



TEXAS STATE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION / NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

RITA C. HAECKER, PRESIDENT NOEL CANDELARIA, VICE PRESIDENT RICHARD KOURI, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Texas State Teachers Association's Testimony on Interim Charge #5

Texas State Teachers Association has always supported all Texas public schools. We believe, however, that all public schools should be held to the same standards. Further, we are concerned that expansion of the charter school system will invite further abuse of the system. Expansion should not even be an option at this point. TEA still has not reached the maximum number of charters allowed by law. What is needed is proper oversight for these schools to function properly and accomplish their task of preparing children for college or the workforce. TEA is already constrained by a budget that does not allow them to keep up with the current number of charter schools. Any expansion of the current charter system in Texas should be done only after a lengthy and exhaustive interim study focusing specifically on charter schools, how they are operating, what could be made better, and what might be a new appropriate cap for charter schools.



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Texas State Teachers Association's Testimony on Interim Charge #6

Texas State Teachers Association opposes school vouchers because they divert essential resources from public schools to private and religious schools, while offering no real “choice” for the overwhelming majority of students. Teachers, parents, and the general public have long opposed private school tuition vouchers – especially when funds for vouchers compete with funds for overall improvements in America’s public schools. The National Education Association and TSTA have been leaders in the fight to improve public schools and oppose alternatives that divert attention, energy, and resources from efforts to reduce class size, enhance teacher quality, and provide every student with books, computers, and safe and orderly schools.

There is no link between vouchers and gains in student achievement. There is no conclusive evidence that vouchers improve the achievement of students who use them to attend private school. Nor is there any validity to claims that, by creating a “competitive marketplace” for students, vouchers force public schools to improve. In fact, the most dramatic improvements in student achievement have occurred in places where vouchers do not exist – such as Texas, North Carolina, Connecticut and Chicago. Instead, those states and communities focused on teacher quality and extra help for students who need it.

Vouchers undermine accountability for public funds. Private schools have almost complete autonomy with regard to how they operate: who they teach, what they teach, how they teach, how – if at all – they measure student achievement, how they manage their finances, and what they are required to disclose to parents and the public. The absence of public accountability for voucher funds has contributed to rampant fraud, waste and abuse in current voucher programs.

Vouchers do not reduce public education costs. Vouchers actually increase costs by requiring taxpayers to fund two school systems, one public and one private.

Vouchers do not give parents real educational choice. Participating private schools may limit enrollment, and in many cases may maintain exclusive admissions policies and charge tuition and fees far above the amount provided by the voucher. Unlike public schools, private and religious schools can – and do – discriminate in admissions on the basis of prior academic achievement, standardized test scores, interviews with applicants and parents, gender, religion, income, special needs, and behavioral history.

The public disapproves of vouchers. By overwhelming margins, Americans prefer improving their public schools to spending scarce tax dollars on voucher programs. Since 1966, vouchers or voucher-related measures have been placed before voters in 13 states and the District of Columbia 22 times. With the lone exception of South Dakota – which approved the provision of textbooks to parochial schools in 1986 – voters have rejected public aid to private and religious schools every time. In those 22 elections, nearly two out of three voters cast “no” votes.

Vouchers have no place in our public school system.