

Raising the Value of Education

By Bobby J Rigues
Brigues@att.net

Most of us believe education is a priority. Legislators echo education as the highest priority. However, in the world of politics, advocacy for education is found with an asterisk – political party interest sometimes comes first.

I am reminded of a room full of eleven year olds attending a cotillion. Regardless of etiquette, boys gravitate to one side and girls to the other. As a legislative body, when political party interest trumps the public's interest, the same is found - most of the R's on one side and the D's on the other.

Education is a nonpartisan topic – not belonging to any one political party. Educators and school board members do their best to represent the public in this impartial fashion.

Attend any educational conference and you will find the labels “Republican” and “Democrat” absent – as if checked in at the door. We do not discuss issues, problems, or solutions under the constraint of any political philosophy. In collaborations and conciliations, we do not turn to one another and say, “by the way, are you a Republican or Democrat?”

We share this crazy idea that educating ALL children today will insure a prosperous society for everyone tomorrow.

The practice of good politics is necessary – evident in the foundation for independence forged by our founding fathers. However, when “respect” is found absent, it can be ugly.

While publicly advocating educational issues, I have found myself tied with political ropes and thrown under the bus a few times. Yes, I know - freedom of speech works both ways. Truth be told, I wouldn't have it any other way. Too many people have given their lives to protect this freedom. The least we can do is practice it respectfully.

Some of my columns have created feedback. Most are statements of support, others are questions of concern, and then there those involving the proverbial bus. Regardless of where they come from, all are equally important and respected. My teacher once said, “Questions are good; it means we are thinking.”

Of all the questions asked, one stands above all others. It was not about the 4.6 million students marking Texas as the second highest enrollment state in the nation. It did not mention the additional 80,000 students expected to walk the halls this school year. And it left out the fact that simply adding more dollars to an already broken school finance system is not the “cure all” answer.

The question was straight to the point – five words: “Who can fix this mess?”

The answer is as simple as the question itself. “We” the public can fix this. At the root of the problem, we need to raise the value of education - not in terms of dollars, but in terms of importance.

I fear our founding fathers valued education more than we do today. Their wisdom found the priority to embed education as a cornerstone in our Texas Constitution. We need to protect that wisdom.

“We” is the answer. We must respectfully demand our legislators to place political party interest aside and work together. We must also support and hold our local school districts to high accountability standards. If we can raise the value of education, solutions will be found. Together, we can Make Education a Priority.



Bobby J Rigues Aledo ISD Board of Trustee
Leadership TASB Class of 09 Master Trustee
Make Education a Priority Initiative
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