

Weatherford Democrat

February 24, 2013

SCHOOL DISTRICTS UNITED: Home rule districts – a Trojan horse

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— *Editor's note: This is the sixth in a series of commentaries presented by the undersigned superintendents and board presidents concerning funding for public schools.*

Today, a number of legislators support specific educational reforms our future will view as unfortunate. The term “school choice” is now tossed around as the cure-all to a public school system they perceive as failing.

School choice is a packaging brand name applied to stale terms like vouchers, taxpayer credits, block grants, charter schools and for-profit academies.

These alternatives are designed to redirect taxpayer dollars from our current public schools toward unproven “school choice” options. Among the array of choices, a new term has surfaced known as Home Rule District charter schools.

Proponents for Home Rule Districts (HRDs) claim that, along with individuals, communities as a whole deserve school choice. This option allows the voters of a community the ability to convert their local traditional public school district to a Home Rule District charter school.

For the record, converting to an HRD has been available since 1995 when the Texas Education Code was revised. HRDs are exempt from some but not as many of the state regulations and mandates as open-enrollment charter schools.

Proponents stretch the benefits Home Rule Districts would enjoy. With fewer perceived state restrictions, proponents believe HRDs would be more cost-efficient and allow communities to implement additional educational reforms.

Their vision of independence includes community public schools removed from the long arm of government and, if desired, an entire new form of local governance implemented at will – paradise. This utopia would be funded by a plentiful “block grant.” The translation to the words block grant is “giant voucher.”

If it's too good to be true – you know the rest of the line. To date, there has not been a single public school district to convert via charter to a Home Rule District. In 1995, the triggers involving the

conversion to an HRD were purposely set at a height that requires serious involvement by a local school district community. The reason is simple; drastic decisions require community participation at the highest level.

Proponents of HRDs find this as a hurdle and will legislate to lower the current conversion requirements and add luring enticements. If the devil is in the details, the best description of what may come is a Trojan horse.

The danger to advocating Home Rule District charter schools is in the misrepresentation of the benefit itself.

We do not need an alternative form of local governance to run our schools. We respect and defend the very democracy that allows us to govern by electing local school board members from within our own communities.

We do not need an alternative system of education to dodge the many mandates legislation places upon us; instead, consider removing such mandates for ALL school districts and ALL children to benefit.

We do not need an alternative method of funding schools such as block grants or giant vouchers; what we need is the courage to address the current broken system of school finance where all children regardless of background, color and location can have an equal opportunity to learn.

We currently have a public system educating children from all walks of life – children of every challenge and those of every talent. Providing each child an equal opportunity to learn offers individual and social prosperity – a gift worth protecting for future generations.

Standing together in a unified voice,

Aledo ISD – Dan Manning, superintendent; Bobby J. Rigues, board president

Azle ISD – Dr. Ray Lea, superintendent; Bill Lane, board president

Brock ISD – Richard Tedder, superintendent; Bill Cooper, board president

Garner ISD – Marion Ferguson, superintendent; Michael Collins, board president

Millsap ISD – Dr. David Belding, superintendent; Dr. Dene Herbel, board president

Paradise ISD – Monty Chapman, superintendent; Homer Mundy, board president

Peaster ISD – Matt Adams, superintendent; Scott Johnson, board president

Perrin-Whitt CISD – John Kubn, superintendent; Wayne Stephens, board president

Poolville ISD – Jimmie Dobbs, superintendent; Lynn Duvall, board president

Santo ISD – Greg Gilbert, superintendent; Randy Parker, board president

Springtown ISD – Mike Kelley, superintendent; Amy Walker, board president

Weatherford ISD – Dr. Jeffrey M. Hanks, superintendent; Charlie Martinez, board president