

# EDITORIAL: The future of Texas depends on this

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The Baptist General Convention of Texas Executive Board made several far-reaching decisions during its spring meeting May 21-22. As significant as all of them were, the influence of one could extend well beyond the others.

First, the board [approved a 15-member search committee](#) to nominate the convention's next executive director. This leader will help shape and focus the convention during the coming years, and the influence could extend for decades.



Second, the board [accepted the suggestion](#) of Stephen Wakefield, the convention's attorney, not to file lawsuits to recover funds lost in the Rio Grande Valley church-starting scandal. "The likelihood of recovery of significant funds is speculative at best," Wakefield told the board. Although many Texas Baptists are disappointed, his logic is solid. And while criminal

charges still may be filed, this brings one portion of this sad saga to a close.

Third, the board allocated proceeds from a recent gift to help retire the debt on Breckenridge Village at Tyler. The ministry to special-needs adults has been strapped since it opened about a decade ago. By ensuring financial viability, the board can secure care for many of God's children for generations.

But the most far-reaching consequence could flow from a report the board passed along for follow-up action.

About two years ago, the board formed a task force to help Hispanic youth finish high school and achieve higher education. The Hispanic Education Task Force created a paint-by-numbers portrait of poverty:

- Hispanics comprise 14 percent of the U.S. population, the nation's largest and fastest-growing minority.
- More than 31 percent of Hispanic Texans age 25 and older received less than a ninth-grade education.
- Fifty-one percent of Hispanic Texas adults do not have a high-school diploma or GED.
- The teen pregnancy rate for Hispanic dropouts is more than 20 percent, far higher than the rate for Anglo dropouts.
- The average U.S.-born Hispanic dropout earns just \$6,500 per year, compared to \$7,300 for a white dropout.
- Nationally, Hispanic household wealth equals less than 10 percent of the wealth owned by Anglos.
- Because so many Hispanic parents are poorly educated, they are not equipped to help their children learn and stay in school, so the cycle of

poverty spirals.

The Hispanic Education Task Force cited numerous reasons Texas Baptists should get involved. Reasons ranged from impact on the Texas economy and society, to the future of Texas Baptist universities, to “lack of leadership and limited financial support” for churches. But it also pointed to an ultimate reason for helping Hispanic youth get an education: “We are called as the Body of Christ to equip people to fulfill God’s purpose in their lives.”

The Executive Board authorized its Missions and Ministries Committee to lead in responding to recommendations to keep Hispanic children in school and help many of them earn college degrees. Bottom line: Churches of all ethnic backgrounds must open our arms and our hearts We will transform Texas—creating a bright future and a hope-filled eternity—when we become known as the people who refuse to let Hispanic kids fall through the cracks of the educational system.

Felipe Garza, the task force’s chairman and an executive with Buckner International, provided a poignant reminder of the proposals’ promise: He grew up in an alcohol-plagued, abusive, impoverished home. But a Baptist pastor knocked on his door and not only introduced Garza to Jesus, but also showed him how education could unlock the bonds of poverty and abuse.

And that’s why congregations will provide the key to the task force’s solutions, Garza said, stressing, “It can only be done through the local church.”