

Texas lawmakers urged to restore funding for public education

January 14, 2015

WACO—Soon after Texas Comptroller Glenn Hager released a revenue estimate projecting lawmakers will have about \$113 billion available for general-purpose spending over two years, a group of Texas pastors and school administrators heard a clear call to restore cuts the Texas Legislature made in public education during the last session.



George Mason (left), pastor of Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas, and Kyle Henderson, pastor of First Baptist Church in Athens, visit during a Pastors for Texas Children gathering at Baylor University's Truett Seminary. (PHOTO / Robert Rogers / Baylor University) "We have the money to do it. Do we have the will to do it?" Charles Foster Johnson, executive director of [Texas Pastors for](#)

[Children](#), asked about 200 ministers and educators during a luncheon at Baylor University's [Truett Theological Seminary](#). Texas Pastors for Children, an advocacy group that encourages churches and their leaders to support quality public education for all students in the state, sponsored the event.

In 2011, Texas lawmakers cut funding by more than \$500 per child. In 2013, they restored only a portion—about 60 percent, leaving a continuing deficit in public education funding, Johnson noted.

“More money is not the entire answer, but quality education is not happening without proper funding,” he said, calling for an additional \$7 billion in public school funding.

Church leaders should raise their voices in opposition to any efforts to privatize public education or divert public money to private schools, Johnson insisted. Texas has a constitutional obligation to provide free education to all children, he noted.

“All means all. Every child is accepted,” he said, contrasting public schools that educate children of varied abilities and low socio-economic backgrounds with private schools with selective admissions criteria.

More than 60 percent of Texas schoolchildren are eligible for free or reduced lunches due to poverty—about 3 million of the 5 million public school students in the state, Johnson noted.

Baylor President Ken Starr likewise emphasized the importance of public education.



Charles Foster Johnson, executive director of Pastors for Texas Children, visits with ministers and school administrators during a gathering at Baylor University's Truett Seminary. (PHOTO / Robert Rogers / Baylor University) "We have an absolute and total obligation to our children," Starr said.

He cited a 1785 quote by John Adams: "The whole people must take upon themselves the education of the whole people and be willing to bear the expenses of it. There should not be a district of one mile square without a school in it, not founded by a charitable individual, but maintained at the public expense of the people themselves."

While Starr affirmed the role of private and religious schools, he noted they serve only a small segment of the population.

"Ninety percent of American children will be educated in public schools," he said.

Starr urged church leaders to encourage and support local schools and affirm their principals and teachers. He cited one teacher at San Antonio's Sam Houston High School—Roberta Mahan, who died Jan. 3 at age 97—who influenced his life by encouraging and challenging him. Every day,

he noted, public school teachers shape the future by telling students: “You have gifts. You have talents.”

Johnson similarly cited what he called “a personal Mount Rushmore” of schoolteachers who influenced his life for good. Public schoolteachers who labor “impossible hours at low pay” are “doing God’s work” by helping children to learn how to name their world, he insisted.

For their sake, and for the sake of Texas’ children, churches need to provide “wrap-around” care for local schools and advocate for quality public education, he asserted.

“Our future depends on it,” he said.