

FIVE QUESTIONS WITH...

Scott Milder, Public Education Advocate



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SCHOOL PRIORITY MONTH

Q. As a public education advocate, can you share a little about yourself?

A. I believe in and support the Texas Constitution and want the best for the future of Texas. These are the only two qualifications required to be an advocate for public education. Beyond that, I have invested most of my adult life in advocacy for public education, beginning as media relations director for Mesquite ISD 25 years ago. I served as public information officer for Galena Park ISD. I then joined Stantec Architecture where I've helped school districts win more than 100 bond elections over the last 20 years. In 2004, my wife Leslie and I founded Friends of Texas Public Schools, a nonprofit organization dedicated to strengthening public confidence by promoting their achievements. I've acquired a deep understanding of the complexities of our public schools and the politics surrounding it.

Q. Make Education a Priority is a campaign under Friends of Texas Public Schools. MEaP promotes public education advocacy programs. School Priority Month-October 2018 is an example. Can you describe the program and its purpose?

A. School Priority Month is a biennium event where school districts invite elected officials from every level of government to experience the great work taking place in our public schools. The idea is to foster engagement, promote partnerships, and exhibit a shared responsibility.

Q. You mentioned locally elected officials from every level of civic government. What are some of the positions being invited and what might that day look like at any given school campus?

A. Precinct chairs, county commissioners, judges, sheriffs, city councils, mayors, etc., they are all opinion leaders in their respective communities. School leaders need community support to best serve students. The better local leaders understand their public schools, the

more likely school leaders can conquer existing challenges. Schools hosting elected officials should consider rolling out the red carpet and provide them with a diverse set of experiences. Ask them to shadow the principal or a teacher for a few hours, join students for lunch in the cafeteria, and speak with students about their roles in government. Put them on an old school bus to another campus. Include them in testing. I spent a day at my child's campus and asked if I could also take the math test. I scored a 75.

Q. In terms of advocacy, what are some of the challenges in public education you hope this program will improve?

A. We can all agree that our public schools face many challenges, but I'm convinced the biggest challenge of all is the image problem created by those who intentionally spread misinformation to undermine public confidence in our public schools. These same people design grossly flawed testing and accountability systems that cast a negative light, by design I believe, on the whole system. The nature of news also contributes to this image problem, though unintentionally, because the news media's job is to report the anomaly. They don't report on the thousands of things that just quietly work.

The perceptions of failure and inefficient use of public funds created by this image problem are a drag on the system. The result? - negative chatter about our schools at the local level and unnecessary legislation at the state level to address perceived problems rather than real ones such as poverty, safety, curricular deficiencies, and future readiness.

Q. History provides us with inspiring famous quotes about education. What is your legacy quote that we may find relevant and inspiring generations from now?

A. "Oppose those who demonize educators, the most honorable among us." –Scott Milder