **Online Course Funding** – Provide funding to local school districts on a per student basis for successful completion of online courses taken outside of the regularly scheduled school day. This will be a crucial option for students looking to complete the required 26 credits for the recommended graduation plan while continuing to participate in fine arts, career education and athletic programs. Provide a similar model of reimbursement to districts that provide courses during the school day to students from other Texas districts.

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Anticipating the upcoming Legislative Session in Austin, Superintendent of Schools Dr. Doug Otto reviewed with district leaders, school principals and the Faculty Council this month the impact of House Bill 1 from the recent state legislative special session and briefed the groups on the following anticipated topics for the upcoming session to be held January 9 through May 28, 2007:

- ways to economize the retirement system,
- TAKS changes,
- vouchers, and
- funds for facility needs.

Dr. Otto stated that he anticipates that more legal action will be necessary prior to the 2009 Legislative Session, since HB 1 is not a long-term solution, and he doubts that changes will occur during the upcoming session. He also mentioned the governor's request of the Teacher Retirement System (TRS) for \$600 million from its pension fund for venture capital investments. He stressed that the district cannot take a stance on this issue since the pension fund belongs to individual members, not school districts. However, individual members can express their opinion to the TRS Board regarding this proposal. Future legislative updates from Dr. Otto will be posted on this site.