

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL



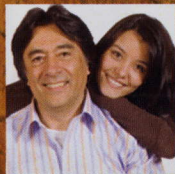
A Statement from the Texas Catholic Conference

From childhood, most of us have proudly recited the Pledge of Allegiance with its concluding, hopeful words, “one nation – under God – indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.” Our nation was conceived as a place wherein all people could exercise their basic human rights in an atmosphere of freedom. Among these rights is equal access to educational opportunities and resources so that each person can fully develop his or her potential.

For many years our state’s education system has provided generations of young people with the intellectual and social skills needed for just employment in the marketplace and success in higher education and the professions. As Texans, we are all rightfully proud of the many achievements of public education and yet, despite the vigilant efforts of teachers and administrators, students and parents, advocacy groups and government leaders, the system of public education in our state is increasingly unable to meet the rapidly growing and changing needs of our population.

Accordingly, citizens, educators, community leaders, and lawmakers, must come to terms with these hard realities:

- In Texas the estimated dropout rate among all high school students is approximately 50%. Among inner city Latinos and African-Americans the dropout rate is substantially higher.
- Of the 50 states, Texas ranks second in the nation in dropouts.
- Today, more than ever, a good education is necessary in order to live a productive and responsible life.
- Families, especially those whose limited resources prevent their access to better schools, must have the widest possible spectrum of school choice (ranging from traditional public schools to private schools).
- The competition of school choice serves the public good by strengthening public schools with increased student performance, reduced costs, and increased revenues from greatly reduced dropout rates.
- School choice provides access to better educational options thereby providing an escape from poverty.



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- K-12 is the only segment of education where an educational voucher is not used as a mechanism that makes broader educational options accessible.
- Among the western industrialized nations the United States is the only country that does not offer choice in education.

Society has an interest in the education and the well being of our children. It is in everyone's best interest that future generations of Texans receive a good education that prepares them to be contributing members of society. All students should receive the best education possible whether they attend a public school, a charter school, a private or parochial school, or are home schooled. However, these choices are meaningless if children are denied access to attend particular schools because of financial or other concerns.

Here in Texas, private and parochial schools play a very important role in educating children and many of these schools, especially Catholic schools, have been located in underserved inner city neighborhoods. Catholic schools, as part of their mission, make a concerted effort to serve these disadvantaged students and provide them with a quality education that is desired by their parents.

Our motivation for educational reform springs out of a deep conviction that we must correct long-standing social injustices in educational funding and a lack of access by providing real opportunities for parental choice. For the Church this is clearly a matter of justice because those families with limited educational choices are the very families trapped in a vicious cycle of poverty. A quality education is what these families need so their children can develop their fullest potential as participants in our democracy.

Social justice is not an option, but a fundamental tenet of Catholic social teaching. Parental choice in education is a right and a duty, a gift and a responsibility. We must join our voices in speaking out for the cause of educational opportunity for all.

The mission of the Texas Catholic Conference is to be the public policy arm of the bishops of Texas before the Texas legislature, the Texas delegation in Congress, and state agencies.

