



# TEXAS STATE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION

FIGHTING FOR TEXAS PUBLIC SCHOOLS SINCE 1880

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## TESTIMONY SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE March 29, 2007

Good afternoon, I am Jack Kelly with the Texas State Teacher Association. TSTA is opposed to SB 1506, Sen. Janek's voucher bill.

Article VII, Section I of the Texas Constitution provides (in part) "it shall be the duty of the Legislature of this State, to establish and make suitable provision for the support and maintenance of an efficient system of public free schools." We have spent a lot of hours in the legislative and judicial systems over the last twenty five years trying to clarify what those thirty words mean. It does not mean vouchers for private schools.

Presuming the best of intentions, those supporting vouchers want students who are not doing well in their current public school setting to have a chance to do better academically. There are numerous reasons students do not perform up to our expectations—they are not attending school, they are not participating in school, there are health, social, personal or family problems, etc.—none of which will automatically be improved by a change of school.

There are three key reasons to oppose this or any other voucher bill: Vouchers are unnecessary; they are fiscally irresponsible; and ultimately they are bad for students.

### Vouchers are unnecessary:

If a parent is concerned about the quality of education their child is receiving, there are already intra- and inter-district transfers; there are public education grant transfers and numerous charter schools already available within the public education system.

### Vouchers are fiscally irresponsible:

Texas can not afford a voucher program. Even with HB1, many school districts cannot attract or retain sufficient certified classroom teachers. In addition to personnel costs, school districts need additional money for programmatic improvements, computers and other materials and, in many districts, facilities assistance. The state has not yet adequately funded the education program it is constitutionally required to provide; it should not divert funds to promote another education program.

In one very simple example, if the average voucher is \$6000 and 50 students in a high school use this new program; that will mean a reduction of \$300,000 for the public school—or about seven teacher's salaries. The reduction in the number of students will be scattered across all the grades and departments of the school. That is a

reduction of 10-12 students per grade level or 2-3 per class. So the school has the same costs in personnel, facilities, utilities, and transportation as before, but it has to meet those needs with \$300,000 fewer dollars. Under SB 1506, 5% of the students in the affected districts equal about 36,000 students, times the same \$6000 voucher and these districts would lose about \$216 million per year.

Vouchers are bad for many students:

If there are problems with students not receiving a quality education in a specific building or district, the problem should be corrected so that all students will get a good education. Creating a competing educational system is not the appropriate response. In fact, by providing an alternative for some students, vouchers could actually impede the push for improvement necessary for all the remaining students. HB 1 directed the Commissioner of Education to be more vigilant in monitoring student progress and working to improve or close low performing campuses. The state needs to let those changes proceed before creating yet another solution to the same problem.

Public schools are doing a good job with the resources available. Where there are problems, they need to be corrected—for all the students. Texas needs to adequately fund the existing public school system. Therefore, TSTA would urge you to vote against SB 1506.

**COUNTIES/ISDS AFFECTED BY SB 1506**

			2000 Census		% Econ.
		Bexar CO.	1,396,931	Enroll.	Disadv.
15	915	NORTHSIDE		82000	50%
15	907	SAN ANTONIO	ANTONIO	55000	92%
15	904	HARLANDALE		14000	91%
15	905	EDGEWOOD		11967	92%
15	908	SOUTH SAN ANTONIO	ANTONIO	9600	90%
				0	
		DALLAS CO.	2,218,899	0	
				0	
57	905	DALLAS		164000	83%
				0	
		HARRIS CO.	3,400,578	0	
				0	
101	912	HOUSTON		210292	82%
101	909	NORTH FOREST	FOREST	8915	95%
				0	
		TARRANT CO.	1,446,219	0	
				0	
220	905	FORT WORTH	WORTH	80000	71%
				0	
		TRAVIS CO.	812,200	0	
				0	
227	901	AUSTIN		81859	60%
				0	
		TOTAL		717633	