

8209:3/00

**American Baptist
Resolution on
Church and Public Education**

In every society, the education of each new generation plays a critical role in shaping individual and community life. Thus questions of the purpose, content and method of all levels of education are of great importance to Christians as we seek to participate in expanding the reach of God's love and justice. Further, we recognize with repentance that we place an almost insurmountable obstacle in the path of many children by failing to provide them with the best education possible.

We are in a time when criticism of our public schools is common, and when conversation and debate about public education is increasingly politicized. Yet the public schools are the primary route for most children - especially the children of poverty - into full participation in our economic, political and community life. As a consequence, all of us, especially Christians, have a moral responsibility to support, strengthen and reform the public schools. They have been and continue to be both an avenue of opportunity and a major cohesive force in our society, a society daily becoming more diverse racially, culturally and religiously.

Concern about the decline of quality in some public schools has led to a number of initiatives, including charter schools and magnet schools or advocacy for a system of school vouchers. As with all important matters, it is essential that we work to understand the situations of those with perspectives different from our own and that we avoid the temptation to oversimplify complex issues. Some persons are strongly convinced, for instance, that school vouchers are a clear use of public funds for private purposes and a potential threat to the Constitutional separation of church and state. Others feel that families trapped in failing urban schools, due largely to middle class flights, have little choice but to send their children to private schools, but may not be able to make this choice without some support from public funds. We must also be aware of differences in charter schools. Some charter schools are accountable to local school boards, just as other public schools. Some charter schools, however, are accountable to a different board, or to a university

Too often, criticism of the public schools fails to reflect present societal realities. Wide disparities among public schools exist largely because the schools reflect the affluence and/or political power of the communities in which they are found. Within virtually every state there are school districts which spend on the students three or four times the amount of money spent on other children in the same state. Most tellingly, the schools which offer the least to their students are often schools serving poor children, among whom children of color figure disproportionately. We must address with prayerful determination

the issues of race and class which prevent many children from realizing their God-given potential and which threaten both public education and democracy in the United States.

We call upon every American Baptist individual and congregation to make real their commitment to all of our nation's children through actions which renew and strengthen public education by:

1. Supporting programs and measures which enable and empower parents and families to understand, accept and fulfill their responsibilities for the education of their children through constructive and mutually supportive relationships with teachers and school administrators and through their effective participation in community decisions which bear upon schooling and other learning opportunities for children and youth;
2. Honoring teachers;
3. Encouraging all schools to use curricula reflecting the role of the many racial and ethnic groups in the history and present life and culture of the United States;
4. Initiating programs in cooperation with the public schools to provide after-school and vacation help, enrichment, tutoring and mentoring programs, literacy and reading emphases;
5. Supporting programs and measures which enlarge public participation in open inquiry, debate and political action concerning the goals of education, the current conduct of public education, and the development of those reforms which will provide all children and youth equal opportunity;
6. Advocating adequate tax support and equitable distribution of this support in order to insure public schools of high quality for all children;
7. Encourage innovative and carefully monitored reform efforts in the public school system, giving particular attention to matters of access and justice in governance, financing and selection of students.

Affirmed by the General Board Executive Committee - March 2000
(Combination of Resolution on Quality Education and Resolution on Educational Institutions and Social Change)
(General Board Reference # - 8209:3/00)

POLICY BASE

American Baptist Policy Statement on Human Rights

As American Baptists we declare the following rights to be basic human rights, and we will support programs and measures to assure these rights:

1. The right of every person to choose a religion freely, to maintain religious belief or unbelief without coercion; the right for communities of faith to meet together to engage in public worship, to witness publicly to others, to speak prophetically from religious beliefs, and to be free from governmental intrusion, coercion, and control in the free exercise of conscience and religion;
2. The Right to the basic necessities of food, shelter, clothing and health care;
5. The right to grow in mind and self-fulfillment, to secure an education, to develop knowledge, to exchange ideas; and to receive, impart and have access to information;
9. The right to human dignity, to be respected and treated as a person, and to be protected against discrimination without regard to age, sex, race, class, marital status, income, national origin, legal status, culture or condition in society;
10. The right of ethnic or racial groups to maintain their cultural identity and to develop institutions and structures through which that identity can be maintained;
11. The right of citizenship in a nation, to participate in the political process, to form political parties, to have a voice in decisions made in the political arenas, to be secure from fear of deportation or expulsion, to emigrate and to have political asylum.

American Baptist Policy Statement on Native Americans

5. Education. We must see that both the public and federal educational systems provide a higher level of literacy and quality education among all Native Americans.

We must explore and encourage alternatives to formal education which will provide not only academic knowledge but vocational skills as well.

SUPPORTING POSITION

Board of Educational Ministries Resolution on Declaration of Commitments on the Churches and Public Education

1. Support programs and measures which continue to provide as the right of all children and youth integrated education of

high quality. Such education must avoid discrimination on the basis of class, race, religion, sex, place of national origin or of physical, mental and emotional capacities.

2. Support programs and measures which encourage adequate and equitable tax support and provision for public schools of high quality for all children and youth. Such support must not be made fully dependent upon the place of residence and the variations in value of real estate for taxing purposes.

11. Support programs and measures which provide for education in public schools about the history, literature, and symbols of varied cultural and religious traditions. Churches and other religious communities should encourage to provide for quality instruction in tradition and experience of religious faith and practice.

12. Support programs and measures which encourage church members and others to study the ways in which the moral formation of youth is accomplished in our society, and to share in defining the relative roles of family, church, business, government, and communications media in that formation.