

Lack of funds is harming state's future

San Antonio Express-News Editorial Board

February 7, 2012

Texas is shortchanging public education. Advocates such as state Rep. [Mike Villarreal](#), D-San Antonio, have been warning that the Legislature's underfunding of public schools will have serious consequences on educational attainment, student readiness and the state's economic prospects.

Texas is also shortchanging its social safety net for the state's neediest residents. Advocates such as [F. Scott McCown](#), a former state district judge who now heads the [Center for Public Policy Priorities](#), have warned that the state's tax system is inadequate for providing health care and other vital services to individuals who otherwise could not afford them.

Villarreal and McCown are the usual suspects — a liberal legislator and the executive director of a liberal Austin think tank. As [Gary Scharrer](#) reported from the Express-[News Austin](#) bureau, however, they are not alone. Last week, the leaders of the state's two largest agencies — both hand-picked by Gov. [Rick Perry](#) — issued similar warnings.

Texas Education Commissioner [Robert Scott](#) said he would not enforce new accountability standards or a 13-year-old ban on the social promotion of underperforming students to the next grade level unless the Legislature provides adequate funding for school districts to achieve such goals. Health and [Human Services](#) Commissioner [Tom Suehs](#) said that the state's Medicaid program will face at least a \$15 billion shortfall going into the next biennium.

For those who paid attention to last session's budget maneuvers, such ominous statements come as no surprise. The GOP-led Legislature reduced spending on public education by \$4 billion from the existing funding formula. In a bit of fiscal flimflam, lawmakers also deliberately shorted \$4.8 billion from Medicaid in order to produce an ostensibly balanced budget.

Perry and Republican budget writers were gambling that an economic recovery would fill state coffers and close the spending gap. With less than a year until the next session, that seems highly unlikely.

The fundamental problem is Texas is suffering from a structural deficit, the result of a 2006 tax fix that included the creation of a business tax that has fallen far short of revenue expectations. State leaders need to confront that problem rather than starving public education and essential services. Read more: <http://www.mysanantonio.com/opinion/editorials/article/Lack-of-funds-is-harming-state-s-future-3078403.php#ixzz1lhn23oFj>

