

## 600 TEXAS SCHOOL DISTRICTS SEEK LEGAL RECOURSE OVER POOR FUNDING AND INAPPROPRIATE EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES



Six lawsuits have been filed before state District Judge John Dietz in Austin contending that the educational system in the school district is flawed and does not adequately prepare students to be qualified and ready for high paying avant-garde jobs. Lawyers representing the around 600 school districts said that the imperfect financing system of Texas schools was so bad that it was beyond repair and that it infringed on state Constitution and failed in its primary objective of providing a vocation-oriented education to the students. The lawsuits filed on behalf of two-thirds of the school districts that are responsible for the education of around 3.75 million of the state's students. Since they represent a similar cause, the cases have been rolled into a single case that is expected to spill into the next year. The plaintiffs argue that even though the Texas Constitution undertakes to provide an "efficient system of public free schools," an incompetent and unjust funding system prevents it from doing so. They allege that Texas relies on a scheme that is based on, "take from those who have and give it those who do not. " Districts where property is valued at higher prices and where the revenue from oil or natural gas taxes are plentiful, give a proportion of their revenue to poorer districts. Rick Gray, who represents more than 400 districts, most of them not so affluent said that the method of school finance is beyond repair and unlawful. The consequences are so dire that it cannot be ignored any more, he warned. What further aggravated the problem was that even though the population of Texas has burgeoned and the number of low-income students, who cost more to be educated, has escalated, the Legislature cut \$4 billion in state funding to schools and an additional \$1.4 billion for grant programs. The districts are using funding cuts to lay off teachers, increase the number of students in each class and cut back on education programs, all measures that put the students at great disadvantage where learning is concerned. Ironically, plaintiff's claim that, Texas has made it obligatory for students to sit for standardized tests that have become more difficult than before, clearing which has become mandatory to graduate. "The bar has been raised and yet one hand has been tied behind school administrators' backs," Gray said. He said that the current educational system will prepare students who are incapable of obtaining high paying jobs and will have to settle for low-paying jobs costing the state-exchequer \$11 billion in lost tax revenue by 2050. Experts opine that for the quality of the education to improve students should be provided with iPads and sports and extra-curricular activities should be a compulsory part of the curriculum. At the moment these are not required by the state. Moreover, to provide incentive to the teachers they should be paid on a seniority basis and not on student performance. The defendants argue that the plaintiffs are overstating the case and though there could be a crisis in the future, it is not a crisis that needs urgent tending. Standardized tests are being phased in slowly and will not be implemented fully until 2015, hence the fear-mongering is not really justified, they contend. Mark Trachtenberg, arguing on behalf of the more affluent districts said that the Hispanic population in his districts is increasing and it costs more to educate them since they cannot speak English. He said that approximately one in five students needs extra instruction in English. "This is not a future crisis," he said, "it is a present crisis."