



HB 3643 Takes Schools in the Opposite Direction of What's Best for Students by Expanding Virtual Education

IDRA Testimony against House Bill 3643, submitted by Chloe Latham Sikes, Ph.D., to the House Public Education Committee, March 30, 2021

Dear Chairman Dutton and Honorable Members of the Committee:

My name is Dr. Chloe Latham Sikes, and I am the Deputy Director of Policy at IDRA, an independent, non-partisan, education non-profit committed to achieving equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college. We respectfully oppose HB 3643.

During the past year, students, families and teachers navigated the challenges of remote learning and arrived at the same conclusion: students do better when they can learn in-person. HB 3653 takes schools in the opposite direction by expanding virtual education through a commission. This is counter to best instructional practices for students and redundant to the existing Texas Virtual Schools Network, which already provides the infrastructure for students to access online courses.

The pandemic presented grave health and safety risks that required schools to adapt to distance, remote and modified in-person learning environments. While the Texas Education Agency and schools had to adapt quickly, they succeeded in developing statewide tools to accommodate virtual learning through the existing Texas Virtual Schools Network, newly developed Texas Home Learning resources, and device and connectivity supports to school districts. These steps enabled schools to serve students who attend school virtually. But no virtual environment can replace the in-person relationships, instruction, and assessments that teachers and students' peers provide in the classroom.

To better serve students now as we recover from the pandemic and create a more equitable school system moving forward, schools need continued investments in broadband, instructional materials, teachers and staff support, and student support services. We do not need a separate, costly and potentially ineffective virtual education system. Please oppose HB 3643.

IDRA is available for any questions or further resources that we can provide. Thank you for your consideration. For more information, please contact Chloe Latham Sikes, Ph.D., IDRA Deputy Director of Policy, at chloe.sikes@idra.org.

Resources

DePaoli, J., Hernández, L.E., Furger, R.C., & Darling-Hammond, L. (March 16, 2021). A Restorative Approach to Equitable Education, Learning Policy Institute. <https://idra-resource.center/RestorativeApproachforEquitableEducation>

IDRA. (July 2020). Guide to Ensuring Education Equity During and After COVID-19, website. San Antonio: IDRA. <https://idra.news/EdEquityinCOVID>

IDRA. (May 29, 2020). What We are Hearing from Families, Students and Educators: Part II, Learning Goes On. <https://idra.news/eNLearningGoesOn11>

McLaughlin, C. (2016). Low Graduation-Rate Schools Concentrated in Charter, Virtual School Sectors, National Education Association. <https://idra-resource.center/Low-Graduation-RateSchools>

IDRA is an independent, non-profit organization led by Celina Moreno, J.D. Our mission is to achieve equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college. IDRA strengthens and transforms public education by providing dynamic training; useful research, evaluation, and frameworks for action; timely policy analyses; and innovative materials and programs.