

Group rallies pastors as advocates for Texas schoolchildren

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FORT WORTH—Charles Johnson, executive director of [Pastors for Texas Children](#), wants to recruit Christian leaders across the state to support quality public education for all Texas children.

Charles Johnson became involved in advocating for children in public schools in 2008. Suzii Paynter, then executive director of the [Christian Life Commission](#) of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, asked him to represent Texas Baptists in an organization called the [Coalition for Public Schools in Austin](#). The organization was created primarily to oppose the privatization of public schools—school vouchers or any policy that takes public money and diverts it toward private educational ends.

“The interest of the BGCT against school vouchers is church/state separation, a time-honored Baptist principle,” said Johnson, who served as pastor of Texas Baptist churches in Lubbock and San Antonio.

After working during the 2009 legislative session, he was asked to serve as co-chair of the organization for the 2011 and 2013 legislative sessions.

In the process, he grew “convicted about the power and the necessity of education for all our children, regardless of race or background—especially economic condition. I think it is a foundational institution of our social order,” Johnson said.

Johnson also began to feel the BGCT would be served better by organizing

pastors and church leaders in local communities rather than concentrating efforts in Austin during legislative sessions.

Recruiting to support public education

He suggested to Paynter: “We have faith communities in 1,000 Texas towns. Let’s go recruit those Christian leaders to support public education.”

That marked the beginning of Pastors for Texas Children, formally launched in July 2013. The BGCT remains a partner of the organization it founded but does not fund it. The group depends on the financial donations of churches, groups and individuals.

Pastors for Texas Children seeks to involve churches in providing “wrap-around care and ministry” for individual schools, Johnson said.

“We want to connect every church to a public school to do that care and to build those relationships to provide food in weekend backpacks for poor kiddos who don’t have a nutritious meal to eat, after-school mentoring and school supplies. One of the great outrageous crimes, I think, is that public school teachers pay for school supplies out of their own already inadequate salaries,” he said.

“We want to provide spiritual support for that principal and those teachers. We want to empower those schools for the common good in every community.”

The organization focuses on building relationships, he noted.

“Out of those relationships, we advocate with that community’s elected official for the advancement of public education and funding,” he said.

Showing care and love for community schools

As churches build credibility by showing individualized care and love for schools in their communities, he added, church leaders then can approach policy makers and say, “We’re going to hold you accountable, because we represent congregations of people who vote, and we want you to support public education as this basic building block of God’s common good for all of God’s children.”

Many churches already are involved in lovingly caring for neighborhood schools, but few understand the impact they can have through working with state representatives and senators, he added.

Churches that join Pastors for Texas Children are asked to sponsor a teacher-appreciation event each year. Churches also develop relationships with their local superintendent and principals, offering spiritual and tangible support. They also are asked to visit their legislator in Austin and urge elected representatives to visit school campuses.

Members are not required to donate financially to the organization, but many do.

For organizational purposes, Pastors for Texas Children divided the state into 20 regions, and at least one church leader from each of those regions is represented on the organization’s steering committee.

700 members across Texas

About 750 people from more than 400 churches have joined the organization. Not all are pastors, nor are they all Baptist.

“Most of our ministers are bedrock, Bible-believing, conservative pastors of all denominations,” Johnson said.

As the organization becomes better known, superintendents are beginning to contact Johnson about coming to their community to talk to faith leaders.

More than 50 educational meetings have taken place across the state.

For more information, [click here](#) or [email Johnson](#).