Paying For Education

What Is The True Cost?

By Chris Patterson

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This report evaluates how Texas public schools are meeting the challenge of educating children today and calculates the cost of public education outcomes on the lives of individual Texans, their communities, and the state economy. Evidence that many Texas public schools are failing public trust is convincing, despite decades of reform, tripling of funds, aggressive efforts of policymakers and intense commitment of educators:

- Academic performance is far below grade-level proficiency, although Texas elementary and middle school students generally keep pace with average national performance.
- For Texas high schools, performance and graduation rates remain at the bottom of the nation.
- Average proficiency of public school students is one to two years below grade level on national norm-referenced tests and similarly behind privately educated peers in Texas.
- Graduates of Texas public schools are unprepared to succeed in skilled vocational training or college.
- Overall performance of students in Texas has not significantly improved over the past several decades.

Race, ethnicity and income still determine student outcomes in Texas public schools; the lives of many African-American and Hispanic youth are blighted by the failure of Texas public schools to erase the achievement gap.

Today, the failure of schools to do their part in building a highly educated workforce has mounting consequences. Within the next two decades, Texans will experience lower standards of living, poorer health, higher crime, less community engagement and deteriorating social conditions unless changes are made.

The price of educational failure will continue to grow until Texans exchange the endless, fruitless reform of public schools – reform that has failed to provide any improvement in the overall quality of public education – for fundamental changes in how public education is delivered.

School finance reform offers an opportunity to fundamentally change the delivery of public education. Texans can offer all children educational quality and equity by focusing funding on students instead of schools, allowing parents to choose where children are educated, and holding schools accountable for final educational outcomes instead of incremental, compartmentalized improvements. Introducing school choice as a new form of delivering education offers Texans a proven means to improve government-operated schools and educational outcomes of individuals.

Student-centered funding that allows students to enroll in government- or privately- operated schools is the next step in the evolution of public education. Unlike other reforms cycled through Texas public schools, vouchers have proven effective in raising educational excellence in equity for students who use school choice and for students who choose to remain in government-operated schools at lower costs. Vouchers offer Texans

a new form of public education, a hybrid of government schools and private schools that is very similar to the public free school system established by the 1876 Texas Constitution.

Texans can no longer afford to pay the price exacted by the current status quo of our education system. The cost is paid in opportunity: personal dreams, economic growth, and quality of life. To create a system of public education that offers opportunity to all children, Texans must choose choice.

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