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Column: Texas' progressive education system should pay off

By Nick Prelosky

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When political junkies think of progressive politics, Texas is not the state that comes to mind. Connotatively, at least, Texas represents people in cowboy hats, country music and an accent akin to that of our 43rd president. This view is shared by a good number of non-Texans and foreigners alike.

The progressive label is generally saved for states where the wealthy pay an arm and a leg in taxes, where the government decides that they can change the definition of marriage or where gobs of money are thrown at the nonexistent problem of human-caused climate change.

The quality of our public schools and education would also not be dubbed extremely progressive, as Texas ranks 49th in verbal SAT scores and 46th in math SAT scores, according to a 2005 report by then-Comptroller Carole Keeton Strayhorn. Couple those dismal scores with the fact that only one of the nation's top-20 universities is located in Texas, and it ensures that there is at least one dark spot when a discussion about the politics of the great Lone Star State arises.

A recent edition of The Economist magazine published a 10-page review of different aspects of the state, which were generally glowing. The review cited the state's low taxes, the 81st legislative session's ability to not tap into the rainy day fund and even the lack of strict zoning regulations that have allowed Houston and Dallas-Fort Worth to become the sprawling megacities that they are today.

For a magazine that covers events the world over, spending 10 pages on our humble state should assuredly be a cause for pride (and much gloating the next time your cousin from Oklahoma visits, or when your neighbor who goes to LSU assures you that Texas is inferior).

The one area where the writers were quick to offer criticisms: You guessed it. For a state that is doing so well in so many other areas, the education Texas children receive is, to say the least, subpar. This is the chance for the "progressives" to step in and solve the problem.

Progressives typically say that such abysmal results are clearly the result of underpaid teachers and old textbooks. The solution, their argument suggests, is that the state should throw more money at the problem and watch it fix itself.

We can only hope those people are unaware of the school system in Washington, D.C., given that it spends approximately \$10,000 more per student per year than Texas does, according to a report by the Cato Institute. Despite such policies, the system still has deplorable scores and educational facilities.

The solution to this quickly escalating crisis is actually surprisingly simple. It is also, ironically, an area in which Texas really can claim to be "progressive."

Charter schools have proven time after time to be an amazingly effective way to educate children. Teachers are more qualified, parents are more involved and the students will actually commit themselves to doing the coursework and learning more.

Leaders in this movement are KIPP (Knowledge Is Power Program) Schools, which were started here in Texas. In addition to higher scores and better-quality education, the rate of low-income students who graduate college increases from 7 percent to more than 90 percent when the students come from a KIPP school, according to the same article in The Economist.

The reason Texas is progressive in this area is that it has done a great deal in the way of allowing these charter schools to open. Texas has 427 charter schools currently open, with a total enrollment of 113,760 students, according to [uscharterschools.org](#). If Texas continues to marginalize red tape, teachers' unions and bureaucrats, instead choosing to empower gifted teachers and individual families, there is every reason to expect our education ranking to rocket upward.

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