

**Dallas Assembly**  
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**Home Rule Discussion**

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Thank you for this chance to discuss the proposed conversion of the Dallas Independent School District to a Home Rule Charter School District.

I attended DISD, taught in the district, served as a principal and spent 5 years as a trustee, earned a doctorate in Education, taught teachers at SMU, am professor emeritus of the Dallas Community College District, have five successful kids who graduated from DISD, and I served in the legislature when this really poorly constructed legislation was drafted.

I am a professional educator who has researched this issue from every conceivable side, and I have concluded, without a doubt, it is a disruption we do not need that would do great harm not only to our schools but to our entire community.

Let's start with the financial reality. Currently, DISD has an AA- rating. They just had a clean audit and expect to jump to an AA rating. This will save the district millions of dollars in interest.

A Charter District would be a new legal entity requiring time for performance observation for a rating. We would no longer have the protection of the Texas Education Code or the oversight of the Texas Education Agency or the review of the Commissioner. That would concern financiers who like stability. This entire debacle has led to anything but that, already. And we don't know what the Legislature might do to further erode public confidence in our system. Our entire community would suffer the financial consequences.

We also have a very real immediate need to consider a bond proposal. The average age of DISD's 777 buildings is 39 years with a condition rating of "fair". The Parson's December, 2013 report on our real estate portfolio estimated a need of over \$4 billion in the next 10 years. That means a bond package. Next year we will have no funds to refurbish very old buildings much less consider the

construction of needed new ones. This has greater impact than just on the students.

It would significantly affect the construction industry and our local economy in every way.

Should a proposed charter be written, the first available election with sufficient voter turn-out would be November of 2016. With home rule charter clouding the landscape, we would have a very low probability of getting a bond program passed. Should the charter pass in 2016, there will be time consuming litigation on such an un-tried idea, delaying any serious hope for a successful bond program for at least half a dozen years. Then there is a question whether the bonds would even receive permanent school fund guarantee and at what level. Can we afford all that for an untested experiment?

And for what? No educational idea home rule proponents have suggested is disallowed by Texas education laws-not one!

Full day pre-kindergarten, expanded school days, flexible teacher contracts, year round schools, innovative curriculum—have you been in Booker T. Washington during instructional time—which is about from dawn ‘til late at night? Have you seen the ratings on Irma Rangel, or Barefoot Sanders Law Magnet? One of our comprehensive high schools is teaching a psychology class for gang members—going over great—could make a huge difference.

We have Montessori, International Baccalaureate, talented and gifted. It is foolish to say we have cookie cutter schools hampered by government mandates.

A charter would end DISD as an independent school district. I can't see Dallas voters going for a charter school district. Many of our business and civic leaders graduated from DISD—many of you did. Some try to say it will still be an independent school district. That's ridiculous. The author, the Senate legislative research arm and the code itself refer to the law as providing districts with the opportunity to convert their school district to a charter school district.

Nor does it take a charter to include students as non-voting members of the board. We have a teen board now. The mayor has appointed a liaison to the District—didn't take a charter.

Ours is not a governance problem but a management problem. DISD has some good policies they are not following and some state laws they are ignoring. ...not different if our schools were charter schools. In fact they would lose the oversight of the Texas Education Agency. It is not clear that they would have any oversight.

Changing the election date to November? We have had several opportunities to do just that. One fairly recently when only Ms. Bingham and Mr. Lowe supported it. The major concern - our election would become a partisan race. Starting school early has also been discussed through the years. It has never garnered public support.

There has been criticism of a bickering board. Well, this board, the City Council, our County Commissioners —every functioning elected group is sometimes inefficient and seemingly in disarray. Democracy is messy and even dreadful--- until you compare it with any other governance.

If we don't do something drastic how can we expect change? We have seen change. Until the current administration we were enjoying unprecedented improvement. We can regain that if we use research based decision making and listen to those closest to the schools- parents and the professional educators. Our trustees have a responsibility to demand educational success and adherence to policy and law from the superintendent.

Another good thing is happening. Meetings like this -- asking about our schools. This is happening all over town.

The umbrella organization, Our Community Our Schools, to which our group, Stop the Take Over and Dallas Friends of Public Education, belongs, has twenty some groups working together to improve our schools. Divergent groups like LULAC and the NAACP, usually competing teacher groups, churches, parents and former school board members, an arts group, school administrators, retired Americans, all working together to seek ways in which our schools can be better. We have had meetings all over Dallas to get real grass roots input and are compiling the results of the over 1000 people who came. We can do better and many of us are dedicated to seeing that we do so.

A problem has been lack of information or misinformation. Home rule proponents, including our Mayor, have claimed that only 4% of DISD students graduate “college ready”. Yet 6 years after graduation 18% of DISD students have graduated from college.

There is the misconception that the Charter Commission must submit a proposed charter. Not true. The commission has a year to consider what is best for the DISD and only write the proposal if that seems best. In the 4 district meetings they have held so far to hear from the community, far more speakers are against than for Home Rule.

We can't get rid of bad trustees? Of course we can. There are state laws and DISD policy to address the removal of a trustee.  
So what's the answer?

I don't think we really want to destroy our Independent School System and replace it with an untested Charter School experiment. Do we need improvement in our schools? Indeed we do. Until each student gets the quality education so many of our Dallas ISD students are getting, we are not where we want to be. Can we do it with the protection of our state laws and the flexibility and innovation the education code encourages. Yes we can!

We have sent the home rule commission a list of 10 things the city could do to really support the schools—things cities are supposed to do.

Encourage our home rule commission to continue working diligently to gather ideas to present to the Board of Education as a blueprint for the future.  
Join your education committee and visit some DISD schools. You will be impressed. You and I can correct the misconception that we are going to heck in a basket.

You could start a trend in your group of influential and successful Dallasites to allow your employees to attend parent conferences and their children's school programs. Offer flexible scheduling—you don't have to give them the time off; you can let them make it up. Just make it easy for them to do what you and I do as parents. If the Dallas Assembly started that as an organization, who knows how

much difference you could make not only for your employees children but as a business model for the city.

Most of all, you and I must demand that those we elect to go to Austin and work for us understand that we expect them to support our public schools. Our funding has again been found unconstitutional. That is unacceptable.

Of the 5 billion they cut from public education, they restored less than a fourth. You and I can do something about that. They work for us and we “hire” them with our vote. It is distressing to hear a local legislator threaten to divide the district if he doesn't get his way. The schools belong to us and it seems apparent to me now that the people who own the schools do not want them taken away.

Again, thank you for allowing the three of us to share what is proposed for our Dallas Public School District—the pros and cons and the alternative options.