



Protecting Your Child, Your State And Your Money From An Education Scheme

(NAPS)—There's a movement to take hundreds of millions of Texas taxpayer dollars and use it to limit the education available to millions of Texas students. It has nothing to do with school curriculum and everything to do with public school funding.

The Problem

The issue is vouchers, also known as education savings accounts (ESAs). Vouchers and ESAs have been called a scheme to divert public funds to private schools and vendors, and then continue to undermine traditional public schools and charters, teachers, and students. Vouchers and ESAs siphon off money that could be used to expand pre-kindergarten, support much-needed salary and retirement increases for teachers and staff, and support tutoring and accelerated instruction for the neediest students.

What They Are

Vouchers are tuition payments parents can use for their children to supplement the cost of tuition at a private school with no public oversight or accountability. This leaves any voucher program rife for mismanagement of financial resources, and lack of academic accountability.

Education Savings Accounts (ESAs) are personal savings accounts funded by public tax dollars for tuition at a private school or private vendor with no public oversight or accountability.

Business tax credits let companies funnel funds for private school vouchers in lieu of paying state taxes.

Special population vouchers are generally for students with special education needs but typically fund only a fraction of their actual education costs.

Virtual vouchers divert funds from public schools to private vendors in order to establish a statewide system of publicly funded private virtual schools with no oversight or accountability.

"Bracketed" vouchers single out certain student populations or communities, possibly excluding higher-income students or rural schools.

It doesn't matter what they're called, however; vouchers can have a long-lasting, negative effect on the state.

What They Do

All of these vouchers hurt public schools because they affect how much funding is left for programs that benefit and support Texas public and charter schools.

Consider this: For each student leaving a Texas public school, a campus would lose about \$10,000 in state and local funding. And when those resources leave the school or district,



Giving taxpayer dollars to private schools and vendors that do not have to account for their spending or the academic outcomes of their students is not good for children or a responsible use of funds.

the fixed costs of running those schools don't go away. Class sizes increase, programs are cut, and public school communities become lesser shells of what they could be if the students remained. For example, in rural Texas communities, just 4 to 5 students leaving for a private virtual school under a voucher program could hurt the school's ability to fund extracurricular activities.

Evidence from other states shows that in many cases private school vouchers don't even cover the full cost for a student to attend private school, which averages more than \$12,000 a year.

Meanwhile, students with physical, mental, or learning disabilities may not have access to the services they need and that are legally required at public school, but not guaranteed at private school. What's more, when a parent enrolls a child with special needs in a private school, they waive their rights under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

What The Researchers Found

Recent studies show voucher programs do not even make a major positive impact on students.

- Researchers at Brown University found voucher programs don't greatly affect students' college enrollment and degree attainment—least of all those most in need of support.
- According to a study published in the *Journal of School Choice*, families faced significant financial, social, and academic barriers when either enrolling or staying enrolled in voucher programs. Parents often faced unforeseen and hidden expenses from private schools, such as uniforms, transportation to school, meals, field trips, and other fees.
- The same article also showed that students themselves faced academic barriers that either prevented them from accessing the vouchers or pushed

them out of the program. Even if students were eligible for vouchers, they would still need to be admitted into private schools. Students who had low test scores were not admitted into schools and those who were admitted faced inadequate academic preparation and support to succeed within their new school.

- A study of the Louisiana program found large negative effects of using a voucher, especially in learning math.
- The U.S. Department of Education found that, across all types of schools examined, students in traditional public schools were more likely than charter, private voucher, and private non-voucher to take an AP exam.
- In the peer-reviewed journal *Educational Policy*, a review of the competitive impact of private school choice on student achievement at the district level found no effect.

What Can Be Done

Fortunately, there's a non-partisan, nonprofit organization supporting public policy solutions that invest in Texas' 5.4 million public school students. Raise Your Hand Texas believes state dollars should remain in public schools. Only public schools serve all students, it points out, and are required to meet federal standards for those with disabilities or limited English proficiency. Public schools are equitably funded and held accountable for measurable student results and can best serve all Texas families and taxpayers.

While a continued conversation on parental rights and responsibilities within public schools can be good, this policy conversation does not need to be linked to vouchers. Which is why Raise Your Hand Texas opposes any form of school voucher, including the provision of Article 2 in SB 8 that creates an Education Savings Account. SB 8 clearly acknowledges that private schools and vendors will not be required to comply with federal and state protections for students with disabilities, protections public schools are required to offer. In fact, SB 8 clearly states that private schools and vendors do not have to provide the same education as public schools.

As Texas school districts face record inflation and an ongoing teacher shortage, the Texas Legislature should not invest its time and resources in programs that fail to support all students, Raise Your Hand Texas contends.

Learn More

For further facts, stats and information on how you can help, visit www.RaiseYourHandTexas.org.