

# Editorial: ‘Education freedom’ contradicts religious freedom

March 1, 2023

“Education freedom” is a euphemism that cuts the legs out from under arguments opposing public-funded private education. After all, who’s going to argue against freedom?

We need to see the problems “education freedom” poses and respond to them. Its conflict with religious freedom is one problem Baptists should oppose.

## Promoters of ‘education freedom’

Who is pushing the idea of “education freedom?”

The [American Federation for Children](#) is a Dallas-based proponent of school choice. Several on its board and staff have strong religious commitments, much of which is Christian. There’s nothing wrong with that, but it’s something to be aware of.

The federation hosts the [Education Freedom Pledge](#) website, which displays a map of the United States and lists lawmakers in each state who have signed the pledge.

The pledge reads: “I pledge to support policies that promote parental rights in education and educational freedom. This includes the right of parents to voice their opinions at school board meetings and to take their children’s taxpayer-funded education dollars to the education providers of their choosing—whether it be a public, private, charter, or home school.”

# Stumping for ‘education freedom’

It may not matter that Texas Gov. Greg Abbott is not listed as a signer, since he is advocating publicly for school choice and “education freedom.” During his [2023 State of the State address](#) on Feb. 16, Abbott made “education freedom” an [emergency item](#).

Designating something an emergency item allows Texas lawmakers to vote on it immediately, rather than waiting until March 10.

Abbott spoke at Parent Empowerment Night events at [Annapolis Christian Academy](#) in Corpus Christi on Jan. 31; [Central Texas Christian School](#) in Temple on Feb. 21; [Park Meadows Academy](#), a Christian school in Corsicana, on Feb. 27; and [Covenant Christian School](#) in Conroe on Feb. 28. He is expected to speak at another Parent Empowerment Night event on March 2 at [San Jacinto Christian Academy](#) in Amarillo.

It makes sense Abbott would visit so many Christian schools. In Texas, most private schools are Christian. But to visit Christian schools to promote “education freedom” is worth flagging. Will he take the same message to Islamic, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu or secular private schools. Better still, will he take it to any public schools? Perhaps he has, and I haven’t seen it yet.

## Issues with ‘education freedom’

I have some critiques of so-called “education freedom.” For one, parents already are free to “voice their opinions at school board meetings,” despite the pledge’s suggestion to the contrary.

Parents also are free to place their children in a different school. It might require relocating the whole family, paying a nonresident tuition fee to attend a different school district, homeschooling, or being accepted by and paying for a private school. Parents already have these options.

Yes, I know these options are not equally accessible throughout Texas. My children started school in a small, rural public school district—a Title I district, at that. There were no private schools, and we couldn't have afforded the tuition if there were.

My wife and I volunteered several years to help our school district provide the best education it could to our community. Our district needed every dime it could get from Austin, which wasn't enough. It definitely didn't need any of its funding diverted elsewhere. "Education freedom's" funding aims would work to starve rural school districts that cover most of Texas.

Private schools don't have to accept all applicants, and they don't accept them all. Therefore, for all children to receive a high-quality education requires properly funding public schools. Diverting public funds to private schools works against properly funding public schools, creating an even greater need for private schools to accept more students than they do or will. It's unsustainable.

## **The religious issue with 'education freedom'**

A seemingly more subtle problem with "education freedom"—one that should cause all Baptists to resist it—is the religious implications of taxpayer funds going to private institutions.

Many Baptists voiced their opposition to their tax dollars being used to pay for abortions, citing religious freedom concerns among others. Baptists should be equally concerned about taxpayer-funded private education—most of which is religious.

Baptists should ask: Do they want to fund Islamic, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu or other religious schools? Likewise, should Muslims, Jews, Buddhists,

Hindus and others pay for Christian schools they don't attend? Baptists historically have said "no." We should still.

I agree we need quality education for all children. Private options may be what some need to achieve that end. My parents thought so. They placed my sister and me in a private Christian school for primary and secondary education.

But calling it "education freedom" is disingenuous. Besides the ethical, financial, social and political issues it raises, it conflicts with religious freedom. For Baptists, this is reason enough to resist efforts to fund private education with public funds.

But there's another reason we should resist. Many Christians have given their lives to educate children in public schools. Many of our fellow Christians are in classrooms and administrative offices doing their best to care for each and every child in ways that honor Christ and the law. They need our support. What would we say to them by sending that support elsewhere?

*CORRECTION (March 2, 2023): The date of the Amarillo Parent Empowerment Night event was corrected from March 1 to March 2.*

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