



Harry Cabluck
ASSOCIATED PRESS

[\(enlarge photo\)](#)

State Education Commissioner Robert Scott says money may go to textbooks.



AUSTIN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

[\(enlarge photo\)](#)

Drew Scheberle of chamber of commerce cites need to protect local jobs.

MORE ON THIS STORY

- [Sign up for our e-mail newsletter on Legislative coverage](#)
- [Legislative news inside the Virtual Capitol](#)

MORE LOCAL NEWS

- [Get breaking news in your inbox](#)
- **Somos Austin:** [For James Aldretes, 'A Class Apart' hits close to home](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#)
- **Austin Legal:** [Decades for murder defendants](#) | [Comments \(2\)](#)
- **All Ablog Austin:** [City restores access from trail to the Lance Armstrong Bikeway](#) | [Comments \(9\)](#)
- [A place for all to play in Round Rock](#)
- [Coast Guard: Flaws in A&M's boat damage tracking](#)
- [Testimony: Defense lawyer teamed with drug dealers](#)
- [Former shelter dog, former sergeant now a team](#)

Central Texas schools to get about \$80 million in stimulus aid

State programs could get an additional \$5.4 billion.

By [Laura Heinauer](#)

AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

Wednesday, February 18, 2009

President Barack Obama's signature Tuesday on the federal stimulus bill cleared the way for what's expected to be a huge infusion of grant money for state education programs and local school districts.

State officials said Texas could get at least \$5.4 billion for public education over the next two years. Millions more will go directly to school districts for special education and programs for low-income students.

Austin will get about \$41 million in the next two years, according to the U.S. Congressional Research Service. An estimated \$39 million will be doled out to other Central Texas school districts, including about \$9 million for Round Rock, \$4.3 million for Pflugerville, \$3.9 million for Leander and \$2.7 million for San Marcos.

Christy Rome, Austin's director of Intergovernmental Relations and Policy Oversight, said the district last year received about \$24 million for low-income programs and over the next two years could receive as much as an additional \$21.3 million.

Amounts of federal grants are based on the number of low-income and special-needs students in each district. Rome said at least 40 percent of the increase must be spent on middle and high schools.

In a speech Tuesday, Gov. Rick Perry said the state should take only federal stimulus money that could be used for one-time expenses.

About \$2 billion of the money coming to Texas schools will be split between programs for economically disadvantaged students and special education students.

How schools may use the remainder, which could be as much as \$3.9 billion, is still a little unclear. The money is intended to plug holes in state and local government budgets to avoid layoffs and service cutbacks and could be used for construction.

Texas Education Commissioner Robert Scott said Monday that the state is awaiting direction from federal education officials. But, Scott said, the money might be tapped for buying textbooks and technological equipment and fixing hurricane-ravaged schools.

With Austin posting a 5.4 percent unemployment rate in December, said Drew Scheberle, senior vice president for education and talent development at the Greater Austin Chamber of

Commerce, he'd like to see the stimulus money used to increase the quality of the local work force and protect Austin jobs — not necessarily to create teaching positions.

Local money for programs to help reduce the area dropout rate could have a stimulative effect, Scheberle said.

"Our biggest concern is that it be spent legally, and if it's not continuing funding, that it not be spent on continuing items," he said.

Austin school officials said that as they plan, the two-year limit on the funds would need to be taken into account.

"We have to be strategic on how we spend these funds, because we're not guaranteed that funding," Rome said. "What the district is charged with doing is to spend the funds in a manner that will benefit our students the most in the time period we've been given."

But Louis Malfaro, president of Education Austin, a group that represents about 4,000 Austin school district employees, was less concerned about limiting nonrecurring expenditures.

The stimulus money would be well spent reducing class sizes and hiring more teaching assistants for lower-performing schools, Malfaro said. In these economic times, he said, the district may be able to take advantage of a "buyers' market for employers" by getting highly qualified people at lower prices.

"That way you give kids a higher-quality education and you get the school districts hiring people, which helps the economy," he said.

lheinauer@statesman.com; 445-3694

Additional material from staff writer Kate Alexander.