

# The Dallas Morning News

## Don't count on politicians to rescue students

*He says they've forsaken poor, minority kids who need real school reform*

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By John C. Goodman

A battle is raging inside the Republican Party of Texas. Ironically, it is a battle over educational opportunities for poor, minority children whose parents rarely vote Republican and who, when they reach adulthood, are unlikely to vote Republican themselves.

So why is the GOP engaged in inter-cine warfare over other voters' children? Because these children have been abandoned by Democrats for years.

Go within five miles of any school board meeting, and you will quickly learn public education's most disgraceful secret. The teachers unions are dead set against any and all reforms – certainly any reform that would allow poor children to escape bad schools and cause incompetent teachers to lose their jobs. And with a few notable (and commendable) exceptions, Democratic politicians don't challenge the teachers unions' positions.

Take Wilmer-Hutchins, an almost totally minority school district

that was closed last year when it couldn't pay its bills. The district's administrators were indicted. Even now, no one knows how much money was stolen or squandered. The student test scores were among the worst in the state.

Yet through it all there was not a whimper of protest over the outrageous conditions there. Not from Al Lipscomb or Eddie Bernice Johnson or Jesse Jackson or any other Democratic leader – local or national. Nor was there any protest when Wilmer-Hutchins' students were randomly assigned to Dallas campuses, some of whom have student achievement records every bit as bad as Wilmer-Hutchins.

The lack of outrage on the part of black leadership in Dallas is not unusual. Like the teachers unions, black politicians and community leaders around the country all too often see public schools as a jobs program, rather than as places where children are supposed to learn. While sending their own kids to private schools, they oppose vouchers, school choice, teacher testing and all serious reform.

That's why the GOP is the only party left if you're a parent who is poor, black or Hispanic, and care about your

kid's education. The problem is most politicians are not going to spend very much political capital rescuing the other party's kids. On top of that, the teachers unions – having largely captured the Democratic Party – are now invading Republican primaries.

In the last election (with a low voter turnout), they conducted a stealth campaign and defeated Kent Grusendorf, by far the most reform-minded member of the Texas Legislature. They also used money and turnout machines to go head-to-head with San Antonio businessman Jim Leininger (a wealthy donor to five candidates who backed school choice). The results: Teachers 4, Leininger 2.

For anyone who cares about children, these results are grim. And they communicate a depressing message: We cannot count on politicians whose constituents live in schools far from the problem to risk re-election in order to liberate minority children from the Wilmer-Hutchinses of the world.

It's time for the parents of these children to get politically involved.

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