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Superintendent details hopes for Legislative session, outlines coming financial issues facing DPISD

DEER PARK – [Editor’s note: The following article is the first in a three-part series written by Deer Park ISD Superintendent of Schools Arnold Adair. In the series, Adair covers a variety of issues relating to this year’s session of the Texas Legislature and other issues that will impact the district this year.]

The 81st Texas Legislature convenes this month in Austin, and our elected officials have their work cut out for them this year. While Texas needs more funding for schools, prisons, childrens’ health insurance, roadways and medical care for the mentally ill, legislators face an economy and a budget that might not generate the money needed to maintain the current level of services. This means that, more and more over the next few years, local taxpayers could end up paying for services when the state is unwilling or unable to fund them. Public education is no exception.

I believe we have one of the best educational systems in the state. We pay our teachers very well, which allows us to attract the brightest and most dedicated educators in the area. And that effort has paid off in recent years. Eight of the 11 eligible Deer Park schools are rated as *Recognized* or *Exemplary* by the Texas Education Agency. All of our schools met the federal accountability standards, or AYP [Adequate Yearly Progress]. Our students enjoy successful athletics,

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fine arts, and other programs. Deer Park ISD also received the highest rating, *Superior Achievement*, under the state's financial accountability system, essentially stating that the district is among the most responsible in the state regarding how its revenues are spent.

However, if we are to maintain our instructional and enrichment programs, we are going to need some help this year. We hope that this assistance will come from the legislature. Failing that, the District may turn to the voters for direct assistance. But, we'll get to that in a later column.

During the legislative session, which will run from mid-January to the end of May, the legislature will review over 7,000 bills, passing about 1,500 of them into law. Some will pass quickly with little debate; others will dominate the session from start to finish. Somewhere, amid all this discussion and debate, we hope the legislature will address several key issues for public education:

- increased funding for districts;
- eliminating expenditure targets;
- ending Robin Hood;
- providing equal facilities funding;
- providing more local control over tax rate elections; and
- providing adequate state funding of teacher pensions.

I will share more details about each of these concerns in part two of this series, which will appear in an upcoming issue of the Deer Park Broadcaster/Progress. The series is also available on the school district website at www.dpsid.org.