



Brief: Public School Finance

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Key Points:

- 1. The state should support the educational work of parents and teachers.**
- 2. The Commission on School Finance's offered good recommendations.**
- 3. Legislators should fund excellence to help the most vulnerable students.**

A Catholic perspective: The Texas Catholic Conference of Bishops (TCCB) supports school finance reforms which preserve the common good and conform to the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity.

Catholic teaching emphasizes the benefits of spontaneous natural relationships which are established on the basis of ties that are geographic, economic, cultural, familial, athletic, professional, or political.^[1] These relationships encourage us to commit ourselves to a common good and therefore this is where we find friendship or solidarity. Such friendships allow us to serve others and are essential to human goodness and happiness.^[2] We preserve these associations in part by upholding the principle of subsidiarity, according to which:

It is gravely wrong to take from individuals what they can accomplish by their own initiative and industry and give it to the community... it is an injustice and at the same time a grave evil and disturbance of right order to assign to a greater and higher association what lesser and subordinate organizations can do.^[3]

Those of greater power should help, not supplant, those who are less powerful. This help may be positive, through assistance that is financial or institutional, or by self-restraint: a powerful entity should refrain from acts weak-

ening individuals' ability to commit themselves to a common good. Solidarity and subsidiarity must go hand-in-hand: solidarity without subsidiarity drifts toward a welfare state, while subsidiarity without solidarity drifts toward self-centered localism.^[4]

In addition, every person has a right to an integral education which responds to the needs of the whole person.^[5] Such formation prepares each student to work successfully for the common good of their family, community, and state as an adult. When this perspective is applied to public education, parents, teachers, administrators, and lawmakers should have the following roles:

- *Parents* have the primary right and serious duty to educate their children by teaching them to live virtuously.^[6]
- *Teachers* are a child's second educators and their daily work is to help their students achieve excellence, be it intellectual, physical, or moral.
- *Administrators* scan for best practices to implement and decide how to most effectively use resources to educate students.
- *Lawmakers* order the collection and disbursement of revenue, the establishment of statewide academic standards, and the measure and publication of student outcomes.

Such roles ought to be implemented with the aim of achieving the following goals:

1. foster student achievement statewide,
2. maintain funding which will endure fluctuations in revenue collection,
3. respect parents as the primary educators of their children,
4. provide an adequate and dignified salary for educators,^[7] and
5. allow local administrators to deploy resources to best serve students.^[8]

We support proposals in accord with the above principles and goals.

Texas law and policy: The Texas Constitution states: “A general diffusion of knowledge being essential to the preservation of the liberties and rights of the people, it shall be the duty of the Legislature of the State to establish and make suitable provision for the support and maintenance of an efficient system of public free schools.”^[9] Texas’s Constitution thereby draws upon the ideas of the American Founders, who believed that education was a necessary condition for self-governance and public happiness.^[10]

Today, public school spending accounts for just under 40 percent of total state spending, making it the largest state budget line item.^[11] This financial support breathes life into Texas’ constitutional requirement to support education; a total of \$68.3 billion was expended in the 2016-17 school year on K-12 education in Texas, or just under \$12,800 per student.^[12] While this system serves many students well, it

is also true that:

1. 60 percent of public school third graders read on grade level,
2. 32 percent of low-income public school third graders read on grade level,
3. 21 percent of public school eighth graders earn a higher education credential, and
4. 12 percent of low-income public school eighth graders earn a higher education credential.^[13]

In 2017, the Texas Legislature recognized the need to improve this situation and established a Commission to study public school funding and recommend improvements. Its recommendations honor the proper roles for parents, teachers, administrators, and lawmakers; moreover, the recommendations would accomplish the five goals listed above. For these reasons, the TCCB supports their implementation.^[14]



A call to action: To support school finance reform, please visit txcatholic.org/education to find and contact your lawmaker. Please also pray for Texas and for our legislators, that they may uphold laws which provide educational opportunities to all Texas families and children.

The TCCB is a federation of all Roman Catholic dioceses and ordinariates in Texas. There are 8 million Catholics living in our state. To contact us, call our office at 512-339-9882 or find TXCatholic on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

Endnotes

1. Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church (CSDC). § [185-188](#).
2. CSDC § [193-196](#), [103](#); Aquinas, *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics*. Trans. C. I. Litzinger, O.P., 1964. [VIII.2:1559](#), [VIII.9:1662-1666](#), [VIII.11:1698](#), [IX.11:1909](#).
3. Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno [On Reconstruction of the Social Order]*, May 15, 1931. § 79.
4. CSDC § [351](#).
5. Congregation for Catholic Education, *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witness to Faith*. October 15, 1982. § 3, cf. 56.
6. Catechism [#2221-2231](#).
7. Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witness to Faith*, October 15, 1982. § 78.
8. John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus [On the Hundredth Anniversary of Rerum Novarum]*, May 1, 1991. 48.
9. Texas Const. [Art. VII § 1](#).
10. Pangle, Lorraine Smith and Thomas Pangle, *The Learning of Liberty: The Educational Ideas of the American Founders*, 1993. 113.
11. Legislative Budget Board, *Fiscal Size Up: 2018-19 Biennium*, (September 2018). 2, 197.
12. TEA, *2016-2017 Actual Financial Data: Totals for State Total (All Districts)*.
13. Texas Commission on Public School Finance (TCSF), *Funding for Impact: Equitable Funding for Students Who Need It the Most*, December 31, 2018. 64-65, 11.
14. Specifically, we support TCSF recommendations 1-23 and 25-32, but has no position on tax policy. See [Funding for Impact](#).