Brownfield Rotary Club President Amy Paiva presents a young reader with a helpful new book as members Larry Fryer (Back Left) and Bill McGowan (Back Right) look on. The Rotary Club presented 130 dictionaries Friday afternoon to second-graders at Oak Grove Elementary School. Not pictured are members Scott Lucas, Dr. Carl Moman, Ricky Dill, Ed Peiffer, Mike Richardson and Virgil Cordray.

How Texas schools are currently funded

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — In 2011, a still-sluggish state economy and a depletion of federal stimulus funding left the Texas Legislature facing a budget deficit worth $27 billion. Lawmakers voted to rewrite the funding formula to cut $4 billion from public schools while stripping away an additional $1.4 billion from educational grant programs for initiatives like pre-kindergarten in many parts of the state.

The latest school finance trial — the sixth of its kind since 1984 — centers on whether those cuts mean Texas is no longer meeting its state constitutional guarantee to provide, "A general diffusion of knowledge" via "an efficient system of public free schools."

Like past legal challenges to the way Texas funds its schools, however, this series of lawsuits also questions how equally the state's different school districts are funded.

Because Texas has no income tax, school districts rely heavily on local property taxes for resources — with allocations from the state Legislature helping to fill any funding gaps. Since 1993, a share-the-wealth system has been designed to ensure that school districts in wealthy areas distribute extra property tax revenue to districts in poor parts of the state, thereby equalizing funding levels.

Roughly 36 percent of Texas' 1,024 school districts are now required by law to share their property tax revenue with less fortunate districts under the "Robin Hood" scheme.

State law defines the difference between wealthy and poor districts by how much a district can raise in property tax compared with its average daily student attendance, adjusted to account for certain cost variations.

The tipping point in the calculation is $319,500 per weighted student — though up to $476,500 may be actually exempted based on a district's property tax rate. Schools that exceed that give money back to the state or partner with a poor district.

According to a Texas Education Agency, 23 school districts were added to the property wealthy category in 2012, increasing to a record 374 the number of districts statewide required to share their property tax revenue. Property wealthy school districts now give back more than $1 billion in local tax revenue annually.

Property-rich districts have several options for reducing their wealth level to the state limit. One option basically involves writing a check to the state to lower the district's balance to the legal limit.

Texas lawmakers move to make up $5B budget deficit

CHRIS TOMLINSON Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — Texas lawmakers took the first steps Tuesday toward closing a $5 billion budget deficit they created in 2011 by underfunding Medicaid, the health program for the poor and disabled.

Republican Rep. Jim Pitts, R-Waxahachie, warned members of the House Appropriations Committee that balancing the budget was required by the Texas Constitution.

"It is simply a matter of paying our bills that the law of the state requires us to pay," Pitts said. "If we do not provide additional funding for the state's Medicaid program it will run out of funds before the end of March, leaving the state without the funds for doctors, hospitals and nursing homes for the state to reimburse them for the services they have provided."

Analysts from the Legislative Budget Board reported that Medicaid needs $4.4 billion to continue operating through the end of the fiscal year, and that appropriating those funds will bring in $6.5 billion federal matching funds.

The Texas Education Agency also needs $630 million to pay schools districts what they are owed from the Foundation School Program, board experts testified.

Letters from Home

NOTE: Each of the soldiers listed below has a connection to Brownfield or Terry County. Readers are encouraged to correspond with any or all of Terry County's finest to show their continued support for those who are serving their country faithfully.

Consider sending a card or letter to a soldier, or a complete care package with products such as: Batteries; hardback and paperback books; magazines; puzzle books; CDs; DVDs; non-perishable food items such as beef jerky, dried fruit, canned chicken and tuna, ramen noodles, popcorn, cookies, chips and other snacks; socks; undershirts; personal hygiene items such as deodorant, disposable razors, soap, shampoo and toothpaste; pens and paper; phone cards and hand-held electronic games or travel-size board games.

Sgt. Jared Neil Barrier
Box 162
Roseboro, NC 28382

RCT Brandon Bergara
2nd RT BN Hotel Co. PLT 2166
36001 Midway Ave.
San Diego, CA 92140-2166

Staff Sgt. (P) Jon Boring
1192 Country Fields Ln.
Clarksville, TN 37040
Son of Odis and Bea Boring

PFC Fuller, Jonathan N.
(Address Pending)
Ft. Carson, CO
Son of James and Mary Jane Fuller (Meadow)

Garcia, Jason Anthony
DSC 561 Box 7409
FPO AP 96310-0075

Christopher Gonzales
PRG 6-1
APO, AE 09354
Son of Jose and Teresa Gonzales, father of Erik and Chris

SSGT. Junior Hadley
123 Delaware
Jacksonville, AR 72076
Son of Rick and Martina Hadley

Jones, Samantha D.
917 Silvertree Court
Virginia Beach, VA 23450
Daughter of Geneva and Guadalupe Mata Jr.

Madera, Christopher E.
1st Bn Alpha Co. Platoon 1005
39001 Midway Ave.
MCRD San Diego, CA 92140-1005

LCP1 Mata, Guadalupe III
P.O. Box 453279
San Diego, CA 92145-5727
Son of Geneva and Guadalupe Mata Jr.

Sgt. Steve McQueen
651 Granite Cliff
San Antonio, TX 78251

MSG Jose Mendez
206 Williams Circle Apt. 2041
Opelousas, LA 70570
Son of Maria Ramirez and Pedro Mendez

PFC Joseph Mitcham
75th Fires Brigade
COB Speicher
APO AE 09393

Sgt. Mulkey, Logan
6545 Phillip Dr.
Ft. Worth, TX 76114
Son of Scott and Brenda Minyard and Marlon Mulkey

Lcpl Norris, Jonathan
H&S Co.
ATT: Battalion Maintenance
Camp Pendleton CA 72055
Son of Christie Cottrell

Sgt. Marvin D. Powell
1505 N. Walnut
Lumberton, NC 28358
Son of Lanna & Kenny Powell

Toby Roach
Superintendent of Shipping and Receiving in Munitians Depot
Hill Airforce Base
1522 N. 300E
Layton, UT 84041

LCPL Rogotzke, Joshua K.
P.O. Box 454643
San Diego, CA 92145
Son of Dan Rogotzke and Debbie Jackson

PFC Seaton, Justin
B Btry TF 2/82 FA
FOB Diamondback
APOAOE 09334
Son of Nolan and Lisa Seaton

Snyder, Timothy, SrA
332 ELRS/LGRA
APO, AE 09315-9997
Son of Larry and Brenda Snyder

Sgt. James Titus
1-68AR BN
Unit No. 51502
APO AE 09336-1502
Son of Bill and Beverly Titus

TSST Jerry L. Torrez
PSC 3 Box 8015
APO AP 96266
Son of Elia and Nicanor Torrez, Jr.

Valentin Mata, Leonardo
BI Battery 4319 AFAR CTF
FOB Naray APO AE 09354