

A wish list for public education

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A New Year approaches. Renewal is in the air. Here are my hopes for Texas public education in 2007:

Gov. Rick Perry and the Legislature will focus on the biggest challenge facing public education in Texas: standardizing the patchwork of ESL and bilingual education programs across the state so that Spanish-speaking children learn English as quickly as possible.

Dallas business leaders and the public will continue to support DISD Superintendent Michael Hinojosa as the best hope for cleaning up the district. DISD's board of trustees is stronger than it's been in years. Jack Lowe, Edwin Flores and their board colleagues are putting education in the front seat and politics in the back seat.

Public schools will stop treating the beleaguered parents of special education kids like enemies and potential litigants. School administrators will put more effort into helping parents understand what the law requires schools to do for their children. Why? Because it's the right thing to do.

Thought leaders in public education will abandon the zany notion that all children must be prepared for college. They will refocus on how to provide solid vocational education programs for students who want to start careers after high school.

Every student will get a textbook as required by law. Secondary schools will stop withholding textbooks because they fear too many students will lose or damage them.

Lawmakers blinded by the computer hardware and software lobby will stop advocating the idea that laptops should replace textbooks.

Parents will stop jumping to the conclusion that the evil teacher is to blame when little Johnny gets a bad grade or gets disciplined. Instead, they start with the assumption that the teacher is right and go from there.

School board members will reject Texas Association of School Boards brainwashing. They will regularly bypass the superintendent to visit campuses and to speak with teachers and staff to find out what's

really going on in schools.

School boards, the elected representatives of the people, will reject the TASB concept that they are on "a team" with the superintendent as "quarterback." Instead, they will act like bosses and treat the superintendent like a valued employee. The conceptual difference is small but important.

The school voucher movement will wither and die along with the Republican Party's ill-conceived drive to privatize management of "failing" public schools.

Courageous principals will fire lazy teachers who don't want to teach and who waste precious class time by (1) assigning students to read a chapter and answer the questions at the end of it (2) showing a film to the class while e-mailing friends and munching snack food.

Superintendents will support legislation that requires them to file annual financial disclosure statements with the Texas Ethics Commission.

School board members, superintendents and other administrators will stop taking free meals, free trips, gifts, consulting fees and other gratuities from companies that want to sell them products and services. Why? Because it looks bad.

Lawmakers will pass a law requiring high school students to take a course in media literacy to teach them how to analyze the unrelenting barrage of advertising aimed at young people.

More companies and private-sector volunteers will adopt public schools to make sure students get exposed to the thoughts and ideas of adults who aren't part of the public education bureaucracy.

More teachers will focus on the exhilarating challenges and rewards that first drew them into the classroom and stop obsessing about what they find maddening in their workplace.

Cameron, my 16-year-old son, will make straight A's on his report card this spring.

Some of these hopes are dimmer than others. But, after all, what kind of 2007 can we have without hope?

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