Education Technology

The Issue

Over the past few decades, technology has dramatically changed most every profession and every enterprise. In doing so, technology has greatly improved productivity in most human endeavors. However, the education system operates in basically the same style as it did a century ago.

Technology has vast potential to improve educational quality and efficiency. Virtual learning is just one particular application in a field of possible improvements. Additionally, technology provides massive opportunities in areas such as student assessment, teacher feedback, remediation, and many other areas.

Today, when you check-out at Wal-Mart or HEB, the item is scanned. That scan not only tracks your purchase, it provides important backlog and production feedback. The vendor knows immediately which items need to be replaced on the market shelf and which are remaining. In education, the teacher does not receive feedback on student test results for weeks or months. In fact, too often in education we use multiple-choice questions to simplify the process, whereas with technology, more in-depth answers could still be evaluated quickly. With the use of technology, questions could require actual answers rather than just simple multiple-choice questions, especially in courses like math or history. Teachers could receive immediate performance feedback along with remediation recommendations for their students.

No one knows the full array of possibilities that could be achieved in education with improved technology. Currently, because we have a top-down government-run system, statutory restrictions frequently inhibit innovation. Stakeholders in the *status quo* lobby to keep and implement rules and regulations that protect the current system at the expense of the students and taxpayers.

Virtual learning is education's newest frontier. Although its full potential is still unknown, one thing is certain: we have only scratched the surface in unleashing the enormous potential recognizable within education technology. Great benefits await Texans, both students and taxpayers, in the form of greater efficiency, higher productivity, improved learning, and lower dropout rates.

Despite the fact that Texas has made some minimal progress in technological advances through the Texas Virtual School Network, the state's general policies in this arena remain far too restrictive. Most of these restrictions are promoted and held in place by pressure from stakeholders of the current system. They believe it is in their interest to protect the *status quo* at the expense of Texas students. If virtual education and innovation is to flourish in Texas, the state must not only remove restrictions which inhibit the use of new technology, but it must also remove policies that add needless red tape and expense to technological expansion in Texas classrooms.

The Facts

- Texas regulations restrict virtual learning and technological innovation in the education system.

- Texas trails behind other states in technological innovation, especially Florida and South Carolina.

- Analysis performed by the U.S. Department of Education found that online students perform more highly than traditionally educated students overall.

- Virtual education is rapidly growing across the nation and action is needed to prevent Texas from being further eclipsed.

Recommendations

- Remove restrictions to virtual learning and allow greater innovation.

- Fund education and schools by course rather than by average daily attendance (ADA).

- Accelerate implementation of interactive online administration of state assessments.

- Encourage the use of blended learning as a teaching tool in Texas classrooms.

- Allow every public school to run their own virtual education shop, rather than running through the red tape of the virtual school network process.

- Allow greater freedom for private providers of virtual education.

- Allow more flexibility for private and homeschooled students to be involved in publicly provided virtual education in Texas.

Resources

Virtual Education and the Future of Texas Education by James Golsan, Texas Public Policy Foundation (Mar. 2012).

Virtual Schools: The Future is Now by James Golsan, Texas Public Policy Foundation (Mar. 2011).

Virtual Learning Across the Nation by James Golsan, Texas Public Policy Foundation (Aug. 2011).

Report for Texas Efficiency Litigation by Terry Moe (July 2012).

What Keeps Texas Schools from Being as Efficient as They Could Be? by Dr. Paul Hill (July 2012).

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