



Testimony

Testimony to the State Board of Education

by Dr. Richard A. Johnson, Ed.D., Director, Booker T. Washington Initiative

Good morning members of the State Board of Education,

My name is Dr. Richard Johnson, and I serve as the director of the Booker T. Washington Initiative within the Texas Public Policy Foundation. I am truly honored to appear before you today, on this auspicious occasion, to express my support for Classical Education in Texas.

Classical education involves introducing the mind to the “great ideas” through the “great books” in order that students can effectively join the “great conversations” of the ages. When we think of Galileo, Martin Luther, Socrates, Shakespeare, Charles Darwin, Albert Einstein, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and Martin Luther King, we are reminded of the single thread that binds them together—a classical education. A deeply rooted knowledge of “how to think, how to be virtuous and what to do” are the pillars of classical education. It seeks to stir the heart and the intellect to invite curiosity and ignite a passion for learning. It is less about training for a specific, temporal vocation and more about learning to think and live with an eternal purpose.

Classical education cuts through the grain of human nature and the natural human development as God created it. Thus, the usual progression in classical programs are: (1) Grammar (Elementary School) which focusses on learning the structure of language and of the world around you; (2) Logic (Middle School) is about the principles of right reasoning in order to think well; and (3) Rhetoric (High School) is centered on learning how to bring in all of one’s learning together and express it in a coherent and wise manner.

“An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity” (Dr. Martin Luther King, the philosophy professor at Morehouse College would once say). It is important to note that before he became famous as an activist; Dr. King was classically educated. This education gave him the capacity to see and articulate human dignity, when so many other people had a blind spot and missed it.

MLK knew why racism was wrong; he could explain it and defend his position all because he was fluent in the great books and the Bible. He understood and could explain the justice owed to the image of God in each person—not before he walked with Socrates, Gandhi, Hegel, Kant, and Nietzsche. It was the inspiration of Henry David Theroux that laid the foundation for the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965—deploying the tactics of civil disobedience. “There will never be a really free and enlightened state until the state comes to recognize the individual as a higher and independent power, from which all its own power and authority are derived,” said Theroux.

Houston is the largest city within the state of Texas, with a school district boasting nearly 200,000 students, and yet it has less than five classical schools. Academic performance has reached an all-time low mainly due to lost learning brought on by school closings as a result of the COVID 19 pandemic. Violence in and around American

schools continue to elevate, with over 94% occurring within public schools (Cato Center for Educational Freedom). In light of the turbulent times in which we are living and the reality that far too many of our children are struggling to regain their academic footing, along with a desperate need for enhanced educational options in a safe environment, I strongly urge you to expand classical education by approving classical school charters during this cycle!

Thank you so much for allowing me to speak and if you have any additional questions, please feel free to contact me at Rjohnson@Texaspolicy.com.



Richard A. Johnson, Ed.D., is the director of the Texas Public Policy Foundation's Booker T. Washington Initiative, which examines the effects of public policy on African-American communities.

Previously, Johnson served as a chief of staff in both municipal and state governments. As chief of staff for a Houston City Council member, he played a significant role in drafting and navigating policies related to public safety, public works, and housing and community development. During the 85th and 86th Texas Legislatures, he served as a chief of staff and a senior policy analyst for a House member and worked on education, public safety, healthcare, and workforce development legislation.

An educator for more than 20 years, Johnson has extensive experience in teaching and research. He worked as a research assistant at the University of Texas Mental Science Institute, studying the efficacy of counseling and pharmacological therapy on cocaine and heroin addicts. He began counseling inner-city adolescent males and founded an academy for troubled boys which provided education, discipline, and residential substance abuse treatment. In 2007 he began teaching and researching in the areas of psychology and academic performance.

Johnson was the president of the Louisiana Prison Chapel Foundation for nearly two decades, building more than 20 churches inside prison walls. In addition, Johnson served as the co-founder and second president of 100 Black Men Metropolitan Houston, vice president of development for 100 Black Men San Antonio, and co-chair of the education committee of the NAACP, Houston.

Johnson served in the U.S. Army after college, obtaining the rank of sergeant. He was selected to play for the All-Army basketball team.

A Texas native, Johnson has an Ed.D. in education administration and an M.A. in clinical psychology from Texas Southern University. He received a B.A. in history and government from Wiley College.

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The public is demanding a different direction for their government, and the Texas Public Policy Foundation is providing the ideas that enable policymakers to chart that new course.

