

School Finance Litigation Update Day Twelve – November 8, 2012

Dr. William Duncombe and Dr. Diane Schanzenbach

Day twelve of the school finance litigation began with the state cross-examining Dr. William Duncombe. The state's line of questioning during cross-examination focused on the methodology, the variables and several coding errors within Dr. Duncombe's cost function model that might possibly impact the results of the cost function study.

After the state finished the cross-examination, Philip Fraissinet, Ft. Bend ISD plaintiffs, asked Judge Dietz for permission to allow Dr. Duncombe to correct the coding errors in his model and submit a corrected supplemental report. The state objected to this request; however, Judge Dietz indicated that the issue would be resolved at the time of submission of the supplemental report.

Dr. Diane Schanzenbach then took the stand and was questioned by David Hinojosa, MALDEF, on her report detailing issues related to classroom-size. The report specifically detailed national research on classroom-size and student achievement focusing on the Tennessee STAR study. Dr. Schanzenbach testified the study started in 1985 and represents the best set of data to study the impact of smaller class sizes. She testified that students in smaller classes compared to students in larger classes score 6% higher on assessment tests. She also testified students that were taught in the classes with fewer students compared to those who were taught in classes with more students are more likely to have earned a high school degree, earned a college degree, and are even more likely to be financially secure later in life. The STAR study shows that smaller classes allow teachers to have more one-on-one time with students and allows students to have more time on-task and be more engaged.

Dr. Schanzenbach then detailed her analysis on the Texas 22:1 provision concentrating on the MALDEF focus districts that had applied for waivers due to either unexpected growth, the district's inability to higher teachers, facilities needs, or financial hardships. She stated the data shows that students in classrooms with fewer waivers scored higher on STAAR reading and math. She also testified on cross-examination that her analysis was not a cause and effect study, just a descriptive study of the data she received from the districts. She detailed that she even used different methodologies for each district depending on the data she received. Chris Diamond, TREE, also questioned her on whether or not other programs have the same benefits as smaller classroom-sizes (school choice, professional development, technology, curriculum changes). She testified that while they may, the research shows that smaller classroom-sizes have one of the largest impacts on overall student achievement. Chris Diamond also asked her if would submit her report to a journal for publication. She admitted she would not, but the report was not supposed to be an academic report, merely a descriptive analysis of the potential impact the waivers had on student achievement. The State also took the same line of questioning citing other reports that find class-size does not matter. She underscored the fact that those studies were outliers in the vast amount of research available.

The court has recessed until Tuesday.