

Annette Maule: PTAs should join forces to fight school cuts

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"There is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about." — Margaret J. Wheatley

What will it take for America to continue to lead the way in innovation? What will it take for the American workforce to lead the world in the careers and industries of tomorrow? It takes a commitment and investment in the education of our children. Today, not just parents and educators, but every citizen, needs to recognize the critical urgency of making this investment now.

As of today, we really don't know how much in budget cuts each Texas school district is facing, but we know the cuts will be staggering. Here in Plano ISD, the cuts could be anywhere between \$57 million and \$65 million.

How much money is that and how does that affect a district? Well, in Plano, all general administration, bus drivers, maintenance workers, custodial services, librarians, nurses, counselors, fine arts and special academic programs, and athletics could be cut, and that would total \$60.5 million.

Don't like that scenario? Try this one: We could close one senior high school, two high schools, three middle schools and nine elementary schools. That would total \$59.9 million. Another option? Cutting 1,146 teacher jobs equals \$60 million.

We at Plano ISD Council of PTAs don't like the way any of this sounds, so we are partnering with our district to advocate for our children. We are encouraging PTAs across North Texas to do the same. We can't let this happen.

Plano ISD Council of PTAs is urging the taxpayers of North Texas to mobilize with us to be strong voice for children and our own future during this legislative session. We have adopted a legislative agenda that covers a range of topics, starting with allowing school administrators a place at the table when making decisions on budget cuts. Who knows better than educators where to streamline?

Texas must lead the way in moving from standardized, fill-in-the-bubble, high-stakes tests to a method that encompasses the whole child and measures progress over the life of the child. The new test system going into place next year, STAAR, and end-of-course exams are more of the same. We must move to a more fluid system that will create actionable goals and won't cost the state and school districts hundreds of millions of dollars.

We believe that districts can create a more individualized learning environment if they are given more freedom to fulfill the four-by-four core curriculum with more innovation. Educators, not legislators should make curriculum decisions. More students will succeed and graduate if they are not forced to fit into a standard box.

We also want our children safe from synthetic cannabinoids and cyber-bullying. These are a few examples of our legislative goals for this biennium; for our complete list, refer to our website at planopta.org.

We urge you to stand with us in our efforts. Visit capitol.state.tx.us to find the contact information for your representative, members of the education committees and the financial committees. Fill their inboxes, faxes and phone lines with your opinions.

We are lucky enough to live in a democracy. That doesn't just mean you go to the polls on Election Day and vote. A democracy is a government by the people. We elect representatives, and then we, the people, have to actively let them know where we stand on the issues. It is our duty to the well-being of our democracy to let them know how we want them to vote. Show our children that enough positive voices standing together can change the world.

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