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Superintendent discusses few options available to school districts should legislature fail to provide financial relief

DEER PARK – [Editor's note: The following article is the third in a three-part series written by Deer Park ISD Superintendent of Schools Arnold Adair. Part one of the series provided an overview of this year's session of the Texas Legislature. In part two of the series, Adair discussed several issues that the district hopes the Legislature will consider during the session. In part three of the series, Adair discusses how a lack of support on these issues could impact the district and how DPISD patrons can contact their legislators. If you would like to reread parts one or two, please visit www.dpsid.org.]

In my previous column, I discussed some of the public school district needs and concerns that we feel are worthy of consideration by the 81st Texas legislature. These needs include:

- 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.

In part three of this series, I'd like to explain what could happen if the Legislature does *not* address these issues or make some notable progress towards solving them.

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The good news is that Deer Park is ahead of the curve thanks to sound financial decisions made by the Board of Trustees and administration. We are no strangers to financial difficulties, having been through many lean years thanks to Robin Hood. We have already made many cost-cutting decisions over the last 15 years. We changed the high school class schedules to use staff time more efficiently. We enlisted contractors to help with maintenance work that was previously performed by district employees. In addition to the cuts we have made, we added the Limited Open Enrollment program, which allows children from outside the district to enroll here. This results in about \$2.4 million in additional funds for the district each year.

The bad news is that, regardless of these efforts to maintain our current level of instruction and services, if the Legislature does not provide financial relief, we will have to consider other alternatives. However, with 85 percent of our costs paying for salaries and benefits for our existing staff, there are not many areas of the budget that can be cut without affecting staff. At some point, we need our elected officials to engage these problems and help us solve them.

If they do not, we may reluctantly ask taxpayers to vote on the 13-cent tax rate increase I discussed in part two of this series. As I said before, it is the only option available to districts that need additional revenue. We may also have to consider cutting programs and reducing staff or a combination of these actions.

As always, our primary goal is to provide the best instructional program possible for our students. We will continue to keep our local constituents informed during the legislative session on our progress regarding these and many other issues we are following closely. By the summer, we should have a good idea as to what kind of help or hindrance the legislature will be for the next two years, and how much we are going to have to help ourselves locally if we want to maintain the same levels of quality education and support in our District.

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If you are concerned about these issues and the quality of public education in Texas, I encourage you to contact your Legislators and share your views. If you're not sure how to contact them or who they are, you can visit www.fyi.legis.state.tx.us on the Internet. This website has an address-based search option that makes it easy to find the name of your senator and representative.

Thank you for taking the time to read this series of columns. Deer Park is known across the state for its quality instructional program, but part of the reason behind our success is that we have so many parents and community members who support the district. Thank you for supporting Team Deer Park, and, if you have any questions about the issues covered in these columns, you can contact me at 832-668-7080.

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