Court ponders school finances

Lawsuit demands equal educational district funding

HIGHLAND PARK (AP) — High school students here look up facts for their term papers in an electronic encyclopedia. They use computers to search for library books, take their pick of omputers in the math lab and produce the stu-

dent paper with the help of laser printers. Some 12 miles away at Wilmer-Hutchins High School, engineering students crowd around a few computers. They look up books in a card cat-alog, and student journalists pound out their stories on typewriters

Such are the differences behind a lawsuit, now pending before the Texas Supreme Court, that challenges the constitutionality of Texas' school financing. The issue before the court: Does Texas owe its students an equal education, or

imply an adequate one?
"If we are to be competitive, the state has to do
omething to make sure that districts have equal and adequate equipment to educate students," said Wilmer-Hutchins Principal Clyde Stokes. That doesn't mean leaving one school with outated, insufficient equipment while some others have the best of everything.

"Our problem is that we're limited in the mount and the kinds of things we can buy,"

"We can't keep the best teachers because they go off to the property-rich districts, because they ave the funds to supplement what the state

schools . . . with those kinds of facilities.'

Stokes said it's a state responsibility to see that school funding is equitable.

Almost half of Texas schools' funding comes

from local property taxes. In 1986-87, for example, local taxes provided \$5.8 billion for public

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- Clyde Stokes, high school principal

education in Texas, compared to \$5.7 billion from state coffers. The federal government contributed \$864 million.

The people who live in suburban, blue-collar Wilmer and Hutchins pay twice as much per dol-lar of property as residents of Highland Park, another suburb just north of downtown Dallas that's home to some of the state's wealthiest people. Wilmer-Hutchins property owners are taxed \$1.31 for every \$100 in assessed value; Highland

Park's tax is 59.7 cents per \$100. But Highland Park has almost ten times the property wealth, according to state tax records. For each of its students, there is about \$1.1 million in property to tax. Wilmer-Hutchins has \$124,450 worth of taxable property per student.

As a result, Highland Park was able to spend \$4,570 per pupil in the 1987-88 school year, at

about the top of the statewide scale, according to state officials. Wilmer-Hutchins spent \$3,905 for each of its students, about \$700 more than the state average. The Highland Park district has about 4,000 students; Wilmer-Hutchins about

Highland Park Superintendent Winston Power said he recognizes his district's advantages and believes something should be done to make sure there is "reasonable and efficient" funding of less affluent districts.

He doesn't have a suggested funding plan, but said the issue needs to be talked over between districts and the state - something he believes isn't happening as long as the dispute is in court.

It has been there since 1984, when 68 of the state's poorer school districts filed a lawsuit contending the Texas school funding system is unconstitutional.

Highland Park is one of 48 districts intervening in the lawsuit in defense of the state. Wilmer-Hutchins is not directly involved in the case.

Number of paroled felons increases

AUSTIN (AP) — More than through the so-called "revolving door" of state prisons, officials said. and sentenced to state prison were released directly from county jails during the last fiscal year, a 550 percent increase over the previous year,

The parole in absentia program
in which eligible prisoners awaiting transfer to the Texas Department of Corrections can be paroled directly from county jail — has beme one of the major safety valves o ease overcrowded prisons at both he county and state levels, officials

But as prison crowding increases, ore serious offenders become eli-

door" of state prisons, officials said.

"It's just another example of the general malaise in the system," said Rider Scott, who serves as Gov. Bill Clements' general counsel. "The early release has moved from prisons to (county) jails.

"The reality is that they are going to be released from the penitentiary as soon as they pass through the front gate, so why hold them in the county jails," he said.

Scott said many prisoners are turning down probation in favor of going to prison, knowing they will serve little if any time there, which is gble for parole without ever going preferable to serving out the restric-

tions of a long parole.

"When the crooks start asking to o to the pen, you know it's no more than the cost of doing business,"

Scott said many persons sentenced to 10 years in the Texas Department of Corrections serve no longer than four to six months.

Urban counties complain that they cannot hold the state's prisoners anymore. There are from 12,000 to 14,000 inmates in county jails who have been sentenced to the TDC and are

awaiting transfer, according to the State Commission on Jail Standards.

In fiscal 1989, the 12-month period that ended Aug. 31, the state

paroled 5,772 inmates from county jails, a 550.7 percent increase from the previous fiscal year total of 887, according to the state Board of Pardons and Paroles.

Rey Selvera, a parole analyst with the board, said the pool of eligible inmates has increased since July after legislators changed the law to enable prisoners in county jails to earn good-conduct time credit at the same rate as if they were in the TDC.

Until last year, parole officials only reviewed inmates that were sentenced to five years or less, he said.

But now the pardons and paroles board is reviewing candidates sen-tenced to up to 10 years imprisonment, Selvera said. This includes as-

Three-alarm fire fills Capitol with smoke

AUSTIN (AP) — Foul-smelling moke from a three-alarm fire filled he Texas House chamber on Thursday, causing officials to evac-late the 101-year-old Capitol shortly

The fire was extinguished within n hour, and no injuries were imme-

lately reported, authorities said.
"A lot of smoke was filling up the econd and third floors," Austin Fire epartment Lt. Scott Reynolds said.

Fire Capt. Jack Floyd said cork inulation in an air-handling unit in he basement caught fire about 4:30 m. and began pushing smoke

rough air vents upstairs. "It's not really going to be a prob-em for us," Floyd said. "It's going to ake a little while to get the smoke out and get all the cork taken care

Firemen working in the basement nned breathing units.

Firefighters outside moved a giant in to windows of the House chamer, pumping fresh air into the fourory building to help clear it of the

A total of 21 units and 53 fireighters were sent to the Capitol af-er the first call was received at 4:37 m., Floyd said. He said the first nits reached the historic building ithin 90 seconds.

Officials initially closed the House amber to the public as the two-

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p.m., and shortly after, workers in the building were ordered to evac-

Fire trucks continued racing to

the Capitol until about 5:30 p.m. An early morning fire in February 1983 gutted parts of the Senate side of the Capitol, which is on the oppo-site end of the building from the

Since then, officials have said the

building, which has large attics, could have been destroyed by the

Reynolds said the numerous false ceilings and divided rooms made locating Thursday's fire difficult, and he said it was lucky the fire occurred in the daytime.

'We were lucky that the fire was detected early, it was during daytime hours and people were in the Capitol (to report it)," Reynolds said. Officials said they weren't immediately certain about the cause of the

Jesse Williams of the State Purchasing and General Services Administration, which maintains the building, said workmen had been welding in the basement earlier in

Braniff seeks bankruptcy protection

MIAMI (AP) - Drained by losses of more than \$1 million a week, Braniff Inc. on Thursday became the first major carrier to seek bankruptcy protection a second time after canceling nearly all its flights and laying

off more than half its work force. Some airline experts say a cash shortage and intense competition from larger carriers may keep Braniff from re-enacting its comeback from Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in 1984 as a smaller company.

Braniff left thousands of travelers seeking alternate flights and ticket refunds Thursday as it halted all but four flights linking its Kansas City, Mo. hub with Dallas and Orlando, Fla., its home base.

Braniff spokesman Don McGuire in Orlando said the carrier hopes to restore 40 of its 256 normal daily flights by Monday.

Meanwhile, plans are under way to cut Braniff's work force from 4,791 to about 2,000. The work force currently includes an estimated 2,000 employees in Kansas City, 1,165 in Orlando and 450 in Dallas.

story-tall room began filling with moke. Then the building's fire attendants, 163 mechanics, 1,167 station personnel and agents, 22 dispatchers and 200 salaried personnel.

Braniff sought protection from creditors to allow it to reorganize under Chapter 11 of the U.S. Bankruptcy Code at about 2 a.m. EDT in Orlando, where the carrier relocated its headquarters from Dallas in May. Braniff, sold last year to a group of investors led by Paine-Webber Inc., lost \$31.8 million on revenue of \$293 million in the first six months of the year.

The financial problems were caused by Braniff's relocation to Orlando and its \$2 billion order for 50 Airbus A320 aircraft, said William McGee, president and chief executive officer of Braniff.

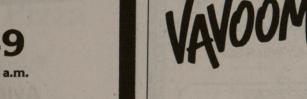
Spokesman McGuire said the company recently was unable to complete a \$75 million financing deal.

McGee said Braniff will not cancel its Airbus order and will retain its options for 50 more. Last May, Mc-Gee announced plans to expand the work force by 35 percent and build new maintenance facilities in Orfando and Kansas City.

Braniff extended the expiration date of issued tickets until Sept. 27, 1990. Continental Airlines and Eastern Airlines, both subsidiaries of Texas Air Corp., said they will honor most Braniff tickets.



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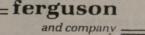


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