

Analysis: Comparing education funding positions side-by-side

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According to the Texas Constitution, education is an essential duty of the state: “A general diffusion of knowledge being essential to the preservation of the liberties and rights of the people, it shall be the duty of the Legislature of the State to establish and make suitable provision for the support and maintenance of an efficient system of public free schools.”

For Texas Baptists, education is a vital component of human flourishing, which, according to the [Christian Life Commission website](#), seeks “to enhance the development of a person’s God-given abilities and purposes.”

With Baptists’ historical commitment to education and to the separation of church and state, what is the proper relationship between state funding for education and private K-12 schools? Is this a further fulfillment of our commitment to human flourishing through robust educational opportunities, or a violation of our understanding of the church and state relationship?

Bobby Broyles, president of [Pastors for Texas Children](#), and Larry Taylor, head of school for [Prestonwood Christian Academy](#), address the proper use of public funding for public and private education in Texas.

Equal concern for quality education for all children

Broyles and Taylor care deeply about the education of Texas children and recognize the system of education in Texas needs help, particularly through the efficient use of educational funding through the state.

Broyles:

“Our main purpose is to encourage and empower churches to adopt their local schools in order to make a difference tangibly in children’s lives ... [and] to remind our legislators that every child is important, and every child deserves a good education.”

Taylor:

“I am in full support of school finance reform that would improve the quality of education ... All children should have access to quality education. This should include those who choose a faith-based school. Let’s unite around the common good for all Texas children.”

Divergent views on funding education

While the ultimate goal of quality education is the same, the methods and processes for meeting the educational needs of the children of Texas differ.

Whereas Taylor promotes the concept of “school choice,” which could utilize either government funding or corporate government donations to assist with allowing children to attend private schools, Broyles stresses the perceived impact of diverting any state revenue to private K-12 education.

Broyles:

“You have heard it said about vouchers: ‘It is my money; I should spend it

how I please.’ Of course, this is not true for 99 percent of the people who say that. If the average school voucher is \$5,500, then that means a person would have to pay that much in school taxes. Statewide, very few homes are taxed at that rate ... What is disturbing is that many Christians think it is a good idea to take money from an already strapped system and give it to private schools.”

Taylor:

“School choice is about the freedom of parents to provide the best educational opportunity for their children, the right to select public, private or homeschooling. This right should be available to every family in Texas. Low-income families and families in high poverty communities continue to be the most neglected when it comes to choosing the best school option for their child.”

Church and state concerns related to education

When Texas Baptists discuss school finance, the discussion inevitably turns to the proper role between the church and the state.

One side typically stresses separation, which would prohibit the use of public money for private education, while the other side is more comfortable with accommodation, allowing the lines between church and state to be blurred for the perceived betterment of a particular circumstance.

Broyles:

“Vouchers violate separation of church and state, a principle traditionally championed by Baptists. When a private school takes money, one of two things happens. Either the school eventually will be controlled by the government, or the private school has a tremendous advantage over the public school by not having to follow the regulations public schools are required to follow.”

Taylor:

“Texas tax dollars are already used for faith-based education. If using tax revenue for faith-based education violates the ‘right of conscience,’ then this violation has been taking place for many years at Texas universities. Texas public tax dollars already assist families—especially low-income families—in sending their children to faith-based universities.”

Public versus private educational outcomes

In addition to the financial question, the debate over the proper use of public funds for education also centers on the equality afforded to every student in the state.

Is it possible for private schools to do all that public schools can do? Or inevitably, if public money is diverted, will students be helped or left behind?

According to Taylor, the results of programs like the [Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program](#) reveal significant improvement for all students in the program.

While Broyles agrees that many private schools do very well, he contends that private education does not improve student achievement compared to public education.

Broyles:

“Public schools look for opportunities to include, not exclude, kids. Uniqueness is embraced. Over and over, there are examples of teachers reaching out to the poor, the hurting and the rejected. Many spend up to \$1,000 of their own money annually to make sure these students have what they need. It is unconscionable to think it is acceptable to take even more money out of their pockets. We simply cannot allow our leaders to turn their backs on our educators or our kids ... The public schools that struggle the most are those that cannot afford the fine arts, sports and many other key educational tools. We should be putting more money in those schools, not taking money out.”

Taylor:

“School choice is about the freedom of parents to provide the best educational opportunity for their children, the right to select public, private or homeschooling. This right should be available to every family in Texas. Low-income families and families in high poverty communities continue to be the most neglected when it comes to choosing the best school option for their child ... public and non-public schools can work together for the good of society.”

People of good will want to see Texas excel educationally—whether it be public, private or homeschooling. The discussion of how best to accomplish this goal surely will continue. Thankfully, we live in a country that allows for vigorous debate over highly imperative issues.

Baptists in Texas continue to contribute to this discussion as they strive to meet the mandate to provide the opportunity for children to flourish educationally and to glorify God in all aspects of their lives.

Jack Goodyear is the dean of the Cook School of Leadership and professor of political science at Dallas Baptist University.

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