

February 25, 2011

An Open Letter to Smith County Residents and Parents of Smith County School Children:

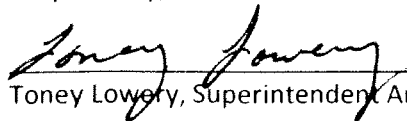
As I am sure you are aware, school districts all across the State of Texas are reeling from the initial budget projections recently released in Austin. While we had all been warned that the current shortfall in state revenue was going to impact schools in a significant way, none of us were prepared to consider the types of drastic measures that would be necessary to absorb this reduction in revenue. For Smith County school districts, this challenge is made even more difficult by the current system being utilized to fund public schools. As a result of the previous legislative action, we are operating on what amounts to a fixed income per student set at funding levels established in 2006. This means that we are expected to operate on far less money than many districts across the state. Some districts who tax at the same rates as those in Smith County receive thousands of dollars more per child. Yet, our performance is measured against those same districts. Those of us who have had to operate more frugally will likely be more harshly impacted by across the board cuts.

Over the last decade, the State of Texas has been ratcheting up the standards for all students, and we applaud this effort. For the most part, our districts have responded favorably to this increase in rigor. Our scores and our ratings have continued to improve. Although we have been forced to accept many unfunded mandates from the state and the federal government, we have seen some increase in resources during that same period. A large percentage of the money was provided in the form of grants, most notably the recent stimulus funds. These additional dollars have helped us continue on a path of improvement. Now, we also face the loss of those additional resources at a time when we are scheduled to implement a new, more rigorous accountability system. All of this is creating somewhat of a perfect storm.

As superintendents of the Smith County ISD's, we want to encourage our communities to help us keep a strong focus on our public schools. While we know that we are not going to avoid our share of reductions, we do believe that the legislators should consider all avenues available to minimize the impact on public education. This should include relaxing some of the existing mandates which would allow us more flexibility with our current budget dollars, and accessing the Rainy Day Fund to reduce the total amount of the state's deficit. Some of our area representatives in Austin have indicated that they want to support our schools, and we are greatly appreciative of their efforts. We ask that you let your voices be heard. We are all making tough choices right now, and we are committed to maximizing the efficiency of our organizations. However, we are steadfast in our attempts to protect the integrity of the educational opportunities that our children need and deserve.

We hope you will join us in letting our legislators know that we want them to make public school education a priority!

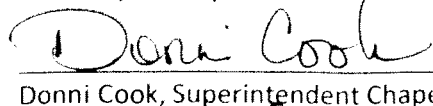
Respectfully,


Toney Lowery, Superintendent Arp ISD


Marvin Beaty, Superintendent Troup ISD

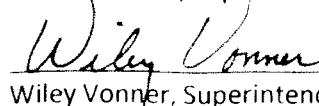

Keith Bryant, Superintendent Bullard ISD


Randy Reid, Superintendent Tyler ISD


Donni Cook, Superintendent Chapel Hill ISD


Daniel DuPree, Superintendent Whitehouse ISD


Stan Surratt, Superintendent Lindale ISD


Wiley Vonner, Superintendent Winona ISD