

Colleyville Courier

GCISD joins funding lawsuit against the state

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BY SHIRLEY JINKINS

syjinkins@star-telegram.com

Grapevine-Colleyville school district will join hundreds of Texas school districts in suing the state over education funding.

School Superintendent Robin Ryan personally briefed parents, students and staff about the legal challenge in a video posted on the district website.

"We wanted to communicate clearly with our staff and community about the reasons behind the situation we're in, and also the reasons why we joined in with the lawsuit," Ryan said during a recent interview.

Trustees voted unanimously on Nov. 14 to join the suit that will be brought by the firm of Haynes and Boone, LLP. It will argue that the current school funding system is not only inadequate, but amounts to a de facto statewide property tax, which is illegal under the Texas Constitution. The Dallas and Fort Worth school districts also are parties in the Haynes and Boone suit. There are two other lawsuits also challenging school funding.

Grapevine-Colleyville will pay \$15,000 per year to participate in the suit. Ryan said the money will come from district savings. The suit is expected to be filed by year's end and go to trial before the legislature's next session in spring 2013.

"We anticipate that statewide, over 60 districts will eventually join this lawsuit," Ryan said.

The decision about which suit to join was easy because of Grapevine-Colleyville's status as a Chapter 41 or property wealthy district whose tax revenue is subject to recapture for redistribution to poorer districts, officials said. Grapevine-Colleyville had to send the state \$29 million this year.

"Haynes and Boone is representing Chapter 41 districts to make sure that the contributing schools to Robin Hood have their interests represented," Ryan said. "That \$29 million going back to Austin this year, plus the \$14.5 million in funding cuts over two years, is unconscionable."

In the website video, located at www.gcisd-k12.org, Ryan said the state's \$4 billion in foundation school funding cuts coupled with another \$1.4 billion shaved from programs like Early Childhood Education actually amounts to \$5.4 billion in total education funding losses.

The cuts come at a time when the state is insisting on ever-higher academic accountability standards, he said.

"The new STAAR (State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness) and EOC (end-of-course) exams are much more rigorous exams than the TAKS (Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills)," Ryan said. "That's at a time when districts are being cut to the bone and are having to reduce teaching staff and the programs that are designed to give students support to meet those standards."

Ryan said he believes the districts will prevail in the courts on both the issues of a de facto property tax and on adequacy of school funding.

Other actions against the state include the Texas School Coalition suit, representing about 280 districts; and the Equity Center's Texas Taxpayer and Student Fairness Coalition suit, representing about 320 districts.

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