

SB 308 Testimony

Chairman Shapiro and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify. I am Bob Schoolfield, volunteer and founder of Let's Choose Schools in Texas, a non-partisan grassroots organization committed to pursuing all avenues for increasing school choices. I am in favor of SB 308 because it will increase the number of charter schools. I wanted to point out some measures of excellence that many charter schools have achieved. I am going to refer to handouts delivered for Connie Sadowski's testimony. She had to leave before she could testify in person.

On the Texas Charter School Factsheet (Red boundary), the percentage of charter schools nationally in the top 1600 public schools is 4%, which is twice the percentage of charter schools among all public schools nationally, which is 2%. This is according to a US News and World report, Dec 2007.

On the Brooke Terry article, two of the top 100 public schools in the nation are Texas charter schools, IDEA Public Schools in the Rio Grande Valley and YES Prep Public Schools in Houston.

The percentage of Texas charter schools that rate exemplary is more than twice the percentage of exemplary traditional public schools. The percentage of charter schools missing the federal annual yearly progress targets is 25% less than the percentage of traditional public schools missing the targets.

Both articles indicate that charter schools have 35% more minority students than traditional public schools. So the claim that charter schools cream off the best students from traditional public schools is simply not true.

One advantage for charter schools is that they can specialize in a particular category of students. Three charter school specializations are

1. elementary schools that have longer school hours,
2. college preparatory schools for minority students, and
3. schools specializing in dropout recovery programs.

The current waiting list of 17,000 students is shortchanging those students, which are primarily minority.

Some of the opponents to removing the cap want to limit the number of charter schools because, they say, that they fear allowing more failing charter schools. Actually, the opposite is true. More charter schools means that bad charter schools will be weeded out sooner. With more suppliers, students will be able to more freely change schools. This means that charter schools are more likely to fail for a lack of customers, than for being ruled academically unacceptable.

When bad schools fail, it is a good thing. It eliminates an ineffective school. Unfortunately, failing ISD schools can't fail and close. They are like zombies that are already dead, but can't be put to rest. Accountability to parents, who have the ability to leave, is much more effective than accountability to the TEA, SBOE, or legislature.

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SB 1830 Testimony

Chairman Shapiro and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify in favor of SB 1830. I am in favor of the bill because it also will increase the number of charter schools.

Providing classrooms and a school campus is the most difficult hurdle for every open-enrollment charter school. Current charter contracts provide no funds dedicated to the purchase of classrooms. SB 1830 provides two ways to help charter schools afford classrooms. There is a third way that I hope will be added to the bill.

1. The bill creates a new campus capacity allotment for open enrollment charters that are rated academically acceptable or above. Funds may only be used for operations and facilities.
2. The bill provides a new motivation for ISDs to co-locate with charter schools. Co-location is a fancy word for an ISD sharing unused facilities with a charter school. ISDs currently have the authority to co-locate with charter schools and it is happening in Houston to some extent. The bill allows ISDs to include the co-locating charter schools TAKS scores with their TAKS scores for the purpose of the TEA academic accountability rating for the ISD.

This would be a great help for charter schools. Not only would it give them a way to obtain facilities for their schools, but also it would give the charter school more visibility in the community. The negative side of this provision is that it gives ISD schools another way to mask their true TAKS scores. But the greater good is that it helps successful charter schools overcome their most difficult logistical problem and allow them to build on their successes.

3. The third way of helping charter schools with facilities funding is the language found in HB 3051 by Rep. Rafael Anchia that I hope will be included in a committee substitute of SB 1830. This bill allows the SBOE to grant extended charters of 25 years for open-enrollment charter schools, instead of only 10 years.

All open-enrollment charter schools typically receive an initial charter term of 5 years. Some successful charter schools have had their charters renewed for a term of 10 years. Neither of these terms gives a charter school the continuity needed to borrow funds for facilities from a bank. If successful charter schools could obtain extended charters of 25 or 30 years, they would have sufficient continuity to obtain a loan for facilities. I would suggest increasing the term to 30 years since this is the standard term for real estate loans.

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Dallas ISD Scandals

1. This article describes a meeting where Dallas ISD Superintendent Michael Hinojosa announces a **\$64 million budget shortfall**. It also lists **earlier financial "problems"** from 2005, 2006, 2007, and early in 2008.

<http://www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/dn/latestnews/stories/091108dnmetdallasisdbudget.62f2203d.html>

2. This excellent article details many of the Dallas ISD accounting problems. Some highlights from the article are:

"The district has always overspent – for years," said finance chief Steve Korby, who joined the district in February. "The fact is that before, we've just always been lucky."

Employees left hundreds of accounts unreconciled for years. Why? Partly because DISD had hired into its finance shop, workers who lacked adequate accounting skills, auditors said. Last spring, the district's finance department had **only one employee whose job title was "accountant" and others had "difficulty explaining changes in account balances."**

<http://www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/dn/education/stories/DN-disdeficit.23met.ART.State.Edition2.4a55e07.html>

3. This article explains how the **Dallas ISD illegally issued fake social security numbers so the district could hire "foreign citizens with visas"**.

http://www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/dn/latestnews/stories/111408dnmetdisd-socials.3d93dbc.html?ocp=2#slcgm_comments_anchor

4. The Federal Aviation Administration keeps a national database of the owners of all airplanes registered in the USA. This webpage shows a search of that database, which indicates that the **Dallas ISD owns 6 airplanes and 3 helicopters**. Austin ISD, El Paso ISD, Ft. Worth ISD, Houston ISD, and San Antonio ISD own no aircraft.

http://registry.faa.gov/aircraftinquiry/nameSQL.asp?nametxt=dallas+independent+school+district&cmndfind.x=15&cmndfind.y=12&sort_option=5

5. After all these years of incompetence and fraud, the Dallas ISD website shows that Superintendent Michael **Hinojosa still has his job**.

<http://www.dallasisd.org/about/super.htm>