

New Academic Standards Calls for More Money

AUSTIN (AP) — Texas will need to spend at least an additional \$8 billion per year to ensure its students meet the tough new academic standards imposed by state lawmakers, a top school finance expert testified Monday.

Lynn Moak, a leading educa-

tion analyst in Texas for nearly 5 decades, told state District Judge John Dietz that nearly half of Texas' ninth-graders — about 150,000 — aren't on track to graduate because they failed at least one of the state's new, more rigorous standardized tests, known as STAAR, last school

year.

Moak said paying for programs to help students catch up and ensure others pass — thus meeting the state's existing college and career-readiness goals — would require restoring the two-year, \$5.4 billion in cuts to public schools

and grant programs passed by the Texas Legislature in 2011. But it would also mean state funding for public education should increase overall by about another \$6 billion annually.

That's a staggering \$8.7 billion per year in additional funding, though it wasn't clear if Moak was including restoring all cuts to grant programs in his estimates. In 2010-11, Moak said that total spending on school operations in Texas was \$43 billion.

When asked about the figure after the hearing, Moak told reporters, "I contend we can't do it without more money."

"We are in a current crisis," he added. "The crisis gets worse in the future but it is significantly bad now."

After last year's budget cuts, six lawsuits were filed on behalf of more than 600 school districts, which educate about three-quarters of Texas' more than 5 million students. All contended that the way Texas funds its public schools is inefficient and unfair and violates the state Constitution's promise to provide "a general diffusion of knowledge."

Moak will remain on the stand Tuesday and face cross-examination. The state argues that while there are some flaws in the school finance system, it doesn't mean the whole thing is broken.

Legal battles over school finance are nothing new in Texas: Moak's testimony Monday marked his sixth such appearance in a major school funding case.

Dietz will rule on the case, but it will almost certainly be appealed to the state Supreme Court. If the plaintiffs prevail, it will be up to the Legislature to overhaul Texas' school finance system — but that may not happen during next year's session and could require a special session in 2014.

Moak also testified that the 2011 cuts forced districts to cut

about 11,500 teaching positions statewide and eliminate 15,000 other staff members.

He said Legislature-imposed structural changes to the school-funding formulas have meant sharp decreases in the amount the state spends per student over time.

But he also noted that, in 2009, Texas used federal stimulus money to bolster funding to schools and soften the blow of state public education cuts. That year, per student funding including state, federal and local funds was \$7,415. Last year's cuts came when the stimulus money had run out — and saw per-student funding fall about \$1,120 to \$6,293 for 2013.

Still, Moak said, giving schools more money is only part of the solution.

When asked which has greater impact, reduced state funding or stricter academic standards, Moak

replied, "the changes on the academic side are the most significant changes in a substantially large amount of time."

He said that of current ninth-graders, only 53 percent are on track to graduate. That means 47 percent have failed one or more of the new standardized tests. Among low-income students, nearly 60 percent now aren't on track to graduate, Moak said.

Texas' booming population has translated to a growth in enrollment by an average of 80,000 students per year — the majority of which are from low-income families.

"As standards increase over time," Moak told the court, "you're going to see — without major increases in performance — many more students not on track for graduation."

Values: from page 1A

place, it just shows our community is experiencing some good growth."

The City's September 2012 building report figures showed an 11.4-percent increase in added property value to the City from September 2011, which reported just over \$6 million in increase property value, with SISD's two current campus projects making up the lion's share of the added value.

"The growth is certainly benefiting our community," said Shelby Concotelli, President/CEO of the Seminole Area Chamber of Commerce, who said the added ventures would result in future jobs and residents coming into the community of 6,430. "I see nothing but good things coming from our growth, and honestly don't see us slowing down with growth anytime soon, with or without the activity in the oilfield."

Of the \$52.28 million in added property value seen by the Seminole community in the City's 2012 fiscal year (Oct. 1 through Sept. 31), roughly \$10 million were associated with construction of the community's two new hotel developments — Best Western Plus and Wingate by Wyndham.

Groundwork began in June on the Best Western project, which is located in the 300 block of S. Main St.

The estimated \$3 million project is expected to bring 50 rooms to the Seminole community and include amenities such as include a business center, indoor swimming pool and meeting room within the property, overseen by Borger-based hotel developer Sabhir Patel and Patel and Uray, LLC.

Completion of the project is anticipated for early 2013.

Just a few weeks ago, groundwork began on the estimates \$6 million Wingate by Wyndham project, which is located in the 1100 block of the Hobbs Hwy.

The 88-room facility is receiving financial assistance from the Seminole Economic Development Corp., who in January of this year, agreed to agree to the terms of a \$750,000 incentives agreement, for a term not to exceed seven calendar years. The property, along with its rooms, will also feature meeting space facilities measuring over 3,000 sq ft, as well as an executive board room, fitness room, and swimming pool.

Seminole ISD Bond Projects Continue

Exterior construction of Seminole ISD's \$17.32 million Primary School campus has been nearly completed as construction crews work on the interior work of the new facility, which will be the future home of SISD's second and third grade students.

The new Primary school campus, located in the 400 block of S.W. Ave. D, features 12 third grade and 12 second grade classrooms, ranging in size from 881 to 892 sq ft in size, two full size gymnasiums (6,089 sq ft and 7,434 sq ft in size), a 2,538 sq ft library, a 3,185 sq ft dining room, as well as various administrative office suites, technology and reading education labs, as well as an 1,188 sq foot music room and 1,194 sq foot art room

which would be shared along with fourth and fifth grade students from the Seminole Elementary school campus.

The campus design also features two designated parent drop-off/pick-up zones, situated off of S.W. Ave. D and S.W. 4th streets respectively, as well as security features such as time-locked doors.

Along with the construction of the Primary school campus, crews associated with the project are also conducting a remodel of the current Seminole Elementary school campus cafeteria, which will be merged with the Primary school campus upon its completion.

At the Seminole High School campus, crews are working on a \$28.02 million addition/renovation of the SHS campus, which includes enlarged band and choir hall facilities, a new 900 seat auditorium, six new classrooms for the campus and new facilities for the campus' speech and theatre departments.

The SHS campus is also expected to see an addition of new administrative offices to the north entrance of the SHS campus, renovations so the campus' current kitchen area, and a renovation to the existing SHS administration offices.

Early Voting: from page 1A

ballots on the opening day of polling, back on Oct. 22. On Monday, 179 voters had cast their ballots for the Nov. 6 general election.

The race for the U.S. Presidency between President Barack Obama and Republican challenger Mitt Romney has been the focal point of the Nov. 6 election, not only locally, but across the U.S.

Aside from the U.S. Presidential election, just one local race of interest — the race for the 19th Congressional District of Texas — will be featured on the upcoming Nov. 6 general election ballot, according to a sample ballot obtained by the *Seminole Sentinel* through the Gaines County Clerk's Office.

In the 19th Congressional District race, Lubbock Republican incumbent Randy Neugebauer will face off with Libertarian challenger Richard (Chip) Peterson, also of Lubbock.

The 19th Congressional District of Texas, which includes Gaines County, spans a 27 county area of West Texas, including the cities of Abilene, Big Spring, and Lubbock. Altogether, the district covers over 29,000 square miles from the New Mexico border through the South Plains and across West Texas and the Big Country.

Neugebauer, who was first elected to office through a special election in 2003, is seeking his fifth term of office.

Peterson is a Professor Emeritus at Texas Tech University in Lubbock, and previously was a professor of finance and holder of the I. Wylie and Elizabeth Briscoe Chair of Bank Management for TTU and former CEO of Lubbock Asset Management Co.

Gaines County residents will also have a say in who will become Texas' newest United States Senator.

In the race, Republican Tea Party activist Ted Cruz and Democrat Paul Sadler lead a field of four candidates who include Libertarian Party candidate John Jay Myers and Green Party candidate David B. Collins.

The remainder of Gaines County's locally contested races were determined during this past spring and summer's party primary elections process.

Those local candidates who will be unopposed in the November general elections process and will assume office on Jan. 1, 2013 include Gaines County Sheriff-elect Ronny Pipkin; Gaines County Tax Assessor-Collector Susan Shaw; Pct. 1 Commissioner Danny Yocom; Pct. 3 Commissioner Blair Tharp; Pct. 4 Commissioner Biz Houston (unexpired term); Mike Munk, 106th District Attorney-elect; Joe Nagy, Gaines County Attorney, and; Gaines Co. Constable, Pct. 1-elect Neal Shaw.

2012 General Election Ballot Candidates

U.S. President/Vice President
Mitt Romney/Paul Ryan (R)
Barack Obama/Joe Biden (D)
Gary Johnson/Jim Gray (L)
Jill Stein/Cheri Honkala (G)

U.S. Senator
Ted Cruz (R)
Paul Sadler (D)
John Jay Myers (L)
David B. Collins (G)

U.S. Representative, Dist. 19
Randy Neugebauer (R)
Richard (Chip) Peterson (L)

Railroad Commissioner
Christ Craddock (F)
Dale Henry (D)
Vivekananda (Vik) Wall (L)
Chris Kennedy (G)

Railroad Commissioner (Unexpired Term)
Berry Smitherman (R)
Jamie O. Perez (L)
Josh Wendel (G)

Justice, Supreme Court, Pl. 2
Don Willett (R)
RS Roberto Koelsch (L)

Justice, Supreme Court, Pl. 4
John Devine (R)
Tom Oxford (L)
Charles E. Waterbury (G)

Justice, Supreme Court, Pl. 8
Nathan Hecht (R)
Michele Petty (D)
Mark Ash (L)
Jim Chisholm (G)

Presiding Judge, Court of Criminal Appeals
Sharon Keller (R)
Keith Hampton (D)
Lance Stott (L)

Judge, Court of Appeals, Pl. 7
Barbara Parker Hervey (F)
Mark W. Bennett (L)

Judge, Court of Appeals, Pl. 8
Elsa Alcalá (F)
William Brian Strange, III (L)

Member, State Board of Ed., District 15
Marty Rowley (R)
Steven D. Schafersman (D)

State Senator, Dist. 31
Kel Seliger (R)

State Rep., Dist. 83
Charles Perry (R)

Chief Justice, 11th Court of Appeals
Jim R. Wright (R)

Justice, 11th Court of Appeals (Unexpired Term)
Mike Wilson (R)

District Attorney, 106th Judicial District
Mike Munk (F)

Gaines County Attorney
Joe Nagy (F)

Gaines County Sheriff
Ronny Pipkin (F)

Gaines Co. Tax Assessor/Collector
Susan Shaw (F)

County Commissioner, Pct. 1
Danny Yocom (F)

County Commissioner, Pct. 3
Blair Tharp (F)

County Commissioner, Pct. 4 (Unexpired Term)
Biz Houston (F)

Gaines County Constable, Pct. 1
Neal Shaw (F)

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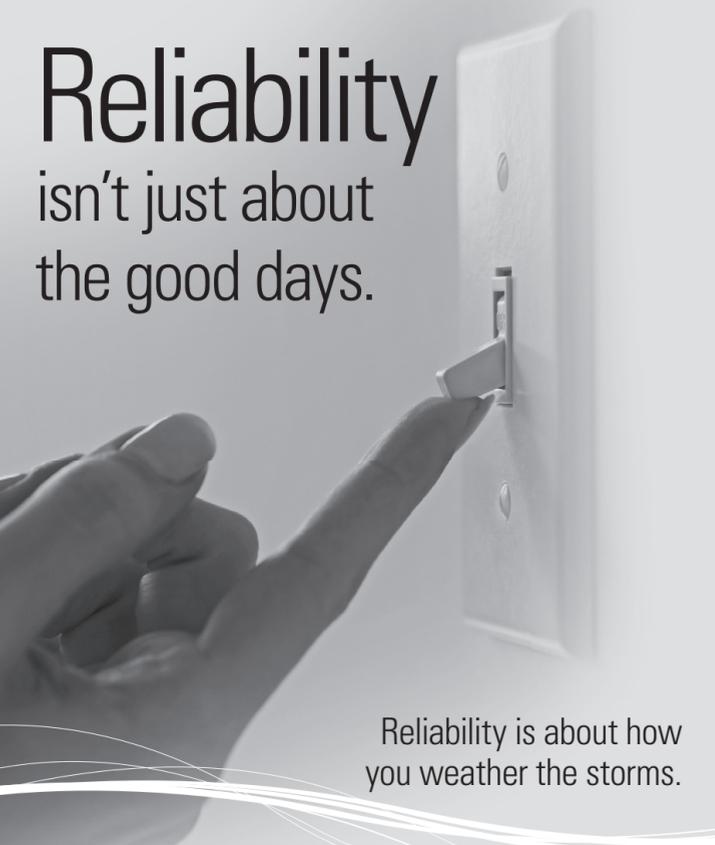
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