

Tyler Morning Telegraph

Tyler can improve schools and scores

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If this was a land battle, we would demand it be pressed on all fronts. If it was a naval engagement, we would call for all hands on deck. It's nothing so dramatic, but it's just as important.

We must all become involved in the fight for quality public education in Tyler. The state of our schools is unacceptable. But sitting on the sidelines is also unacceptable. No one from outside is going to step in and fix our schools; it's up to us. That goes for parents, of course — but also for residents who don't have children currently enrolled. It goes for businesses, which will depend on our public school students to be their future workers.

As a community, we all benefit from a strong public school system. That's not a liberal statement and it's not a conservative statement. It's a simple fact.

The Cato Institute's Andrew J. Coulson once wrote, "For a diverse nation, we share a remarkable consensus with respect to educating children. As reflected in polls and focus groups, Americans are nearly unanimous in their commitment to certain fundamental ideals: that all children have access to a quality education regardless of family income; that they be prepared for happy and productive lives; that they be taught the rights and duties of citizenship; and that the schools help to foster strong and cohesive communities. These are the ideals of public education."

As we have said before, a quality education for every child is a civil right. It's what we've all agreed to, as a society. And if we've agreed to do it, it's inexcusable to do it badly.

To go back to the battle analogy, there are two clear fronts in the fight for better education in Tyler: educational attainment and facilities.

The work of improving test scores and, more importantly, the quality of instruction continues in the Tyler school district. The Tyler Paper has been and will continue to be a tough grader on this. It's unacceptable that both of the city's high schools were recently named to a list of the state's lowest performing schools.

The district points out that rating was based on test scores from the 2010-2011 school year, and since then, scores have improved and the state's accountability system has changed.

We'll see. We'll be quite interested what the new numbers show.

But that's just one front in this battle. The other front cannot be ignored. The district's facilities are desperate for some long-needed improvements and upgrades.

Many of those improvements will be made, if Tyler voters approve the \$160.5 million bond proposal on May 11. We believe the bonds are necessary as a step toward having the school system we all agree we want.

It's troubling to us that the bond will be the only thing on that May ballot — three school board candidates (as well as two city council candidates) are running unopposed. That could mean low voter turnout; we urge Tyler voters to consider how important this single issue is, and make their voices heard.