



# Advocating for All God's Children

---

CBF Public Education Advocacy Resource





# Advocating for All God's Children

---

## CBF Public Education Advocacy Resource

**Public Education Advocacy is the newest area of focus for CBF Advocacy.** However, Public Education Advocacy is nothing new for many of the Fellowship's congregations and their members. All over our Fellowship, the mission of Public Education Advocacy is ongoing, sustained from a missions-based approach grounded in a foundation of building relationships.

Each **relationship**, built from unique places, with unique people, within unique communities, provides diverse opportunities for churches and their members to connect with, advocate for and support their local public schools. From Backpack Ministries to mentoring partnerships, to school board involvement to partnerships with education advocacy groups like Pastors for Children, and so much more, this missions-based work of advocacy builds relationships motivated by love of God and neighbor with students, educators, families and local communities.



**CBF Public Education Advocacy** is a mission-based approach which seeks to provide opportunities for CBF congregations and their members to form partnerships and relationships—through the love of God and neighbor—to support public education in their local communities and statewide. CBF’s missional advocacy approach prioritizes building relationships with schools to strengthen, support and advocate for public education.



*Volunteers with Wilshire Baptist Church’s public advocacy ministry.*

**CBF Public Education Advocacy provides a two-fold opportunity and missions model for local congregations desiring to engage in such efforts:**

**SERVICE**

The opportunity for CBF congregations to create missions-focused relationships with the individuals (students, educators and families) in the local schools in their communities.

Missions-focused relationships minister to, empower and support local schools through the theological principle and commitment to the love of God and love of neighbor.

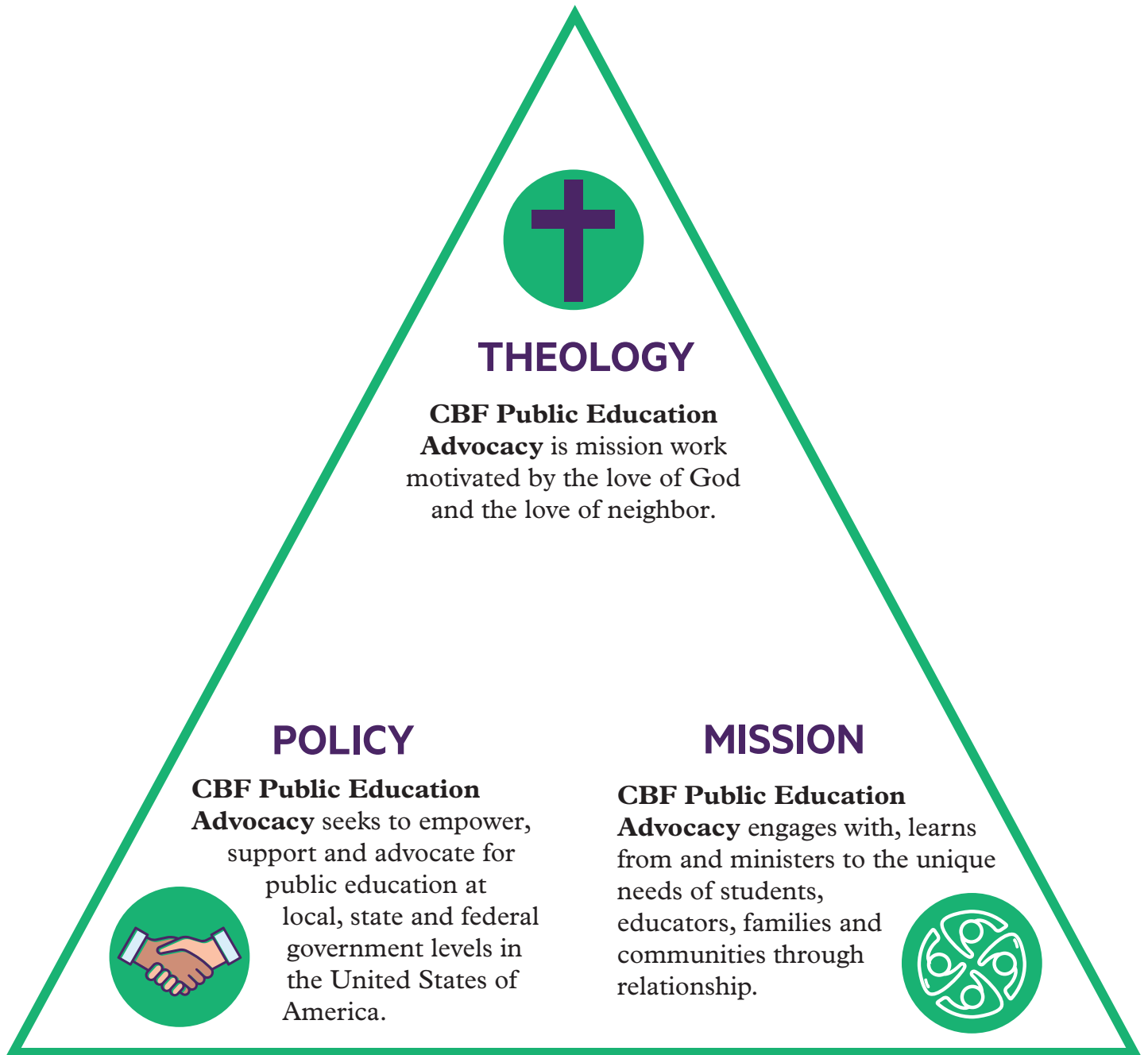
**JUSTICE**

The opportunity for CBF congregations to engage in efforts to support and empower their communities’ schools and advocate for their needs through local, state and federal education policy legislation.

Policy advocacy efforts of any CBF congregation at all government levels is motivated by love of God, love of neighbor and the understanding of need gained through missions-focused relationships with individuals in public education—students, educators and families.



# CBF PUBLIC EDUCATION ADVOCACY FOLLOWS A THREE-PART METHOD:



## CBF PUBLIC EDUCATION ADVOCACY (A PART OF CBF ADVOCACY) IS:

- **State and Local**

CBF Advocacy encourages people to be involved in their local schools and school districts because the majority of public education happens at these levels. The states have the main responsibility of providing public education in our country.

- **Relational**

CBF Advocacy is built upon relationships of trust with students, families, teachers and administrators, as well as relationships with policy makers at the local and state levels.

- **Nonpartisan**

CBF Advocacy must be committed to working with leaders from all political parties to make progress for public education rather than looking to engage in partisanship.

- **Cooperative across religious, political and racial divides**

CBF Advocacy encourages advocates to join and build coalitions to increase their knowledge and political base and to enhance effectiveness in this work.



## CBF PUBLIC EDUCATION ADVOCACY (A PART OF CBF ADVOCACY) WILL NOT ASK CHURCHES TO:

- Alienate fellow congregational members whose political leanings differ from their own.
- Attempt to force congregants to engage in advocacy when they do not feel called to do so.
- Involve the church congregation in partisan politics by endorsing or opposing candidates for office.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Stephen Reeves, “Advocacy & Public Witness,” <https://cbf.net/advocacy>; CBF Advocacy, <https://cbf.net/advocacy>



# Why CBF Churches Should Engage in Public Education Advocacy

by Rev. Sharon K. Felton



Why should churches engage in public education advocacy? Because it's biblical and life-giving to all involved. Jesus calls us to love our neighbors and to care for those around us. Lifting others up, embracing all God's children and loving our neighbors happen every day in public schools across our nation. Walking through the halls of public schools is like walking through the Kingdom of Heaven. They are filled with diverse communities of children and educators. Schools offer opportunities to learn from others, to learn about others and learn how to connect and relate to those who may see the world from a different perspective. Looking in the faces of children, we see the face of God. Public schools are doing



Kingdom work and laboring tirelessly to educate our children. Our very future is in their hands!

Sadly, across our country, public education is under direct attack. Teachers are belittled and demoralized by baseless accusations of inappropriate content and by inadequate compensation for the herculean task we have given them. Schools are underfunded and underappreciated. What other profession do you know that must collect box tops just to fund their programs? A principal once asked me, "What if prisons had to cut box tops to get materials and equipment? How fast do you think they would get funding?"

Congregations have an opportunity to stand in the gap for schools and children. Churches have mission opportunities in their towns and neighborhoods. Teachers and administrators need to be encouraged, prayed for and supported physically, mentally and emotionally. How can your church step in and care for educators and children?

## Here are a few suggestions:

- Sponsor collections of school supplies so that teachers don't have to purchase them out of their own pockets.
- Stage food for backpack programs to feed hungry children on the weekends.
- Write notes of encouragement to teachers.
- Provide beds for children sleeping on floors.
- Arrange for breakfast carts on teacher workdays.
- Make an appointment with the principal to see what is needed.

There are so many possibilities to use your gifts and abilities to support our schools!

Listen to the great things happening with school staffs and students and be amazed at all that God is doing! What a great way to love your neighbor—by loving your neighborhood school!



## THEOLOGY OF CBF PUBLIC EDUCATION ADVOCACY:

- ➔ **CBF Public Education Advocacy** is mission work motivated by the love of God and the love of neighbor.
- ➔ **These two principles of advocacy**—love of God and love of neighbor— are presented *in relationship* to one another in Scripture.
- ➔ **The Greatest Commandment**, found in each of the three synoptic gospels, demonstrates the two principles of advocacy in relationship:

*“... You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:36-39 NRSVUE).*

*“... You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength... You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark. 12:30-31 NRSVUE).*

*“... You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind and your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27 NRSVUE).*

- ➔ **The Gospel of John echoes the synoptic authors, reiterating the relationality of the Greatest Commandment, voiced again by Christ:**

*“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another” (John 13:34 NRSVUE).*

- ➔ **Love of God and love of neighbor, however, are not exclusive to the New Testament. Indeed, such relational understanding of love is grounded throughout the writings of the Old Testament.**



**➔ The Greatest Commandment (voiced through Christ in the Gospels) was first presented through the words of the prophets and the Hebrew Scriptures:**

*“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts”  
(Deuteronomy 6:5-6 NRSVUE).*

*“You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord” (Leviticus 19:18 NRSVUE).*

*“For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings”  
(Hosea 6:6 NRSVUE).*

*“He has told you, O mortal, what is good, and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8 NRSVUE).*

**➔ The mission of advocacy recognizes that Scripture expresses God’s preference for the poor, marginalized and oppressed:**

*“You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien...You shall not abuse any widow or orphan”  
(Exodus 22:21-22).*

*“...You shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the native-born among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God” (Leviticus 19:33-34 NRSVUE).*

*“He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor...”  
(Hannah’s Song, I Samuel 2:8 NRSVUE).*





*“... do not oppress the widow, the orphan, the alien, or the poor; and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another” (Zechariah 7:8-10 NRSVUE).*

*“He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty” (Mary’s Magnificat, Luke 1:51-53).*

*“... ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me’” (Jesus Christ, Matthew 25: 37-40 NRSVUE).*

*“When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:*

*‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.’*

*And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:16-20 NRSVUE).*

Every child in America is entitled to “a free and appropriate education.” In this way, children of every race, every ability and every socioeconomic level are entitled to equity through their education. The mission of Public Education Advocacy—motivated by the love of God and love of neighbor—encourages, demands and works to ensure equity in public education for every child in America.



**CBF Advocacy is committed to the mission of Public Education Advocacy** because the need of our neighbors —students, educators and families— in our local communities’ schools is so great. Through public education advocacy and the missional relationships it creates, CBF strives and encourages congregations and their members to exercise responsible Christian citizenship and to exercise effective, positive and inclusive public witness.

**Looking for examples of how to do the mission work of Public Education Advocacy at your church? Check out these featured CBF congregations:**



## **WILSHIRE BAPTIST CHURCH, DALLAS, TEXAS**

The work of advocacy requires both grit and commitment. Losses happen more than wins and cynicism can easily creep into the heart. Congregations involved in advocacy can uniquely shape the ministry to their own gifts and graces and connect their collective priorities to both the heart of the congregation and their mission ministries and partnerships. The work of advocacy should never be done alone but always in connection with others.

Wilshire has participated in Public Education Advocacy through:

- Hosting community forums on relevant educational issues such as “CRT, Book Bans and Me,” to equip attendees with knowledge on how to fight false narratives that are affecting our schools.
- Participating in advocacy days at our state capitol to advocate on behalf of public schools and against vouchers and voucher-like programs.
- Partnering with local ISD (Independent School Districts) to provide school supplies, COVID health resources and funding to build local capacity to enhance childhood nutrition.
- Meeting with area principals and school staff to advocate for after-school meal programming and to provide needed information.

*– Rev. Heather Mustain, Associate Pastor*



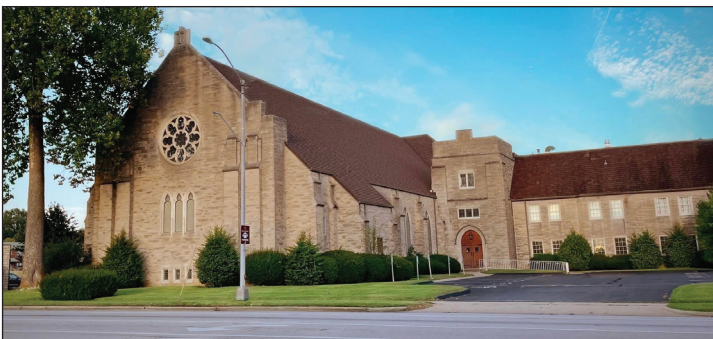


## UNIVERSITY HEIGHTS BAPTIST CHURCH, SPRINGFIELD, MO

We want to be the ones who receive the call when our local school needs help. Wanting to fulfill Jesus' teaching to be good neighbors led our church family to develop a strong and long-standing relationship with a nearby elementary school that has continued through leadership changes at the school and the church. From big challenges to simple questions, our church wants to be the ones who are called on to help, serve and advocate for public education in our city and our neighborhood. Some of the specific ways we have helped advocate are:

- Inviting the principal to speak to our church family about the challenges and successes in public education, as well as how the church can best support and serve the faculty, support staff, students and families.
- Given teachers back to school gift cards to help them with the extra purchases that they so often make that isn't covered by the school budget.
- Served teachers breakfast/lunch a few times per school year.
- Helped the school raise money for things that they could not purchase with budget funds.
- Several volunteers regularly serve as teacher's aides, helping with hands-on projects that teachers don't often have extra time for.
- Provided gifts for several families at Christmastime.

– Rev. Dr. Nolan Porter, Senior Pastor





## FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, AUSTIN, TEXAS

Who will speak for our children? Scratch that! Who will speak **ALONGSIDE** our children? They are not voiceless, they are just often silenced. They have something to say if we will only listen. Congregations can play a huge part in this important advocacy work. These are some of the ways that First Baptist Austin is involved in the schools of our community:

- **Advocacy Days.** We invite educated groups like Fellowship Southwest and Texas Impact to train us in how to talk to our legislators and policy makers about current issues, like voucher programs, facing our schools.
- **Partners in Education.** We have two schools that we are connected with that do not have the same socio-economic advantages of other schools. We provide school supplies, clothing, teacher/staff appreciation meals, literacy days and fundraising events.
- **Communities in Schools.** We regularly connect our social workers to parent support specialists to meet the unique needs of families.

– Selena Steward, LMSW, Community Care Coordinator



Top Left, Clockwise: Teacher Appreciation; Literacy Day Bookshelves; Advocacy with Texas Impact



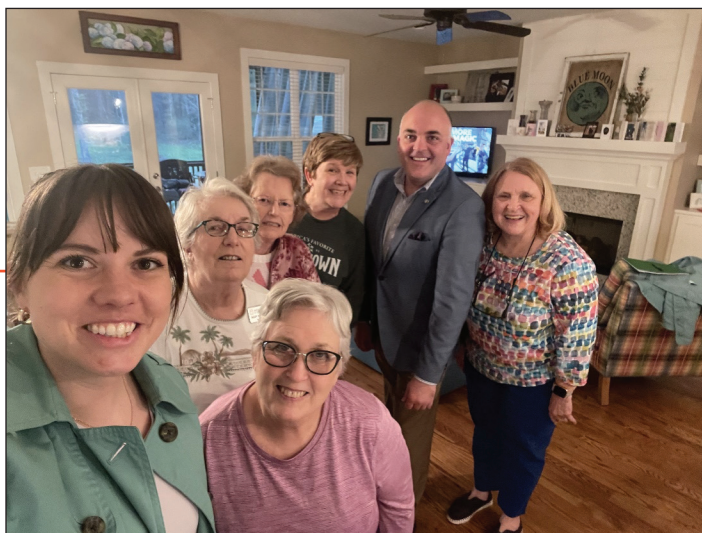


## FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF CHRIST, MACON, GA.

Curiosity and passion are where advocacy began for us. It evolved thanks to a crucial resource all congregations possess: people who are willing to bring their personal stories and connections. Advocacy is often perceived as intimidating; but we learned the importance of creating open spaces for collective learning and sharing resources to make advocacy more accessible. Advocacy work is an act of service and love for our neighbors; but, like most mission engagements, it will surprise you with personal transformation in the process.

FBCX has participated in education advocacy by working with a backpack ministry, supporting a local elementary school and its teachers by donating school supplies, participating in a letter-writing campaign, sharing resources on policy in our state, and offering educational opportunities on education equity.

– *Rev. Kelsey Stillwell, Associate Pastor for Youth and Missions*



*Public Education Advocacy group, from left: Kelsey Stillwell, Cindy Fuller, Suzy McCullough, Mary Leonard, Cathy Logue, Jason Downey (guest speaker and chairman of the Georgia State Board of Education), and Terree Newberry*





## ST. MATTHEWS BAPTIST CHURCH, LOUISVILLE, KY SMBC♥SME

Since 2012, our congregation has served the teachers and staff at St. Matthews Elementary School, the public elementary school just blocks away from our church campus in the Louisville neighborhood known as St. Matthews. As a result, the adults at the school have become a part of the SMBC family, and we a part of theirs. SMBC has become interwoven into the very fabric of the daily routine and the culture of SME. The staff knows of our love for them and that our service is motivated by our desire to share the love that Jesus has showed to us.

Now, 11 years and one pandemic later, SMBC continues to be actively engaged at SME in fulfilling Jesus' command to, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31 NIV). In keeping with this command, the primary goal of School Ministry at SMBC is to "demonstrate the love of Jesus to those we encounter at SME." We silently proclaim our presence and witness by wearing our signature black smocks that bear the church logo. Just as 'love' is at the center of our School Ministry logo, it is also at the center of our service at St. Matthews Elementary School.

As a result of the success of this school ministry, SMBC launched the School Ministry Network. SMN exists to provide all of the resources and expertise developed in support of SMBC♥SME to any interested congregation.



We have ministered at SME with as many as 45 different initiatives. For example, we:



- Provided 50 backpacks of school supplies to start the school year and refilled them to start the second semester.
- Sent a cadre of volunteers each week to serve at least one hour in each of 22 homerooms as Classroom Helpers for teachers, and tutors for students, supported by a team of Substitutes-on-Call to fill in for volunteers during rare absences.



- Made hospital visits and funeral home visitations in support of students and adults during times of family crisis.
- Provided staff breakfast to start and end each school year.
- Provided each teacher with a case of copy paper at the beginning of each semester.
- Purchased books during each of two school book fairs for students unable to purchase the books they desired.
- Invited SME administrators and teachers to promote partnership and bring offertory prayers during Sunday worship services at SMBC during the month of July before the start of school.
- Provided lunch for teachers during parent-teacher conference days.
- Provided “Blessings in a Backpack” weekend meals for students in partnership with local Dare to Care food ministry
- Placed mulch around all landscaped areas of the campus and completed additional work projects during the week before the start of school



*—Mr. Dennis Boswell  
SMBC Member, Retired Educator, Consultant*

My arrival as the new pastor with SMBC coincided with the beginning of the first full post-pandemic academic year at SME. When I met the SME principal at a school showcase event, he lit up and immediately started sharing names and stories from a decade-long partnership. As I learned more from administrators, teachers, parents and enthusiastic volunteers, it was also an opportunity to celebrate the foundational work of my predecessor, Dr. Greg Barr. The entire partnership began with a few SMBC volunteers connecting with counterparts at SME as Greg famously asked of the principal, “What can we do for you — no strings attached?”

*—Rev. Alan Redditt  
Senior Pastor*



## FACTORS OF NEGLECT AND MARGINALIZATION IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

Through mission and the relationships it creates, **CBF Public Education Advocacy** offers an opportunity to demonstrate the love of God and the love of neighbor with students, educators and families in public schools, many of whom are neglected and marginalized by a variety of factors in their lives and communities.

**CBF Public Education Advocacy** engages with, learns from and ministers to the unique needs of students, educators, families and communities through relationship.

**CBF Public Education Advocacy (a part of CBF Advocacy)** is about encouraging, equipping and promoting the voices of advocates in our midst as they encounter the need and the needs in public education which are many and great.

**Several key issues in public education which contribute to neglect and marginalization in the lives of students, teachers, families and local communities include:**

**School Funding**

**School Choice**

**Vouchers**

**Charter Schools**

**Systemic Inequity**

### School Funding

School funding is a complex issue which contributes to neglect and marginalization in the lives of students, teachers, families and local communities in several key ways.

School funding is primarily supplied by state and local resources, in particular property tax revenue. Federal funding plays a very small role in public school funding.<sup>1</sup>

Because school districts are representative of wide-ranging socioeconomic levels—some high-poverty districts and some low-poverty districts—funding varies widely.

- In low-poverty districts, where property values are higher, the socioeconomic level of the representative community will return drastically higher property tax revenue.
- Conversely, in high-poverty districts, where property values are lower, the socioeconomic level of the representative community will return drastically lower property tax revenue.

The resulting wide-ranging disparity in school funding is both representative of and affected by poverty. That means the issue of school funding both reflects and perpetuates economic inequity and all its related and underlying factors of neglect and marginalization, such as food insecurity, systemic poverty and racial imbalance.

**Effectively addressing issues of school funding requires the help and involvement of public education advocates in CBF life.**





## School Choice

In general, school choice allows families to choose how their school-aged children obtain their education in America. However, school choice has now shifted into a movement which has become ever more closely tied to the educational privatization movement.

It is an area which includes the related issues of vouchers and charter schools. All of these issues contribute to neglect and marginalization in the lives of students, teachers, families and local communities in several key ways:

- When school choice is used to expand privatization, the preservation of locally-controlled public schools and the consequent preservation of the education of those schools' students and the well-being of their families, their teachers and their overall community are marginalized and neglected.<sup>2</sup>

Over time, the matter of school choice has increasingly been used to advocate for charter school expansion, private school tax credits, Education Savings Accounts (ESAs) and home schooling.

Advocacy for such public school alternatives marginalizes public education with the resulting increase in neglect for many public school teachers and students, as well as their families and local communities.

- When school choice is expanded in a way that excludes advocacy of public schools, students, teachers, families and local communities become neglected and marginalized.
- School choice can marginalize and neglect student rights and protections, quality of education, safeguarding of school funding and educational accountability and transparency.<sup>3</sup>

**School funding is a key issue that requires the help of public education advocates in CBF life.**

1 Sylvia Allegretto, Emma Garcia, and Elaine Weiss, "Public Education Funding in the U.S. Needs an Overhaul," Economic Policy Institute, n.d., <https://www.epi.org/publication/public-education-funding-in-the-us-needs-an-overhaul/#:~:text=Education%20funding%20generally%20is%20inadequate,funding%20per%20student%20than%20-low%2D>.

2 Network for Public Education, "Public Schooling in America: Measuring Each State's Commitment to Democratically Governed Schools," PowerPoint, Public Schooling in America (Network for Public Education, April 2022), 5. <https://networkforpubliceducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Public-Schooling-in-America.pdf>.

3 Network for Public Education, "Public Schooling in America: Measuring Each State's Commitment to Democratically Governed Schools," PowerPoint, Public Schooling in America (Network for Public Education, April 2022), 6. <https://networkforpubliceducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Public-Schooling-in-America.pdf>.



## Vouchers

The provision of vouchers is an issue which contributes to the neglect and marginalization in the lives of students, teachers, families and local communities in several key ways.

Vouchers divert school funding from public schools by allowing such funding to be used by students and their families to subsidize or pay education tuition at private and religious schools.<sup>4</sup>

Vouchers neglect and marginalize students, teachers, families and local communities by:

- Allowing public, local and state tax revenue (the bulk of public school funding) to support private and religious educational institutions.
- Allowing for the exemption from and ignoring of taxpayer accountability measures and oversight.<sup>5</sup>
- Allowing private and religious institutions (and charter schools without local school board authorization) to marginalize and neglect disenfranchised students [ESOL (English as Second Language)] learners, students with disabilities, etc. Many such institutions practice discriminatory enrollment processes and do not adhere to ESSA (Every Student Succeeds Act) and IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) standards (as public schools are required to do).<sup>6</sup>

Vouchers weaken public schools and decrease their ability to provide a quality free and appropriate education to all students, especially those with disabilities or those belonging to lower socioeconomic groups who often experience heightened neglect and marginalization.<sup>7</sup>

Vouchers contribute to the increased experience of neglect and marginalization in the lives of students, teachers, families and local communities.

**Vouchers are a key issue that require the help of public education advocates in CBF life.**

4 National School Boards Association, “School Vouchers,” 2019, <https://www.nsba.org/advocacy/federal-legislative-priorities/school-vouchers#:~:text=School%20vouchers%20are%20education%20tax,program%20is%20in%20Washington%2C%20D.C.>

5 <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/582f7c15f7e0ab3a3c7fb141/t/63e2aa4b2e03327a1aae37f4/1675799115545/Voucher+Toolkit+TPs.pdf>

6 National School Boards Association, “School Vouchers,” 2019, <https://www.nsba.org/advocacy/federal-legislative-priorities/school-vouchers#:~:text=School%20vouchers%20are%20education%20tax,program%20is%20in%20Washington%2C%20D.C.>

7 <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/edlite-FAPE504.html>



## Charter Schools

Charter schools, classified as “Public Charter Schools,” can be defined as, “...publicly funded school[s] that [are] typically governed by a group or organization under a legislative contract—a charter—with the state, the district or another entity. Many charters exempt the charter school from certain state or local rules and regulations.”<sup>8</sup>

The existence of charter schools can contribute to neglect and marginalization in the lives of students, teachers, families and local communities in several key ways:

- Because charter schools can form their own contracts with the state, allowing for exemption from state regulations, these schools can be afforded unequal privilege. This privilege creates a lack of accountability and lack of adherence to the standards of FAPE (Free Appropriate Public Education) under the IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), which states, “A free appropriate public education must be available to all children residing in the state between the ages of three and 21, including children with disabilities.”<sup>9</sup>
- Because charter school governance and funding are determined by each state, the education which charter schools provide with public taxpayer funding, can create vast inequality of experience for students, families and their communities, which vary greatly from state-to-state and region-to-region.<sup>10</sup>

Charter schools—their existence and operation—can create unequal, legalized privilege.

Therefore, charter schools can provide the potential for the existence and experience of grave inequity, marginalization and neglect for children, their families and their communities, based on (but not limited to) disability, race and socioeconomic status.

Charter schools can contribute to the increased experience of neglect and marginalization in the lives of students, teachers, families and local communities.

**Charter schools are a key issue that requires the help of public education advocates in CBF life.**

8 <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=30>

9 <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/regs/b/b/300.101>

10 <https://www.nsba.org/-/media/NSBA/File/cpe-charter-fund-brief-september-2021.pdf>



## Systemic Inequity

The experience of systemic inequity within the United States of America is widespread, affecting students, their families, their communities and therefore, their schools. Students, families, their communities and schools experience inequity through economic injustice, lack of attention to disabilities and special needs and systemic racism.

Systemic inequity is a broad and complex issue which contributes to neglect and marginalization in the lives of students, teachers, families and local communities in several key ways.

Economic injustice is prevalent in the United States. Currently, the poverty rate in the United States is 11.6 percent. Prevalent economic injustice and socioeconomic disparity in the United States contribute to our current poverty rate. Public school students—who are legally entitled to a free and appropriate education—and the communities which serve them, experience this injustice and disparity in their own lives.

- America’s public schools serve more than 49.5 million students.<sup>11</sup> More than 25 million of those students live with families (and within communities) in “under-resourced households.”<sup>12</sup>
- Children who live with their families in “under-resourced households” experience socioeconomic disparity in variable degrees in the form of chronic food insecurity, instability in housing situations, lack of access to basic medical and dental care and more.
- This means that more than half of the children enrolled in public schools are marginalized by the effects of economic injustice and disparity.<sup>13</sup>

Issues of disabilities and special needs are other areas where students, their families and communities experience systemic inequity. The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) in conjunction with FAPE (Free Appropriate Public Education) entitles all children — including those with disabilities and special needs—free and appropriate educational services from public schools.

- Because of teacher shortages, exacerbated by underfunding of public education issues, students with disabilities and special needs are both neglected and marginalized in public schools. This disparity is more severe for students of color.<sup>14</sup>

11 [https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=372#:~:text=How%20many%20students%20attended%20school,incl%20ungraded%20students%20\(source\)](https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=372#:~:text=How%20many%20students%20attended%20school,incl%20ungraded%20students%20(source))

12 <https://www.nea.org/student-success/great-public-schools/community-schools>

13 <https://www.nea.org/student-success/great-public-schools/community-schools>

14 <https://www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/new-from-nea/students-color-disabilities-face-deep-inequities-made-worse-pandemic>



- Disabled students and students with special needs account for 14 percent of children enrolled in public schools, which is almost seven million students.<sup>15</sup>
- If disabled students and students with special needs cannot receive the services which they require and which they need to ensure that their education is appropriate—due to budget issues or staffing issues which stem from that—then those students, their families, their schools and their communities will experience neglect and marginalization.

**Systemic racism has a long history in public education in America, and its effects continue to influence children’s experience of their own education today.**

- Racial segregation and the history of integration within public schools have caused the neglect and marginalization of students of color for many years.<sup>16</sup>
- The practice of redlining in town planning—which has historically occurred and continues to occur currently—affects Americans of color, has influenced school districting, school funding and student populations within communities served by public schools.<sup>17</sup> Because local school funding is primarily determined by property taxes, this means that school districts which are majority nonwhite receive substantially lower amounts than majority white schools. A 2019 report found that disparity in funding to be equal to \$23 billion.<sup>18</sup>
- Implicit racial bias continues to affect students of color, their families, their schools and their communities. Student academic achievement gaps remain stark among racial demographics, with students of color experiencing the largest amounts of disparity.<sup>19</sup>
- School discipline standards differ greatly for students of color versus those for their white peers. This has been a historic problem, steeped in systemic racism in the United States, which continues to worsen. Public school students of color experiencing such disparity in discipline are marginalized; addressing the severity of this problem continues to be neglected.<sup>20</sup>

15 <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/04/23/as-schools-shift-to-online-learning-amid-pandemic-heres-what-we-know-about-disabled-students-in-the-u-s/>

16 <https://www.raceforward.org/research/reports/historical-timeline-public-education-us>

17 <https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2020/11/02/how-redlining-still-hurts-black-latino-students-public-schools-column/6083342002/>

18 <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/27/education/school-districts-funding-white-minorities.html>

19 <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2016/11/cover-inequality-school>

20 [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/racial-disparities-in-school-discipline-are-growing-federal-data-shows/2018/04/24/67b5d2b8-47e4-11e8-827e-190efaf1f1ee\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/racial-disparities-in-school-discipline-are-growing-federal-data-shows/2018/04/24/67b5d2b8-47e4-11e8-827e-190efaf1f1ee_story.html)



Public schools in the United States are legally required to provide “free and appropriate education” (FAPE) to all children. Private schools and even some charter schools—because they are not legally required to follow FAPE requirements—are able to sidestep these issues of systemic inequity which affect public school students, their families and their schools. Because of this, these schools contribute to systemic inequity.

**Systemic inequity is a key issue that requires the involvement of public education advocates in CBF life.**



## THE NEED FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION ADVOCACY IN POLICY AND LEGISLATION



**CBF Public Education Advocacy** seeks to empower, support and advocate for public education at local, state and federal government levels in the United States of America.  
(Policy)

---

**Are you interested in finding out more about Public Education Policy and Legislation Advocacy in your area, or do you want to get involved with CBF Public Education Advocacy?**

Contact our Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF) Advocacy Team:

- Stephen Reeves, Director of Advocacy, Executive Director of Fellowship Southwest: [sreeves@cbf.net](mailto:sreeves@cbf.net)
- Andrea Corso Johnson, Suzii Paynter March Advocacy Fellow: [ajohnson@cbf.net](mailto:ajohnson@cbf.net)
- Caroline LeGrand, Executive Assistant: [clegrand@cbf.net](mailto:clegrand@cbf.net)



## FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT PUBLIC EDUCATION ADVOCACY, BE SURE TO EXPLORE THESE GROUPS:

### Pastors for Children

- TX: [www.pastorsfortexaschildren.com](http://www.pastorsfortexaschildren.com)
- FL: [www.facebook.com/PastorsForFloridaChildren](https://www.facebook.com/PastorsForFloridaChildren)
- TN: [www.pastorsfortennesseechildren.org](http://www.pastorsfortennesseechildren.org)
- OK: [pastorsforoklahomakids.com](http://pastorsforoklahomakids.com)
- NC: [pastorsforncchildren.org](http://pastorsforncchildren.org)
- KY: [www.facebook.com/Pastors-for-Kentucky-Children-149663502390433](https://www.facebook.com/Pastors-for-Kentucky-Children-149663502390433)

### Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty

### Network for Public Education

### Public Funds-Public Schools

### National Education Association

### Southern Poverty Law Center

### ACLU

### Pew Research

### Communities in Schools

### Raise Your Hand Texas

### National Association of Evangelicals

### Children's Defense Fund

