



## **New Charters Must Still Be Accountable to the State Board of Education and Communities**

**IDRA Testimony against Senate Bill 28: Relating to the approval of open-enrollment charter schools and the applicability of certain state and local laws to open-enrollment charter schools. Submitted by Chloe Latham Sikes, Ph.D., to the Senate Education Committee, March 25, 2021**

Dear Chairman Taylor and Honorable Members of the Committee:

My name is Dr. Chloe Latham Sikes, and I serve as the Deputy Director of Policy at IDRA (Intercultural Development Research Association). We are 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 Senate Bill 28.

### **Communities Must Maintain Accountability over New Charters**

Senate Bill 28 would strip oversight from the elected State Board of Education (SBOE) for new charter applicants and amendments. In a typical approval process, the commissioner of education conducts the first round of review for new charter applicants and presents recommendations to the SBOE. The SBOE then holds a public hearing on charter applicants so that community members, parents, students and educators can voice their perspectives about new charter schools that would open in their communities.

SB 28 would remove the primary way that community members voice their perspectives about new charter schools.

Traditional school districts must hold public hearings on bond elections, new campuses, boundary changes and other major policies that affect the local community. In the spirit of equitable community accountability, charter schools seeking state approval must continue to be held to the same standard with the SBOE.

### **The SBOE Helps Ensure Fiscal and Academic Accountability for New Charters**

The SBOE provides a check to establish balance in the consideration of charter applications. Since 2013, SBOE has only vetoed seven charter applications out of a total of 41 applications. The SBOE considers charter applicants' projected student enrollment, including of special populations, proposed admissions policies, any innovative programs in relation to the surrounding school districts, and the fiscal impact of charter schools. These considerations paired with public testimony provide a fuller picture of the charter applicants' history, proposals and potential impact than just the rubric scores from the commissioner and state agency.

This level of additional accountability from the SBOE is critical to ensure fiscal and academic accountability. From 2000 to 2017, state funding for charter schools increased by 640% as 500 new charter campuses opened (Villanueva, 2019). In 2019, Texas charter school systems

reported a failing academic accountability rating (D or F) at six times the rate of traditional school districts (TEA, 2020). Charter schools' extreme fiscal and academic impacts on school communities must be scrutinized fully with SBOE oversight to ensure they responsibly use state funds to equitably and adequately educate students.

### **Recommendations**

- Maintain community accountability over new charter applicants by opposing SB 28;
- Create equity between traditional school districts and charter schools by enhancing forums for community engagement that promote actual family voice and choice of their public schools; and
- Continue to make equitable investments in public schools to ensure safe learning environments, close the digital divide, and navigate the anticipated and unanticipated pandemic-related challenges of the next academic year.

Charter school applicants should still be accountable to the State Board of Education for fiscal and academic proposals and past performance if available. Communities deserve public accountability with all public schools.

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](mailto:chloe.sikes@idra.org).

### **Resources**

Latham Sikes, C. (December 2020). Texas Must Scrutinize Potential Charter Schools before Issuing Approvals for Growth, *IDRA Newsletter*. <https://idra.news/NLND20a>  
Texas Education Agency. (2020). [Enrollment in Texas Public Schools 2019-20](#).  
Villanueva, C. (2019). [Charter School Funding: A Misguided Growing State Responsibility](#). Every Texan.

*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.*