

## Denying dropouts a second chance

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### Denying dropouts a second chance

Editor:

Albert Einstein once said the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results. This sounds oddly familiar in the world of [education](#) policy. Throw more money at it and expect different results.

The public school establishment clings to the notion that schools can only get better if they get more money. Yet per-student spending in Texas has almost doubled in the past 10 years - growing from \$5,282 per student in 1995-1996 to \$9,629 in 2005-2006 - with little to show for it in student achievement on [top](#) of the thousands of students dropping out of school entirely.

In fact, more than 131,000 Texas students did not graduate with their class in 2006. This statistic is even more appalling considering the fact that African-American and Hispanic students are much more likely to drop out. Broken down by ethnicity, 57.7 percent of African-American students, 54.6 percent of Hispanic students and 75.9 percent of white students graduated with their class in 2006.

A recent proposal from the Texas Education Agency to provide grants for dropout recovery pilot programs has drawn fire from the public school lobby. Under TEA's proposal, the grants would provide funds to a variety of educational settings including public schools, charter schools, universities and some private schools, if they do one thing: get dropouts, or those at risk of dropping out, back into school to work on their diploma. This arrangement would not divert funds from public schools, but establishes a bounty for bringing kids back to complete their education.

The fundamental question, then, is should the [state](#) put a priority on getting dropouts back into school by paying any educational institution that can convince the student to return?

For the public school establishment it seems the answer is a resounding "no!" These education groups show their true colors as they wield political power to protect their self-interests rather than meet the needs of students that public schools have failed to reach.

Most disappointingly, many in the public school lobby seem satisfied if they lose funding due to a student dropping out of school, but object to allowing those funds to follow a student to their classroom setting that rescues them from dropping out.

As Texas struggles with a dropout crisis, policymakers should also explore new solutions to catch those students who continue to fall through the cracks. Dropouts desperately need a second chance at an education and should be given a variety of options - be it in a public, charter, virtual or private school - that meets their individual needs.

The public should demand that the state do something to address the dropout crisis and reject those who defend and protect the status quo that has so obviously failed to meet this need. Instead of dismissing dropouts as impossible to serve, we hope dropouts will be given the opportunity for this second chance through a variety of innovative approaches, and we hope public schools step up to the plate along with other educational settings as they compete to bring these students back to

school.

If experience has taught us anything, it is that doing the same thing just isn't good enough.

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Via the Internet

### **How can it be? It's a puzzle to me**

Editor:

In reading the coverage of the board of directors of the Brownsville Navigation District debating whether or not to allow a major company to do business and bring [jobs](#) to the Port of Brownsville, my thoughts turned back to the man whose vision made the canal possible.

Fritz Hofmokel, the man who developed the BND envisioned the district to be the largest cotton-exporting port in the world, the shrimp capital of the United States - if not the world - a major point of importation of bananas, a home to myriad stevedore concerns, and a home to other major shipping industries.

In his vision, Hofmokel envisioned the port to become the largest and the most economically viable engine of development in the region. This, coupled with the area's superior productive work force, provided a dynamic force that drove the economy forward and raised wages and profits across the board.

Consequently, the port was the entryway for cargo from all over the world and Brownsville came to be known - appropriately - as the "Crossroads of the Hemisphere."

After that auspicious beginning, the port was booming, not only economically but also culturally, providing our residents with great opportunities and hopes for a higher education and quality of life. Those were good times, with local residents seeing a chance for their children to attain a higher level of education and a hope for a higher standard of living for everyone.

Had this pattern been followed and Hofmokel's vision been realized, this area should have been in the top levels of economic strength, educational attainment, and a well-set pattern of success that would have established Brownsville as a major metropolis and a place where a working person could aspire to a decent to top-level middle- and above-average income and lifestyle.

But neither Hofmokel, nor for that matter anyone else, suspected that forces would gather to bring down this vision of hope and success. Those forces conspired (I said it: a conspiracy) with greedy economic predators who feared an educated population, and manipulated the political process so that righteous people who wanted a fair distribution of the wealth and power were kept from attaining decision-making positions at the port.

Even Hofmokel - a German citizen - was forced into exile to Cuba during World War II, partly as a result of machinations by those who were affronted by his dedication to better the BND, and not the political powers of kingmakers in South Texas. Rather than have himself placed in a concentration camp as German foreign nationals were, he chose to remain alive in Cuba and