



BAD FAITH IN EDUPOLITICS

Q. As a public education advocate, what drives your passion?

A. Working alongside rural Texas teachers and students for over 20 years.

Q. What is the biggest threat to public education?

A. First, any threat to public education is a threat to freedom. Thomas Jefferson noted that people can only self-govern if they're well-educated; otherwise, they'll fall victim to autocrats and charlatans. The biggest threat now to public education and democracy is bad faith. By that, I mean the penchant of some to use dishonest rhetoric, misleading statistics, political theater, Orwellian language, and logical fallacies to advance rotten political agendas that can't advance on their merits. Bad faith is epidemic.

Q. Can you give some examples of bad faith rhetoric or policy-making?

A. One is that the 3rd grade STAAR reading tests include passages written at a 5th grade level. When the state tells a parent that their child is "approaching" 3rd grade reading proficiency based on STAAR, they're lying and inflating the number of failures. Second: when the state got busted by the feds for under-identifying special education students, state officials blamed local officials. But TEA had for years implemented an accountability system that gave ISDs a hard target of 8.5% special education student enrollment. State officials know this.

Another example: during the last election, an effort to promote voting among teachers spawned a shady effort by anti-school advocates to conflate pro-voting efforts with illegal electioneering in order to dampen voting. Another example of bad faith was when Texas legislators sought to make it illegal for Texas teachers to have

association dues withheld from their paychecks...while not doing the same to firefighters and police officers. Why the different treatment for teachers?

At every turn, with education policy—from standardized testing to charter schools to vouchers to school finance to funding equity—the debate is steeped in bad faith on the part of state officials, lobbyists, and advocates paid by foundations bankrolled by billionaires. This is the reality nationwide. Public education is marked for death by people with unimaginable fortunes, and in accomplishing their goal, it's no holds barred. Ethics, honesty, and integrity are collateral damage. The bad faith is infuriating because defenseless kids are victims of the shenanigans, and our future freedom is very much in jeopardy by the anti-public education movement. And yet, the people who call themselves our leaders don't seem to care much, or else they just don't get it.

Q. What can we do to confront bad faith in education debates?

A. Education advocates must empower neighbors and friends to know the facts so they can see through the bull. Groups like TAMSA, FOTPS, MEaP, and Pastors for Texas Children are indispensable partners, and educators must be willing to support them and use after-work time to amplify their voices. Educators must vote. The current session is better for education than the last one precisely because an educator using his own time and the power of a hashtag started a movement called #blockvote. Several statewide anti-education politicians almost lost their heads as a result. And many legislators did lose.

The immediate antidote to bad faith is the wide sharing of facts by an army of advocates from all walks of life; but the permanent solution is to vote out liars and crooks and never put them in positions of influence again, because they aren't worthy of Texas.

Q. History provides us with inspiring quotes about public education. What is your legacy quote that we might find inspiring future generations?

A. "In the end, the givers beat the takers." ~John Kuhn