



## **Written Testimony of the Texas Latino Education Coalition Relating to Texas Charter School Expansion, Opposing SB 1061 Testimony Before the Texas Senate Education Committee, April 25, 2017**

Dear Honorable Chair and Committee Members:

Thank you for hearing our testimony today. The Texas Latino Education Coalition (TLEC) is a collaborative of organizations and individuals who advocate the rights of Latinos at the local, state and national levels. The coalition was organized to focus specifically on critical educational issues in Texas and to improve the state of education for Latino students in public schools.

The best way to support public schools is by supporting public schools – not schools that are overseen by private interests. Unlike public schools, charter schools are not held accountable to a publicly-elected board of trustees for the usage of public dollars. As such, we oppose further expansion of charter schools and emphasize that **limited public funds for education should not be siphoned off for charter schools.**

After more than 20 years of the Texas charter school “experiment,” the results are mixed – at best. As a 2016 study stated, “Well over 80 independent and generally accepted studies... yielded the consistent finding that, after controlling for student demographics, charter schools show test-score results at levels that are not meaningfully better or worse than district schools” (Mathis, 2016). Yet, charter schools in Texas continue to grow. Perhaps most concerning fact is that, because charter schools do not have a local tax base, the state must provide all funding for maintenance and operations for charter schools.

The state’s investment and experiment with charters looks bleak when examining ratings by school district/charter operator:

- One out of every 12 charter operators (8.2 percent) failed to achieve the “met standard” or the lower “alternative standard,” compared to fewer than one out of every 25 school districts (3.8 percent).
- The true numbers may be even worse, as 10 charters (5.1 percent) were not rated compared to only two school districts (0.2 percent).
- The 2016 TEA state accountability ratings showed a continuing trend, with approximately twice as many charter campuses receiving “Improvement Required” ratings (10 percent) compared to traditional public schools (5.1 percent).

Diverting more public dollars to privately-operated charter schools is hardly the most efficient way of spending public tax dollars. **Despite the spotty performance, the state has increased funds for charter schools from \$200 million to \$2 billion over the last 10 years.**

The burden to the State of creating additional charters did not go unnoticed. As former Commissioner of Education Robert Scott testified in the most recent school finance trial, *Texas Taxpayer and Student Fairness Coalition v. Williams*, “When you create a charter, it’s like creating a whole new school district... It adds that level of workload to the agency” (FOF 1473). Indeed, the cap operates as an efficiency gauge, given the volatile performance of Texas charter schools, by:

- Maintaining some control for TEA in overseeing charter schools;
- Reducing the significant burden of limited state staff in reviewing applications for charters, in light of budget cuts to the agency;
- Saving the state tax dollars, due to the state funding of 100 percent of FSP and ASF funding for charter schools, as opposed to public schools that contribute local revenues; and
- Avoiding an even a greater number of lawsuits filed by charter operators seeking to stop the revocation of their charters by the State.

In light of charter schools’ mixed performance and substantial state funding diverted away from public schools and to privately operated charter schools, further expansion of charter schools would not be a wise investment of public dollars.

TLEC thanks this committee for the opportunity to testify and urges the Senate to oppose SB 1061.

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IDRA. (December 7, 2015). “The State of Texas Open-Enrollment Charter Schools and a Modest Proposal to Diversify and Improve Public Charter Schools, Charter School Interim Charge, Testimony of IDRA before the Texas Senate Education Committee. <http://budurl.com/IDRAtmChs15>

Mathis, W. (August 2016) “Research Based Options for Education Policymaking: Regulating Charter Schools,” mini-brief (Boulder, Colo.: National Education Policy Center). [http://nepc.colorado.edu/files/publications/Mathis%20RBOPM-10%20Regulating%20Charters\\_2.pdf](http://nepc.colorado.edu/files/publications/Mathis%20RBOPM-10%20Regulating%20Charters_2.pdf)

Texas Education Agency, 2016 Accountability Rating System. <https://rptsvr1.tea.texas.gov/perfreport/account/2016/highlights.pdf>