

PARENTAL CHOICE NEEDED

Kent Grusendorf: Voucher push benefits public education

KENT GRUSENDORF Guest columnist

Sep 16, 2024

I read a column by Waco Independent School District board member Angelo Ochoa [**“Only failure in schools is lack of funding,”** Sept. 5] who claimed the real issue in public education is that it simply isn’t getting enough funding and that legislative answers proposed such as school choice and increased academic standards will only make problems worse.

As a proud graduate of the Waco school system many years ago, I strongly disagree.

Funding is not the issue. Rather, it’s how the money is spent. Over the past two decades the Texas Legislature has increased funding in public education by more than \$23 billion. Texas education spending alone is more than the entire budget of most states.

Miracles are indeed happening in many public schools. Teachers are doing fantastic things. But they’re doing them in spite of bad administration and bad financial mismanagement, not because of them. For example: In 2023, Waco ISD spent more than the state average per student. Yet test scores are lower than the state average: Only 24 percent of Waco ISD students can do math at grade-level expectations. And only 31 percent can read at grade level, a particularly devastating predictor of economic and societal success in life. That means three quarters of Waco kids are far behind in math and two thirds are far behind in reading.

People are also reading...

- 1 **Up in smoke: Hail Mary dooms Baylor in conference loss to Colorado**
 - 2 **Centex Roundup Week 4: Rockets pull off impressive upset of No. 2 Glen Rose**
 - 3 **Fetsch, Axtell blast by Crawford in wake of Leathers injury**
 - 4 **Brice Cherry: Colorado's show-stopping finish stings Bears, but they'll be back**
-

At the same time, many bureaucrats and school board members claim that the only solution is funding — and that school choice would damage the system. Wrong. The Waco ISD board of trustees belongs to associations such as the Texas Association of School Boards, which lobbied lawmakers to kill the funding bill in the recent legislative session because they feared school choice.

That's right. The very people complaining about funding and school choice are the ones who ultimately rejected billions of dollars in public school funding because it came with school choice. The Legislature offered more than \$7 billion to schools last year and the proposal was shot down. Waco ISD alone would have received \$16 million or an extra \$1,409 per student over two years.

The issue is clear: It's not funding, it's school bureaucrats and woke unions that don't want competition. This, despite the fact teachers' pay would increase with school choice amid new competition for their invaluable services. That's right, unions actually lobbied against the interest of their members.

Enough is enough. The school establishment killed additional funding and parental choice in last year's legislative session.

Yes, we must adequately fund public schools, but we must also make sure the money is being spent well — and not on things such as overpriced consultants, lobbying or lavish buildings. Just last year, Waco ISD reported to the Texas Education Agency

that it spent almost \$5 million on consultants, association dues, lobbying and other “professional services.” In short, the district spent your tax dollars to lobby against the public interest.

These expenditures don’t help kids. They pad the pockets of education profiteers steering money out of the classroom and into their wallets. If we want to strengthen public schools, we must ensure the money goes into classrooms — and doing so means taking power away from administrators and unions. We must put the power where it belongs — with our teachers and parents.

We can do so by cooperating, not fighting, with the governor and other state leaders who want to do what’s best for kids and for Texas teachers. We can do this by passing parental choice in education.

Kent Grusendorf is former chair of the Texas House of Representatives Public Education Committee, a former member of the State Board of Education, president of Liberty for the Kids and a graduate of Waco High School (downtown campus). He is author of the book “Saving Public Education: Setting Teachers Free to Teach.”

Yes, we must adequately fund public schools, but we must also make sure the money is being spent well — and not on things such as overpriced consultants, lobbying or lavish buildings.