



# IMCAT

*'Delivering the Future'*

House Public Education Committee

*RE: Interim Charge #2*

Mr. Chairman and Members of the House Public Education Committee,

The Instructional Material Coordinators' Association of Texas (IMCAT) is an organization of 471 school district and charter school employees who work in the area of instructional materials across the state of Texas.

We are pleased to address the Committee about the important matter of the effectiveness of the Technology and Instructional Materials Allotment (TIMA). Our group has often provided testimony, data, and collaboration to the committee that expresses our views about deficiencies with the current allotment and possible solutions. As you may recall, the Instructional Materials Allotment was created in 2011 during the 82<sup>nd</sup> Legislative Session - 1<sup>st</sup> Called Session in Senate Bill 6. That bill fundamentally altered the way Texas acquired instructional materials for students by creating a dedicated fund that is distributed directly to school districts to provide instructional materials for students. Previously, districts simply submitted an order based on enrollment to TEA and received the materials directly from publishers. Additionally, that legislation eliminated the technology allotment and instructional technology was added to the list of allowable expenditures for the TIMA. Unfortunately, the funding from the technology allotment did not carry over into the new allotment.

With that history in mind, we have improved how districts utilize their allotments. The Texas Education Code allows for certain expenditures under the TIMA, and any item not listed is not an allowable expenditure. Recent legislation has expanded the allowable expenditures for the Texas Education Agency along with certain appropriations have created programs via set-asides. These include the Texas Resource Review (TRR), Open Education Resources, and the Technology Lending Grant. Our organization has consistently opposed these programs as bureaucratic bloat and unhelpful to districts. As specialists in instructional materials, we have found these programs provide no benefit to school districts. The programs should be vetted during the standard appropriations process and, if determined to be of value, funded from general revenue, not the TIMA. These programs represent millions of dollars which otherwise would be flowing to districts for the direct benefit of students. To characterize them as Robin Hood on steroids is certainly appropriate as every ISD and charter school in the state is paying for them while deriving little or no benefit from them.

We urge you to remove these earmarks from statute and/or control the Agency's ability to commandeer TIMA funds for the programmatic purposes of the leadership of the Agency. For example, the current TRR program includes a contract with SAFAL Partners, Inc., that is in excess of ten million dollars. The continued expenditure for this program far exceeds any

suggested benefit to Texas schools. Thus far, the program has very little to show for such a significant expenditure.

In addition to the issue of set-asides, we have compiled the remaining issues into common questions that we receive from stakeholders that will assist you as you seek to satisfy your inquiry.

1. Why are districts not using the TIMA for more technology purchases?

As previously mentioned, the funding for technology was initially withdrawn when the TIMA? fund was originally created. The previous legislation contained a maximum allowable cost for books. Not only was this maximum cost eliminated, but districts must also now purchase accompanying software licenses and other tools to assist in giving students a 21<sup>st</sup> century education. These items were not prevalent under the previous program. Thus, with all of these additional expenses, the typical district allotment received from the TIMA does not allow for major technology purchases by the District without significant local funds to supplement such a purchase. A survey of a sample of our organization revealed that the vast majority of districts spend little to no TIMA on technology, but continually utilize all of their allotment funds each biennium. The pandemic has only exacerbated these fiscal issues, as districts have been forced to purchase more consumables (one-time use materials) and online subscriptions for at-home use, in addition to their normal instructional material needs. In the past, our organization has advocated for a separate technology allotment to establish a more specific and focused funding source. We continue to advocate for such a program, but also understand the budgetary restrictions. At the very least, we believe the SBOE should consider the necessity of technology as they approve proclamations and other cost drivers as described below.

2. Why do districts often have unexpended TIMA at the end of the biennium?

Many mistake unexpended monies in TIMA as surplus funds. However, the vast majority of districts thoughtfully plan for the use of these monies to prepare for the implementation of major proclamations that reflect the more expensive subject area proclamations as well as other purchases. Additionally, after the State Board of Education issues a proclamation it contemplates funding that proclamation for a twelve-year cycle. However, often these next proclamations are delayed and the SBOE will continue the contract for the previously adopted materials. Prior to technological advances, this was a simple issue, books would merely be used for a longer amount of time. Technology has complicated this issue due to districts payment of ongoing licenses and the use of consumable materials. This necessitates that districts expend TIMA on materials for these previous adoptions in addition to the new adoptions. The SBOE and the Legislature may wish to look at more consistent and shorter review and replacement cycles to help alleviate this issue.

Districts must also purchase Advanced Placement®, dual credit, and International Baccalaureate® materials to address course enrollment requirements. Often, the Institutions of Higher Education have new faculty or faculty that have been recently published and therefore require new materials to be purchased, sometimes as frequently as each semester. Many of these courses are required by the Agency to meet College, Career, and Military Readiness (CCMR) indicators. Additionally, as the English Language Learners population has risen, costs for appropriate materials have increased. There has not been a corresponding increase in the TIMA to reflect these enrollment trends.

This issue is best summed up by the quote of one instructional material coordinator: “Unspent funds are the result of making economically responsible and conservative decisions with our purchasing practices.”

3. If the money is not spent on technology, then shouldn't every child be receiving a textbook?

This is also a widely asked question by stakeholders. The majority of instructional material coordinators surveyed suggested that their districts require each student be given a book if requested. The use of online and consumable materials has warranted fewer textbooks than in previous generations. However, as previously mentioned, there are other significant cost drivers which may lead to some districts not initially providing a printed textbook to every child.

We appreciate the opportunity to address the Committee on this important matter. If we may provide any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact us. Your dedication to the schoolchildren of Texas is noticed and appreciated.