

CITY OF HOUSTON

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The Honorable Dan Huberty, Chair, the Honorable Diego Bernal, Vice Chair, and the Honorable Members of the House Committee on Public Education:

I write today in support of House Bill 21. The City of Houston's well-being is predicated on the development of a highly educated workforce. We know that the biggest predictor of a city's success is the education level of its population. Dramatic demographic changes in our community demonstrate achievement and educational opportunity gaps leaving many in our community underprepared to succeed in the local economy. Investing in our public schools is critical to the future of our city and state. Unfortunately, the present school finance system is grossly inadequate and incapable of meeting our children's educational needs and desperately demands reform. Our public schools for too long have been underfunded and left without the resources they need to provide our students with the education they deserve. While House Bill 21 does not solve all the complex school finance issues that presently exist, it is a step in the right direction, and I am proud to lend my voice to support its passage.

I have had the great privilege of meeting many outstanding students, teachers, principals, and educational leaders over the years who struggle to educate in an antiquated system. The state's school finance laws do not properly reflect the cost of providing a quality education in an urban environment. Many important formulas are based on data from decades long past. Further, in 2011, the state cut \$5.4 billion to public education which resulted in devastating layoffs, programmatic cuts, and a further destabilization of a compromised system.

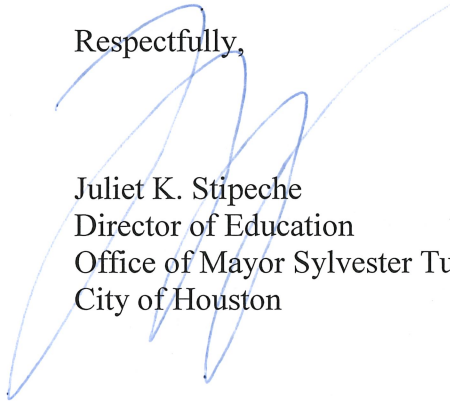
The consequences are painful and revealing. Texas now ranks 43rd in the nation in public school spending per student, a number that is simply unsustainable if we wish to build a dynamic and civically engaged workforce for the coming decades. As a direct result of our lack of investment, we rank 49th in high school graduation rate and students graduating from 8th grade score significantly lower than the national average in reading and writing abilities.

We cannot expect to fix our public schooling system by continuing the same failed policies that drove us to the bottom in the first place. Houston will soon be the third-largest city in the country and is poised to be a dynamic economic center for years to come. Our great city attracts businesses from all industries and investment from around the world. However, the foundation of a global city is an educated and skilled populace. I see every day how hard-working and intelligent the youth of Houston are, but we need to give them the platform on which to transform that potential into success.

If we fail to improve our underfunded schools and support our overworked and underpaid teachers our cities will suffer for decades. Education funding is a policy we all have a stake in. Even if you do not have a child in one of our public schools, you count on engineers educated in public schools to ensure your home is safe. You count on judges who learned to understand complex readings at a public high school to defend your rights in courts across the state. We count on each other to be educated and informed citizens to move our city and state forward. That is why we must be able to count on our public schools to prepare us for the challenges that lie ahead and why we must pass HB 21.

Funding our public education should not be viewed as wasteful government spending, but rather an investment in the potential of our state and the dreams of our children.

Respectfully,



Juliet K. Stipeche
Director of Education
Office of Mayor Sylvester Turner
City of Houston