

Finance: SISD Head 'Pleased' With Ruling

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it violated state guarantees against an income tax.
This time around, more than 600 school districts across Texas responsible for educating three-

quarters of the state's 5 million-plus public school students sued.
Included in the suit were the Loop and Seminole Independent School districts, whose respective school boards both voted to join

the lawsuit during the late 2011 and early 2012 pre-trial process.
Doug Harriman, Superintendent of Schools for the Seminole Independent School District, said Tuesday morning he agreed with

Dietz's ruling.
"I am pleased with the ruling and (Dietz's) understanding that (Texas) public school funding mechanism is flawed," said Harriman. "We're not funding education in the State

of Texas like we should be. We won this case for now, but it's far from over."

At issue were \$5.4 billion in cuts to schools and education grant programs the Legislature imposed in 2011 — but the districts said simply restoring that funding won't be enough to fix a fundamentally flawed system.

"It's not just dollars; it's how we use them," David Thompson, an attorney representing school districts that educate about 2 million students, said in reaction to Dietz's ruling. "I think there's a lot of room there to begin a discussion with the Legislature."

The districts noted that the cuts came as the state requires schools to prepare students for standardized tests that are getting more difficult and amid a statewide boom in the number of low-income students and those who need extra instruction to learn English, both of whom are more costly to educate.

"There is no free lunch," Dietz said while issuing his ruling. "We either want increased standards and are willing to pay the price, or we don't."

The trial, which began Oct. 22, took more than 240 hours in court and 10,000 exhibits to get this far.

Sen. Rodney Ellis, D-Houston, said Dietz's decision confirms what his party has been saying all along.

"Hopefully this latest in a long line of decisions will force the legislature to truly and systemically address the inequities in our school finance system to ensure that every child in every school — regardless of wealth — has access to a top-notch education," Ellis said in a statement.

The state attorney general's office declined to comment. But Texas Education Commissioner Michael Williams said he'd wait for appeal.

"The Texas Education Agency will continue to carry out its mission of serving the students and educators across our state," he said in a statement.

A spokeswoman for Perry declined to comment. But Lt. Gov. Dewhurst said he was disappointed in Dietz's decision and that he would work with other top state leaders to "ensure that Texas continues to have an accountable,

efficient system of public education that produces graduates ready to compete in college and in our global economy."

Texas relies on local property taxes to fund its schools. But attorneys for the school districts said the bottom 15 percent of the state's poorest districts tax an average of 8 cents more than the wealthiest 15 percent of districts, but receive about \$43,000 less per classroom.

Rick Gray, a lawyer representing districts mostly in poorer areas of the state, said during closing arguments that the funding system was "woefully inadequate and hopelessly broken." He said Texas must begin producing better educated college graduates, or it would see its tax base shrink and needs for social services swell due to a workforce not properly prepared for the jobs of the future.

"Texas should be ashamed," Gray said of the funding system.

The state countered that the system is adequately funded and that school districts don't always spend their money wisely. "We are not here to debate whether the state is providing the best system money can buy," argued Assistant Attorney General Shelley Dahlberg. "We are here asking if the state system is a constitutional one and we believe that it is."

Districts in rich and poor parts of the state are on the same side of the case since the funding mechanism relies on a "Robin Hood" scheme where districts with high property values or abundant tax revenue turn over part of the money they raise to poorer districts.

But many "property wealthy" districts say that while they are in better shape than their poorer counterparts, the system still starves them of funding since local voters who would otherwise support property tax increases to bolster funding for their schools refuse to do so, knowing that most of the money would be sent somewhere else.

Also suing were charter schools, which wanted state funding for their facilities and for Texas to ease or a remove a cap allowing only 215 licenses to operate charter schools statewide. Dietz said those complaints did not violate the state constitution.

Seminole EDC Board Hosts Brainstorming Session

Rail, Manufacturing Related Businesses Top Discussion of Recruitment Goals for Local Economic Development Group

By Dustin Wright
Sentinel Managing Editor

Without some clear cut goals in place to achieve over the past several months, members of the Seminole Economic Development Corp. spent a portion of their Monday afternoon special meeting developing an outline of short and long term goals for the corporation in their approach toward spurring economic development within the local community.

"This is a great time for us to focus on what direction (the SEDC) wants to go and what we would like to accomplish pertaining toward economic development in our community," said Tommy Phillips, Seminole City Administrator and interim SEDC Executive Director in Monday's special meeting.

The SEDC, since the resignation of former executive director Donna Johnson in May of last year, has been in a holding pattern of sorts with the recruitment

"We've been working on some things with potential business prospects and developments, while going through the process of finding the right candidate to fill our vacancy," said Phillips. "But, we haven't had much success in finding someone to fill the vacancy and we've reached a point we as a corporation have to continue to move forward with what we want to achieve (with economic development) while continuing to look at other options to fill (our executive director's) vacancy at the same time."

Ideas tossed around in Monday's brain-storming session included some board member's desires to pursue the following industries/businesses to the Seminole/Gaines County community: rail service, industrial/business park development, supermarket recruitment, and the recruitment of businesses which complement existing industries within Gaines County, such as agriculture manufacturers, petroleum refineries/service companies and international trade.

SEDC Board member Gary Parker, in Monday's meeting, stated the pursuit of extending rail service further into Gaines County from its



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Seagraves terminus could be a prime target for the corporation to pursue.

"Now would be a great time for us to pursue extending rail service within the county because all indicators I have seen is this area of West Texas is about to explode with activity," said Parker, a Senior Vice President with First United Bank's Seagraves Branch.

"We (the SEDC) may not have a lot of clout with the folks in Austin or with the rail companies, but if we were to partner up and approach with some heavyweights in the oil industry, such as Halliburton or any of the other major oil players in this area, then we may can get the ball rolling with rail expansion discussion."

Fellow board member Kevin Petty added he'd like to see the SEDC further pursue the recruitment of businesses associated with ties internationally — primarily with Mexico and Canada — through Gaines County's diverse German population.

"We have the existing resources here in place with our German population ties to both Mexico and Canada," said Petty. "(US Hwy.) 385 is a major road for international travel between Canada and Mexico, and we're right here in a place where we have some key ties to both (Mexico and Canada)."

SEDC board members also discussed an option of visiting with local residents from all walks — from small business owners, to community leaders, to local residents — in an attempt to gather feedback on the needs of the community to help spur economic development.

"There are some movers and shakers within our community," said Petty. "They may not want or be able to serve on this board, but they are willing to voice their opinion on the needs of our community. I think we need to get out there and ask the question of where do we want to go (as a community) and what do you think our town needs."

In other action on Monday, SEDC members approved of a full-page advertisement, valued at \$5,500, in the "Texas Wide Open for Business" magazine, an economic development magazine overseen by the Texas Governor's office of economic development.

Local News Briefs

County Approves Grant Pursuit for Storyteller

Gaines County Commissioners gave their blessing last Monday morning to allow for Gaines County Library system officials to pursue a grant through the Texas Commission on the Arts to assist in funding the library's annual storyteller program.

Jane Bering, Gaines County Librarian, said if approved, the TCA grant would cover one-half of the \$1,500 quoted cost for the storyteller program for the 2013 calendar year.

"If we're approved, the school districts in the county (Seminole ISD, Seagraves ISD and Loop ISD) have all agreed to help assist (Gaines County) in paying for the rest of the storyteller fee," said Bering.

That split cost, according to Bering, would be \$187.50 for Gaines County and the three public school districts.

The show is tentatively slated for April 9 and 10th, and is expected to draw over 1,700 in its two day run. Bering did not release the name of the storytellers being sought for this year's program in Monday's meeting, but stated they were a "husband and wife team."

SJHS Honor Band Performs at All-Region Event

LUBBOCK — Members of the Seminole Jr. High Honor Band performed in the Region 16 ATSSB Middle School All Region Band concert held at the Lubbock Civic Center on this past Saturday (Jan. 26).

Earning honors in the All Region Band were Adriana Romero, flute; Rebecca Rempel, clarinet; Jacob Nagy, tenor sax; Nathaniel Sumpter and Kaegan Shoemake, trumpet; Madeline Hiebert, horn; Adrian Harms and Jesus Ayala, trombone; Amanda Rodriguez, baritone; Max Weibe, tuba and Jaydon Weibe, percussion.

The Middle School All Region Band was directed by Russ Teweleit of West Texas A & M University. Seminole High School Band

members, Valerie Krahn, clarinet and Travis Peters, trombone, earned honors in the ATSSB Region 16 Honor Band.

These students also performed in a concert held at the Lubbock Civic Center. The Honor band was under the direction of Dr. Gary Garner, retired, West Texas A & M University. Travis Peters also qualified for the area auditions held in Lubbock on Jan. 12.

Photo Furnished

Members of the Seminole Junior High School's Honor Band recently performed at the ATSSB Region 16 event held at the Lubbock County Civic Center in Lubbock. Those receiving honors include (in no particular order): Adriana Romero Rebecca Rempel, Jacob Nagy, Nathaniel Sumpter, Kaegan Shoemake, Madeline Heibert, Adrian Harms, Jesus Ayala, Amanda Rodriguez, Max Weibe and Jaydon Weibe.



2013 Midessa Boat, RV, Sport & Gun Show

Thursday, Feb. 7th All Tickets \$3.00 5 p.m. - 9 p.m.	Ladies Night Friday 8th 5 p.m. - 9 p.m. "Ladies Free"
Adults: \$6 • Seniors: \$5 • Children: \$3 (3 yrs - 11 yrs)	
Thursday, February 7th - 5 p.m. - 9 p.m. GUN SHOW OPENS FRIDAY Friday, February 8th - 10 a.m. - 9 p.m. Saturday, February 9th - 10 a.m. - 9 p.m. Sunday, February 10th - 11 a.m. - 5 p.m. Ector County Coliseum 42nd & Andrews Hwy • Odessa, Tx www.midessaaboatshow.net jramseynrg@aol.com	
Sponsored by Leisure Promotions & Odessa Chamber of Commerce	

Little Valentine Sweets

Show Off Your Little Valentine Sweetheart for only **\$25.00** (per person in picture)

Deadline: Monday, February 11, 5:00 p.m.

The Seminole Sentinel

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