



Testimony to the Senate Education Committee on Interim Charge #6,

August 24, 2012

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The Texas School Alliance (TSA) comprises 38 of the largest school districts in the state, representing 38 percent of the state's total student enrollment, 43 percent of Texas' economically disadvantaged students, and 59 percent of the state's Limited English Proficient students. On behalf of TSA, we strongly oppose the use of private school vouchers for public education.

Many proponents of voucher proposals argue that private schools will be better able to operate efficiently in a deregulated environment. We think that the public would be better served through the careful analysis of educational regulations to determine which are serving our students well and which are not. It is the legislature's responsibility to implement regulations that insure accountability without leading to inefficiency for all entities spending public dollars. We also think that flowing tax dollars to privately run schools without any financial or academic accountability will likely result in increased, rather than reduced levels of waste.

We are very concerned that the calculated "savings" associated with the "Taxpayer Savings Grants" incorrectly mixes state, local and federal dollars as well as operations and facilities funds in a way that results in an incorrect interpretation and very misleading account of actual savings. We also believe that statements about the benefit to public education are misleading since the proposal makes no effort to reinvest any dollars back into the public schools. At a more fundamental level, however, we think that this approach paves the way for a wrongful attempt to abdicate legislative responsibility to properly educate all children through a constitutionally required system of public free schools. A focus on how to properly fulfill this responsibility is long overdue and should certainly come before any conversation about the creation of a voucher-type program.

Finally, we remind the legislature that a significant level of competition already exists within the public school system. Many of our state's school districts accept transfer students from outside the district, and the state funding formulas are designed to allow for these kinds of arrangements. The addition of within-district school choice options, magnet programs, virtual classes and charter schools has created a market place in which significant options are available to families who are interested in them.

We urge the committee to consider ways of improving the system for all children and look forward to working with you on these issues.

Sincerely,

Curtis Culwell
President, Texas School Alliance