

DAILY TRIBUNE

[Print Page](#)

FRIDAY FEBRUARY 6, 2009 Last modified: Thursday, February 5, 2009 11:38 AM CST

Estimates show millions might flow to schools

By AMBER CULLEN - Tribune Features Editor

Public school districts in Titus County could have an additional \$3,744,100 over a two-year period to spend, according to Strategic Partnerships, Inc., (SPI) an Austin-based research and procurement consulting firm.

The totals quoted are part of the \$825 billion economic stimulus package currently being considered by the U.S. Congress. The House Appropriations Committee reported its economic stimulus bill out of committee and the bill will now go to the House floor for debate.

A breakdown of how much it is estimated that Titus County public schools will receive over two years from the House version of the Economic Recovery Package includes \$254,500 for the Chapel Hill Independent School District (CHISD), \$271,000 to the Harts Bluff Independent School District, \$142,900 for the Winfield Independent School District, and \$3,075,700 for the Mount Pleasant Independent School District.

Toward that goal, an estimated \$41 billion in funds could be pushed to local school districts nationwide. That includes \$13 billion each for both Title I and IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) programs, both of which are based on formula funding and address high poverty schools and special needs students respectively.

Another \$14 billion is estimated to be allocated for school modernization and repairs and an estimated \$1 billion could be allocated for education technology.

The funding is aimed at improving public school classrooms, laboratories and libraries for students across the nation and is part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Plan aimed at providing increased educational opportunities for school students, creating jobs and moving the nation's economy forward.

"Although these figures are not yet firm," said Mary Scott Nabers, president and CEO of Strategic Partnerships, Inc. Nabers. "President Obama has said he intends to move swiftly on the economic stimulus package, as every day it is delayed, thousands of Americans lose their jobs. These millions of dollars estimated to be headed to local school districts in Texas will not only supplement school coffers, but also provide contracting opportunities that can put local workers back to work."

Mount Pleasant School District (MPSD) Superintendent Terry Myers said the unconfirmed funds were not out the gate yet.

One of the biggest issues with these preliminary numbers is that they are just that- preliminary.

"None of this has been approved. It is all very preliminary," Myers said. "So far all anyone has is a statement by the president saying he is going to move quickly to see if he can get this as part of the package."

"Basically we had a group of pro-education folks of the United States, who, as a result of the bailout package, proposed that the president include public schools in that financial stimulus package," he continued. "They have put this plan together which is based on basically construction and technology needs along with some library needs of the districts."

Chapel Hill Superintendent Marc Levesque said the information he has at this time suggest CHISD would receive a Title 1 increase of 23,400, Construction increase of 85,100 and IDEA/Special Education increase of 55,400 in 2009, and in 2010 CHISD would receive Title 1 increase of 23,400 and IDEA/Special Education increase of 67,100.

"This certainly would be great news for our school district. Additional help (funding) for facilities, programs

and technology would be welcomed with open arms in this tough economic times," Levesque said. "If and when these stimulus funding figures become firm and real, CHISD will be ready/ prepared to spend the dollars in the best interest of the students in the District."

Myers said he has a few concerns with the bill as represented at this time, one of them being the lack of funds designated as discretionary (to be used as the districts deem fitting).

"There is no money coming to the district to help out with payroll costs, or personnel," Myers said. "Districts are in great need of discretionary funding now. And we are not so much in need of earmarked funding. So, we hope that some of that is rethought and they release some of that to come to us as discretionary funds that we can use in payroll to help with personnel cost."

How the money may be spent in the districts, Myers said, is also an issue he is concerned about, as the limiting of how monies for construction and technology could affect the district's ability to use the funds as needed.

"Usually money that comes from the government comes with very, very severe restrictions, and if indeed this is money is to be used for improved library and renovation, and such, what happens if the school district needed a new building or if they don't have a library and needed to build one. Would they be able to use this money for new construction, not just renovation construction? Those are just questions we don't know the answers to yet.

"It would be very difficult for me to say that we are pleased to say this money is coming in this form because we simply don't know what that form may be, and we don't know whether or not Mount Pleasant will be able to apply it to an area of great need in the district right now," Myers said. "When it comes down to needs in the school districts, the school districts know best what their own needs are. We don't need someone from Washington D.C. or even Austin telling Mount Pleasant where and how to spend the money. Just send us the money; we'll spend it on kids. We'll take care of them. But Discretionary funds are what we are looking for."

Myers said the answers won't come down to the schools for some time, as the proposed package must pass through both the House and the Senate.

"Until the house and the senate have come together with this budget with this stimulus package, and they work all those things out, we won't really know if we are going to get any money, how much money we are going to get, how that money will have to be spent (what restrictions will be put on it) we'll not know," Myers said. "But we will be excited if we get those kinds of dollars, I can assure you. Speculation certainly surrounds it, but as an educational institution we are just glad we are being considered for this stimulus package, because we can certainly use it."

"I would like to encourage folks to let our legislators know that public education is in dire need of funding," Myers said. "We need to, if at all possible, get back to the proper funding of public schools."

Tribune Features Editor Amber Cullen can be reached at 903-572-1705, ext. 215 or by email at amber@dailytribune.net.