

KEN CASPER

RESPONDS

In response to Dr Kingman:

I read with interest Dr Kingman's letter in support of the coming school bond election.

I agree wholeheartedly with his opening statement: "Public education is critical for the preservation of a thriving and free society. As with every area of society, a quality public education system must continue to improve and evolve to assure the tenets of student achievement and success are met."



Unfortunately, the quality of education our children are receiving in the San Angelo ISD has not been improving. In fact, it has been deteriorating for years. In the last decade, SAISD's academic rating dropped from 53.9% to 37.5%. That's nothing to be proud of. In this last year, between 2017 and 2018, SAISD dropped from 3 Stars to 1 Star in the state's 5-Star rating system. No, Dr. Kingman, the educational system in San Angelo has not been improving, and building another gym at Central High School is not going to make things better.

In the headline article in the Standard Times on Thursday, October 18, the school district tried to explain why our schools have gotten failing grades in the state's STAAR program. The administration honed-in like vultures on the seat of the problem: "...that was simply because our kids couldn't read." The principal at Lamar Elementary elaborated further. "...we've got to close the gap and do something because they are going to the next grade level not knowing how to read at all."

This reminds me of the kid who murders both his parents and then appeals to the court for mercy because he's an orphan. It is an elementary school's job, its only job, to teach kids how to read and write and figure. No matter what other skills it may teach them, no matter how many awards the teachers or students may get, if the kids can't read, the teachers, the principal and the system are failures. No excuses. No explanations. Lamar is a failure.

I'm picking on Lamar because it's a convenient target, but it's not alone. Lamar got a 1 rating in the state's Star rating system. So, did Austin, Fannin, Goliad, Reagan and San Jacinto at the elementary level. Bradford got a zero! Lincoln got a 1 at the middle school level, and Lakeview received a 1 at the high school level. Only two elementary schools, Glenmore and Ft Concho, received the highest rating, 5 Stars. Santa Rita elementary, which had been a 5-Star school in the past, has dropped to 4 Stars. (Data source: test scores: Texas Education Agency, ratings: SchoolDigger.com)

Our children deserve better, much, much better.

Let's be clear. The quality of education is not dependent on tax rates or the age of facilities. Glenmore (5 stars) is an old school (80+ years). Bradford (0 stars) is a new school. The fact is there is no correlation between the age and condition of school facilities and test scores. But there is a direct correlation between the quality of instruction and student achievement. None of the schools in SAISD have placed lesson plans on line for parents to examine and evaluate in at least 6 years. Why? Their excuse, that they are being rewritten, is just that, an excuse. Does it mean there are no lesson plans and teachers are making them up as they go along? Or is the district trying to hide something?

Whatever the explanations/excuses, the fact remains that the San Angelo ISD is failing its mission. No amount of dollars spent on 3,000-seat multi-purpose facilities or fancy new lobbies is going to improve the education our children are being subjected to. It's time to empty out the school administration building, hire experienced teachers and retire school board members. Until those things happen the long, downward spiral of the San Angelo Independent School District will continue. With a 28 percent achievement score, at least it doesn't have too much further to fall.

I urge every San Angeloan casting a ballot in the upcoming general election to vote NO on Proposition A and Proposition B of the school bond. All a "yes" vote will accomplish is burden your children and grandchildren with another \$145M, plus interest, for the next 25 years. The money won't do a thing to improve our public education.

Ken Casper was born and raised in New York City. He joined the Air Force, served in Japan, Vietnam, and Germany as well as various stateside assignments before retiring in San Angelo, Texas. An active member and past-president of the San Angelo TEA Party, Ken is also the author of more than twenty-five novels.

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