

CC3660 11.10.23 Friday

Fort Worth (Texas) area clergy and advocates for public education speak out against vouchers and for public education.

The attached [opinion](#) by some religious leaders in Texas is relevant to the EdChoice voucher litigation in Ohio. These influential Texans support the traditional view that church and state should be separated and that the public common school system is essential to maintain the common good.

The Ohio EdChoice voucher scheme is antithetical to the separation of church and state and the common good.

Texas schools don't need vouchers. They need more money, focus on education that works | Opinion

BY MICHAEL EVANS, MARY SPRADLIN AND BRIAN ZIMMERMAN

NOVEMBER 01, 2023 5:28 AM 00:00 56:49

School choice: Is it good for Fort Worth and Texas? Hear about the school choice issue in the new Star-Telegram debate series "Beyond The Headline." The Star-Telegram and Texas A&M University Law School are hosting a policy discussion as the Legislature considers education savings accounts. BY STAR-TELEGRAM

We are Fort Worth- area clergy and advocates for public education, driven by our faith to support the well-being of our state's children. Our belief in community responsibility to provide the best possible education for every child is unwavering. The sad truth, however, is that we are falling short of this commitment.

Across Texas, our schools grapple with underfunding, overcrowded classrooms and overworked teachers. Educators face numerous challenges, including the disruptions brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. Most are disheartened by the increasingly politicized environment that undermines their abilities and integrity without a factual basis.

Some argue that the main issue in public education is teachers promoting controversial ideologies, undermining traditional values and neglecting core subjects such as reading and math. This is a false narrative.

As pastors, many of us regularly convene with school leaders to assess students' progress. Our teachers are driven to improve education for their kids in the classroom. Elementary teachers aim to help early readers move toward goals set by people with little understanding of the life of families who, for example, may have already had to move many times in their young child's life.

High school educators passionately prepare students for college, career and military success. Their dedication is inspiring, but our schools lack the necessary resources to achieve their desired success.

The claim that "public schools are failing" is overly simplistic and diverts attention from our collective responsibility. We fail our kids when we buy into this hysteria — part of a national playbook determined

CC3660 11.10.23 Friday

to undermine public education. We fail our kids when we have a historic \$32.7 billion state budget surplus but refuse to raise the basic allotment to fund schools.

We fail our kids when we blame school districts and teachers for campus ratings without speaking against a system that prioritizes one STAAR test score. We fail our kids when we refuse to acknowledge the correlation between poverty and school performance. We fail our kids when we buy into the claim that the best thing to do is to “pull kids out” of public schools.

Some argue that vouchers or education savings accounts, known as ESAs, would provide options for all students, but the numbers reveal otherwise. Texas has more than 347,000 kids in private schools and more than 5.5 million in public schools. An ESA allotment of \$8,000 for a child from the projected \$500 million the Legislature is considering would help only 57,500 students after administrative costs. The cost/benefit analysis of this plan doesn't add up.

As religious leaders, we understand the faith-based element of the voucher push. Recent political campaigns have been funded to exert a specific Christian influence in our politics and schools. We firmly believe in the First Amendment's call for the separation of church and state, allowing parents, not the state, to choose their children's religious instruction.

Vouchers will harm Texas. Advocating for funneling tax dollars to private and mostly religious schools reinforces a false narrative and defeatist attitude. Our children deserve better. Rather than investing billions into a plan that deepens the divide between the haves and have-nots, Texas should take the lead in identifying successful education models and allocate the necessary funds to replicate them.

Investing in our children, our most valuable resource, will yield lasting benefits by increasing the number of educated professionals and trained workers, thereby reducing poverty. Vouchers will not lead us there. It's time to prioritize the well-being of Texas students over outside influences and work together as a society to provide the best possible education for all our children.

Dr. Michael Evans is senior pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church of Mansfield. The Rev. Dr. Mary Spradlin is senior pastor of Arlington Heights United Methodist Church of Fort Worth. Rabbi Brian Zimmerman is senior rabbi at Temple Beth El in Fort Worth.

Also supporting this message are: Cantor Sheri Allen, Makom Shelanu Congregation, Fort Worth; the Rev. Armando Alvarado Jr., New Riverside United Methodist Church; the Rev. Dara Austin, retired, United Methodist Church; the Rev. Fred Bates Jr., Grace Methodist-Metroplex; the Rev. Dr. Michael Bell, Greater St. Stephen First Church-Baptist of Fort Worth; the Rev. Nancy L. Bennett, United Methodist Church Retired; Sarah Berel-Harrop, Texas Unitarian Universalist Justice Ministry; Dr. Tim Bruster, Central Texas Conference, United Methodist Church; the Rev. Leslie Byrd, New World United Methodist Church; the Rev. Dr. Wendell Campbell, West Mount Moriah Baptist, Fort Worth; the Rev. Rhonda Chambers, Saginaw United Methodist Church; the Rev. Michelle Clark, Arlington First United Methodist Church; the Rev. Tim Clifford, Arlington Heights United Methodist Church; the Rev. Dottie L. Cook, South Hills Christian Church; the Rev. Yvonne Coon, Hurst, First United Methodist Church; Dr. Will Cotton, Central Texas Conference United Methodist Church; the Rev. Debra Crumpton, United Methodist

Church, retired; the Rev. Joy Dister-Dominguez, Keller United Methodist Church; the Rev. Holly Dittrich, Coutts United Methodist Church, Weatherford; the Rev. Barbara Dunlap, United Methodist Church; the Rev. Ken Ehrke, Embrace United Church of Christ; the Rev. Ralph Emerson, Rising Star Baptist church; Michael Evans Sr., Bethlehem Baptist Church of Mansfield; the Rev. Beth Evers, University United Methodist Church, Fort Worth; the Rev. Sheila Fiorella, Good Shepherd United Methodist Church; the Rev. Lauren Frazier-McGuin, Chaplain, United Methodist Church; puck glass, rabbinic intern, Makom Shelanu Congregation, Fort Worth; the Rev. Dr. Katherine Godby, Justice Network of Fort Worth; Dr. Chris Hayes, First United Methodist Church, Arlington; the Rev. Dr. Katie Hays, Galileo Christian Church (Disciples of Christ); the Rev. Dr. Ann Hitt, Central Texas Conference, United Methodist Church; the Rev. Dr Robert Holloway, United Methodist Church, retired; Dr. Clifton Howard, Central Texas Conference, United Methodist Church; the Rev. Erin Sloan Jackson, New World United Methodist Church; the Rev. Kevin Johnson, All Souls Episcopal Church, Arlington; the Rev. Marcus Jones, UTA Wesley (United Methodist Church); the Rev. Kristin Klade, Kyrie Pub Church ELCA; the Rev. Dr. Alan Lobaugh, Christian Church in the Southwest Father John Luft, pastor, Saint Anne Independent Catholic Church; the Rev. Dr. Andy Mangum, regional minister and president; Christian Church in the Southwest; the Rev. Lona Mary, Saint Anne Independent Catholic Church; the Rev. Paul Massingill, Genesis United Methodist Church; the Rev. Kate McGee, Westminster Presbyterian Church, Arlington; the Rev. Terre McGill, Springtown United Methodist Church; Rabbi Ralph Mecklenburger, rabbi emeritus, Temple Beth El of Fort Worth; the Rev. Katie Meek, United Methodist Church; the Rev. Robyn Michalove, First Presbyterian Church of Fort Worth; the Rev. Nelda Murraine, coordinator for diversity, equity and inclusion, Central Texas Conference, United Methodist Church; Dr. Lisa Neslony, St. John the Apostle United Methodist Church; Pastor Rick Owen, Pathway Church; the Rev. Dr. Russ Peterman, University Christian Church; the Rev. Dawne Phillips, United Methodist Church, retired; the Rev. Jennifer Pick, Revive United Methodist Church; the Rev. Tom Plumbley senior pastor of First Christian Church of Fort Worth; the Rev. Jeremy Pope, board certified chaplain; the Rev. Dr. Ryon Price, senior pastor, Broadway Baptist Church of Fort Worth; the Rev. Daniel Reeves, Project Transformation CTC; the Rev. Philip Rhodes, district superintendent of the Central Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church; the Rev. Tomeca Richardson, Morningside United Methodist Church; the Rev. Nicholas Scott, Arborlawn United Methodist Church; the Rev. Lori Silvestri, SoulShine Ministries, Keller United Methodist Church; the Rev. Diane Smiley, retired; Pastor Curtis Smith, Trinity Metropolitan Community Church, Grand Prairie; the Rev. Jenny Spidell, Arborlawn United Methodist Church; the Rev. Brandie Spletzer, Epworth United Methodist Church; the Rev. Beth Stuyck, Project Transformation Central Texas, United Methodist Church; the Rev. Anne Tabor, Unity of Arlington; the Rev. Danny Tenney, Central Texas Conference, United Methodist Church; the Rev. Lee Trigg, Ash Lane United Methodist Church; the Rev. Jason Valendy, Keller United Methodist Church; the Rev. Kissa Vaughn, St. Barnabas United Methodist Church; Rev. Doug Vaughn, United Methodist Church; the Rev. Ginger Watson, Meadowbrook-Poly United Methodist Church; the Rev. Kristin Warthen, St. Andrew's United Methodist Church, Arlington; the Rev. Lori Williams, Saint Anne Independent Catholic Church; the Rev. Meg Witmer-Faile, Central Texas Conference, United Methodist Church; and the Rev. Matt Ybañez, First United Methodist Church Hurst.

Read more at: <https://www.star-telegram.com/opinion/opn-columns-blogs/other-voices/article281275983.html#storylink=cpy>