

# US Faith Communities Play Big Role in Public Education

As pastors and faith leaders in our communities, we and our congregations are very close to our schools.

We believe education is nothing less than discovering and identifying God's creation. In this sense, education is the will of God for all people.

Education is a universal value of faith and spirituality, regardless of denomination or tradition.

It is necessary in order to be a responsible steward of the gift of existence, to "be fruitful and multiply, replenish the earth and subdue it," as Holy Scripture commands.

This is why schools have been and remain at the forefront of mission for all faiths. It is a universal human right accorded every child by virtue of being on God's planet.

The first schools in America were founded by faith communities. Shortly thereafter, at the dawn of our republic, people of faith realized that an educated populace was essential for the preservation of democracy and self-governance.

Therefore, public education for all children in America was birthed out of a moral sensibility.

That conviction was encoded in constitutions of the respective states as our nation expanded westward. Virtually every state constitution has a mandate for public education.

Schools and churches remain inextricably bound together in every community, as 90% of the children in our churches attend public schools. The rest attend private and home schools.

We appropriately affirm all these models of education. Indeed, Pastors for Children is comprised of leaders in all these diverse school models.

But it is the public schools that serve all children. Not just those of economic means or whose parents are engaged or who are from stable homes or who perform well academically. But, all.

Our spouses and church members routinely teach in our public schools. Often in our towns, the public school district is the chief employer and economic generator of our communities.

As goes the financial health of our public schools, so goes the financial health of our churches.

The school is the center of vitality and meaningful, life-enriching activity for our people. One only need look at the importance of "Friday Night Football" for folks to see this.

These are profound moral, biblical, constitutional and economic reasons for universal education paid for by the public. The case for quality public education is overwhelming.

Therefore, we remain puzzled at the attempt of state legislatures to divert already stretched dollars from our public schools to fund private schools.

We know that private schools are not asking for this support; they do not want government interference and intrusion into their private assemblies. That is the reason they established their private schools in the first place.

We are troubled by the government expansion and entitlement programs undergirding privatization policies.

Private school vouchers and so-called “school choice” initiatives are nothing but government giveaway programs with no accountability or oversight.

Absent are the myriad stewardship measures the public schools must submit to give account for how state dollars are being spent.

We hear about these overwrought accountability rules from our family and church members all the time.

We decry the expansion of unlimited charter schools as a replacement for our traditional community and neighborhood public schools, the avalanche of burdensome assessment measures our teachers and students are subjected to, and the de-professionalization of teaching through low wages and bad conditions.

We are doing something about it.

Pastors for Children is mobilizing congregational leaders to do two transformative missions:

1. Get your church involved in assistance ministries in your local neighborhood school, always under the authority of the school principal and in deference to God's gift of church-state separation.
2. Get your church leaders engaged in public education advocacy by bringing your influence to bear on state legislators who shape education policy for our children.

We are now in six states: [Texas](#), [Oklahoma](#), [Kentucky](#), [Tennessee](#), Mississippi and [Florida](#).

We have held meetings and conversations with faith leaders in a dozen other states where we will soon plant our work.

If you are interested in launching a witness in your community, please do not hesitate to call upon us.

Let's provide our children the education that our community provided us. Their future, and ours, depends on it.

*Editor's note: This article is part of a series of articles this week for [International Literacy Day](#) (Sept. 8). Previous articles in the series are:*

[Literacy: Powerful Weapon Against Inequality if We Use It](#) | Hannah Watson

[Helping Students Discover the Worlds Awaiting Them in Books](#) | Trevor Barton

[Christian Agency Brings Education to Syrian Refugee Children](#) | Alia Abboud

[\*Together for Hope: Delivering Literacy to Kids in Rural Poverty\*](#) | *Jason Coker*

[\*Fun Curriculum Bridges Educational Gap for Refugee Kids in US\*](#) | *Karen Morrow*