



TEXAS WORKFORCE COMMISSION

101 E. 15TH STREET, ROOM 638

AUSTIN, TEXAS 78778-0001

TOM PAUKEN

Chairman

(512) 463-2800 FAX: (512)

463-1289

RICK PERRY

Governor

St. Anthony Academy: A Charter School Success Story

Everywhere I go as chairman of the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), employers express concern to me about what they see as the uneven performance in Texas schools. Some schools continue to produce students well-equipped for the job market and for life in general; others, sadly, fall short.

Why is this a TWC concern? The fact is that too many students don't have the basic academic grounding along with the skills needed for the jobs that are available. In point of fact, the marketplace needs workers with maturity, judgment, and broad, as well as specialized, knowledge.

If Texas is to continue as the best place in the whole country to do business, no time could be better than this one for putting a range of ideas on the table about how we train the next generation to take the places of those now working. We have to do a better job of educating our young people, at every level. That means we have to teach better the basic skills that make it possible to teach the sophisticated skills.

The more I think and talk about matters like this, the more often I think about a courageous and, I want to add, successful little school in South Dallas.

The name of the school is St. Anthony Academy. It's a charter school. A really impressive one – thanks to impressive teachers, and to students impressed with a sense of mission about learning.

You're likely familiar with the charter school concept. A charter school is a public school – with some significant differences. Charter schools, which enrolled 113,000 Texas pupils last school year, get from the state the same money per-capita that regular public schools do; however, they receive no capital funding. They take all applicants, provided there's room. Four out of five charter school pupils are Black or Hispanic.

Does this concept of an alternative approach to public education work? Clearly, what St. Anthony Academy is doing from an educational standpoint shows it can.

(more)



TOM PAUKEN
Chairman
(512) 463-2800 FAX: (512)
463-1289

RICK PERRY
Governor

Some basics first: St. Anthony's 250 pupils, kindergarten through eighth grade, come not just from the school's inner-city neighborhood south of downtown Dallas, but also from as far away as Rockwall, Waxahachie, and Richardson.

You ask why there's so much demand, particularly with gasoline prices as high as they are. The reason is simple: As a charter school St. Anthony has the state's permission to teach in challenging ways. It sets high performance standards. Principal David Ray and his teachers work hard to make sure those standards get met. They teach at a level one grade higher than the one in which pupils are enrolled. Second graders, in other words, learn at the third grade level. Third graders learn at the fourth-grade level. And so on.

At St. Anthony, there's the right to learn. There's no corresponding right to mess around. The school emphasizes character – knowing the right thing and doing it. Discipline is explained to the pupils as a matter of choices – good ones or bad ones. St. Anthony Academy knows which are which, and it teaches the difference.

"Excellence is what we do," says David Ray, a former sixth grader teacher in conventional public schools. He wouldn't go back. "We bring the kids here by choice," he says. "We are in a situation where we have to maintain customer loyalty, customer satisfaction. We don't have a choice."

To that end, St. Anthony, (organized as a charter school in 2003, using the facilities of a former Roman Catholic parochial school) works closely and regularly with school parents.

Presently a "recognized" campus according to state rankings, St. Anthony saw 19 of last year's eighth grade graduates head off – with scholarships – to finish their schooling at prestigious local schools like Hockaday, Greenhill, and the Episcopal School of Dallas. Still others gained admission to the Dallas Independent School District's finest magnet schools.

(more)



TOM PAUKEN
Chairman
(512) 463-2800 FAX: (512)
463-1289

RICK PERRY
Governor

St. Anthony has characteristics in common with the best private schools, but I want to make the point that it isn't private at all. It's a hard-working public school, enjoying the right to teach in creative ways and also to set and insist on high standards of performance. One reason it can do so is that charter schools hire and fire their own teachers without interference from teacher unions like the National Education Association.

The charter model in public education probably never will take over the public schools. Some charter schools, as we read every year, don't live up to expectations. When they do work, nevertheless, they look a lot like St. Anthony Academy. They take raw materials – brains, character – and shape them for success in life.

It's what we need in Texas (not to mention everywhere else) to keep moving forward. The challenges before us are huge. We need the best young talent possible. There needs to be a way to translate St. Anthony's model into the language of the conventional, everyday public school. Why not, for all students, the option of excellence?

Tom Pauken is the Chairman of the Texas Workforce Commission

Media Contact: Ann Hatchitt

Phone: 512-463-8556

The Texas Workforce Commission is a state agency dedicated to helping Texas employers, workers and communities prosper economically. For details on TWC and the programs it offers in unison with its network of local workforce development boards call (512) 463-8556 or visit www.texasworkforce.org.