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Indriago, Druart: Money isn't the only answer to school woes

By Kristen Indriago, Nancy Druart

Texas Public Policy Foundation

This past Saturday, Save Texas Schools held a rally at the Texas State Capitol. The agenda promoted at that rally touched on a number of education issues, but most centrally a call for more funding to Texas education and opposition to education scholarships to attend private schools.

The reality is that while there are a number of problems in Texas education, pumping more money into the system is too simple a fix. Once you adjust for cost of living, Texas funds its students at 97 percent of the national average on a per-pupil average daily attendance basis.

If we want to address issues such as our troubling 26 percent dropout rate or improving academic performance, we must try a different path.

While Texas public schools and educators work hard to serve the needs of their students, the state is still in need of education reform that addresses the needs of all Texas schoolchildren. Just because a student lives in proximity to a given public school — even an excellent public school — does not necessarily mean that school is best suited to address the needs of that particular child.

The best thing we can do as a state to meet the needs of every student is create a competitive, flexible education system that equalizes education opportunities regardless of socioeconomic status.

We have little such flexibility in Texas education. Our total lack of private school choice, cap on public charter schools, limited parental and voter control at the local district level, and restrictive policies regarding online learning make for an inherently noncompetitive education system.

There is a demand for such flexibility among Texas parents. At last count, the Texas Charter School Association estimated more than 100,000 students on waitlists to attend public charter schools in Texas. This does not factor in the number of parents who might wish for their child to attend a private school if that were a viable option.

Incorporating such parental freedoms into Texas' education system would not adversely affect our public schools. In fact, one of the best examples of how competition can benefit a public school system is our home-grown Horizon Scholarship Program, a privately funded scholarship program that operated within the confines of San Antonio's Edgewood Independent School District from 1998 to 2008.

During the run of the Horizon program, test scores improved not only for students that received a scholarship but also for students attending public schools in the Edgewood district, as public schools competed with private education providers (and excelled).

Additionally, teacher salary gains within Edgewood outpaced those of teachers in surrounding districts, and the district's collective dropout rate fell 30.1 percent during the run of the program.

Competition has proven beneficial in other states as well; a 2008 study by the Florida Department of Education determined that their long-running education tax credit program had been of benefit to their public school system as a whole.

So what can Texas do to make their education system more competitive? Comprehensive reform is the answer. We need education scholarships for all students so that private education is an option for all Texans, not just wealthy Texans, with a particular focus on scholarships for special needs students.

We must remove the cap on Texas charter schools and make it easier for voters to drive the home-rule charter school creation process.

We must strengthen the Texas parent-trigger law so parents of students at a struggling Texas public school are empowered to make changes on behalf of their children.

We must improve online and blended learning opportunities in Texas by giving school districts more flexibility with their budgets and removing needless restrictions on distance learning.

We all want nothing more than the best for our children. These reforms will make Texas education more competitive and drive efficiency and accountability from the bottom up, as parents will have a more open market from which to choose an education path that best suits the needs of their child.



These types of reforms — not blindly putting more money into our school system — will improve education opportunities for all Texas schoolchildren, but especially lower income schoolchildren and schoolchildren with special needs.

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- Posted by AngelBarron at 8:52 a.m. Feb. 25, 2013
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It is all about the money. The teachers' unions fear-monger this issue all the time. They complain about the kids that will suffer if government schools do not keep the monopoly they have over our education tax dollars. But, they really care about the

dollars, more than about the children. I

For 41-years I was an activist for the Hispanic community urging the school districts to do something about the bad schools that were failing our minority kids. I waited for 41 years for improvement. It never happened.

The teachers' union joined my "activist" organization so that we never should consider changing the status quo for keeping all tax dollars going to the public schools. The status quo never changed.

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