



Vouchers

Legislation to create taxpayer-funded private school vouchers has been introduced — and failed to pass — in every Texas legislative session since 1995. In more recent sessions, proponents introduced vouchers in the form of “tax credit scholarships” and “education savings grants” and began marketing the idea as “school choice” and the “civil rights issue of the 21st century.” The latest attempt to open the door to vouchers was a move to add a pilot “education savings grant” to an important school funding bill in 2017 — a move that resulted in the death of the bill. Despite all these failed attempts, voucher proponents persist. Many public education advocates believe the reason for their persistence is that the true goal is to siphon public funds for private gain. The fight continues this session. Defeating voucher legislation once again will require reminding lawmakers of the damage they would do to Texas public schools and students.

Public schools need every dollar.

Texas public schools are already struggling financially due to the state decreasing its share of the bill and a broken school finance system that is yet to be fixed by the Legislature. Texas ranks 36th among the states in per-pupil expenditures, despite having one of the healthiest economies in the U.S. and a rich reserve.

Vouchers allow public funds to be spent without any accountability.

At a time when Texas public schools are being held to increasingly rigorous accountability standards, lawmakers should not allow public, taxpayer dollars to be spent at private or religious schools that do not have to meet the same standards. Private schools do not have to report student achievement data to the state, and they do not have to meet the same standards for hiring teachers.

Vouchers could be expensive.

Depending on the limitations set in the specific voucher legislation, hundreds of thousands of students who are currently attending private schools or being home-schooled could begin to receive vouchers, requiring the state to spend much more on education than it does now.

The amount of a voucher would not be enough to cover tuition at most private schools.

The amount of a voucher would not be enough to cover tuition at most private schools. Only more affluent families with the means to pay the balance of their children’s tuition would truly benefit. This would leave the very children vouchers are supposed to help left behind in schools with even less funding than before.

Private schools are not an option for most students.

Private schools do not exist in every part of Texas, especially in rural areas. If a voucher program is created, fly-by-night private schools could pop up across the state, offering “choice” while profiting from public tax dollars.

School choice is already offered in Texas.

School choice is already offered in Texas in such a way that preserves accountability and local control. Many districts offer multiple school options through magnets, academies, and transfers. Students are benefiting from legislation giving districts

more tools for innovation. Public schools are providing more personalized curriculum and pathways to college and career.

Private schools may discriminate; public schools must educate every child.

Private schools are the ones that have choice with vouchers. They may or may not enroll any student they choose. Those with records of academic failure, those with disabilities, and those who are difficult to teach due to behavioral issues would not be the top choices of private schools with limited space. The children who need the most attention would be left behind in schools lacking the resources to provide them with what they need.

Vouchers would allow public funds to be spent on religious activities.

Most private schools have a religious affiliation and teach religion. Vouchers would allow public funds to be spent on religious activities, blurring the line between church and state.

Texas has a poverty problem.

Six out of 10 Texas public school students live in or nearly in poverty. Economically disadvantaged students — the students most likely to be left behind in underfunded public schools should a voucher program be established — are historically more expensive to educate than more affluent students because they don’t have as many external educational opportunities. Also, districts often provide them with more services. Schools need more, not less, money to educate these students.

Vouchers are not popular among Texans, and they are losing favor in other states where they’ve been tried.

In a 2015 University of Texas/Texas Tribune poll of registered voters, a voucher program was the least popular idea for ways to improve Texas public schools. On Election Day 2018, Arizona voters rejected by a 65-35 margin Proposition 305, a massive expansion of school vouchers.

How are education savings grants just vouchers by another name?

Education savings accounts take a portion of public funds that would have been used to educate a child in public school and put the funds in a special savings account for the child’s family to spend on private tuition and other education-related expenses with no accountability for how the funds are spent.