



# Education Savings Accounts Reduce Opportunities for Equitable Education for Texas Students

IDRA Testimony against SB 1, submitted by Chloe Latham Sikes, Ph.D., to the Texas Senate Education Committee, October 10, 2023

Dear Chair Creighton and Honorable Members of the Committee:

IDRA is an independent, non-partisan 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.

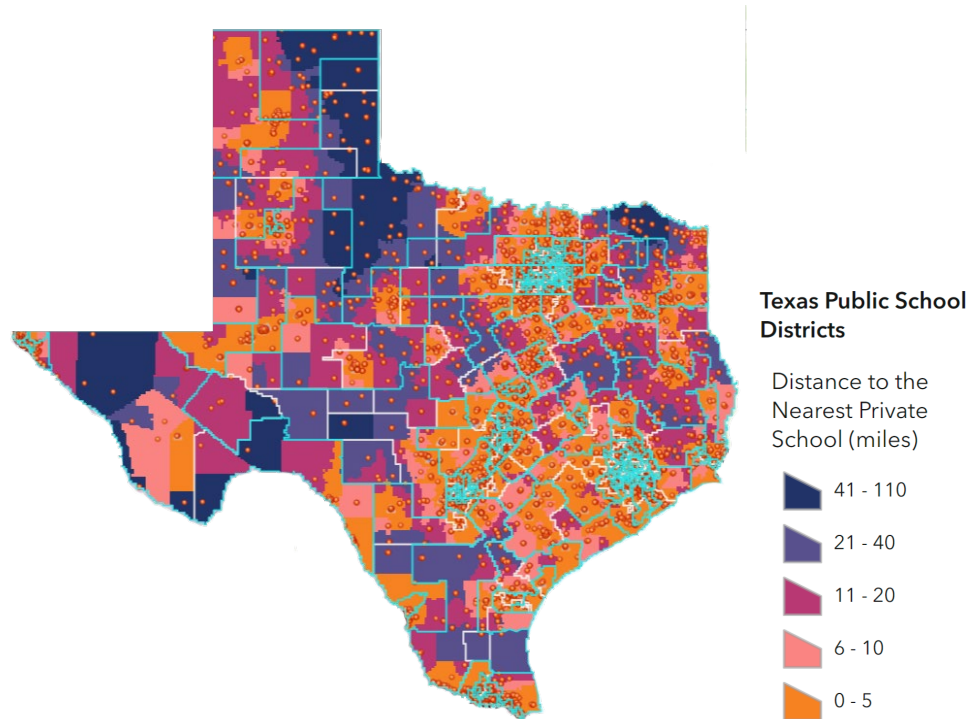
IDRA opposes Senate Bill 1 and any other legislative proposals that divert public school funds for private use, particularly without any public transparency or accountability. This proposed legislation takes the state farther away from the goals of fair school funding, high-quality public schools, and parent and community accountability over public funds and students' educational opportunities.

## **SB 1 Creates an Inefficient and Expensive Private School Voucher Program Without Guardrails**

Texas public schools serve all students as part of the state's constitutional obligation to provide an efficient public education system. SB 1 creates a separate, inefficient system of publicly-funded educational assistance organizations. If we look to other states with private school voucher programs, we see that costs have ballooned compared to what was originally predicted (Abrams & Koutsvalis, 2023). Florida, for example, now supports a private voucher program that rose to cost over \$1 billion in a few short years, reflecting 10% of the state education budget (McKillip & Dollard, 2022). These costs come with no fiscal accountability to the public.

## **Texas Private Schools Are Few and Far Between**

According to IDRA's analysis of Texas private schools by distance to public school districts, 23% of public school campuses are at least 10 miles away from the nearest private school, with 13% exceeding 20 miles. The cost of transportation services would come from the ESA amount, with additional costs transferred to the program participant's own family to absorb. For many families, traveling more than 40 miles round trip for students' school is unaffordable and not feasible.



Source: IDRA Map – Distance to Private Schools by Texas Senate and House Districts

### **SB 1 Promotes Ineffective Educational Programs and Could Increase Segregation**

Studies have found that private school vouchers do not improve student achievement. For instance, researchers at the University of Arkansas published a four-year study analyzing assessment data from students who used the Louisiana Scholarship Program. The results concluded that students using the program did visibly worse on state assessments four years later than their counterparts in public schools (Mills & Wolf, 2019). Similar negative trends have held true across programs in Alabama, Indiana, Ohio, and Washington, D.C.

There also is concern about the educational opportunities for students in bilingual and special education. Private institutions typically enroll fewer emergent bilingual students and students in special education (Mead & Eckes, 2018). A 2020 study found that private school voucher programs across 29 states rarely require transparent reporting on student achievement or graduation rates or information as basic as teachers' education qualifications. Most of the programs allowed private schools to discriminate against students' religious and gender identities for admission. Only five states of the 29 required that students with disabilities be admitted to private schools benefitting from the voucher programs.

Private school voucher programs lead to racial and socioeconomic segregation and disparate provision of educational services. Studies on comparable programs in other states, such as Indiana, Arizona and Ohio, indicated that they predominately serve white, affluent students already enrolled in private schools (Ee, et al., 2023; PFPS, 2023). SB 1 similarly extends program eligibility to students already enrolled in private schools, regardless of income levels.

Overall, research shows that private school voucher programs obscure transparency on school and student performance, reduce accountability for meeting students' needs, and permit discrimination from students' accessing the private education touted by the programs. This is an inefficient and unaccountable use of public education funds.

Private school vouchers disempower students and parents from accessing high-quality education.

IDRA is available for any questions or further resources that we can provide. Thank you for your consideration. For more information, please contact [chloe.sikes@idra.org](mailto:chloe.sikes@idra.org).

## References

- Abrams, S.E., & Koutsavlis, S.J. (March 2023). The Fiscal Consequences of Private School Vouchers. Southern Poverty Law Center, Education Law Center, Public Funds Public Schools.  
[https://pfps.org/assets/uploads/SPLC\\_ELC\\_PFPS\\_2023Report\\_Final.pdf](https://pfps.org/assets/uploads/SPLC_ELC_PFPS_2023Report_Final.pdf)
- Ee, J., Orfield, G., & Teitell, J. (2023). Private-Sector Schools. *The School Voucher Illusion: Exposing the Pretense of Equity*, 241.
- IDRA. (2023). IDRA Map – Distance to Private Schools by Texas Senate and House Districts.  
[https://www.idra.org/research\\_articles/community-action-data-dashboards-index/](https://www.idra.org/research_articles/community-action-data-dashboards-index/)
- McKillip, M., & Dollard, N. (2022). Florida's Hidden Voucher Expansion. Education Law Center, Florida Policy Institute.  
<https://edlawcenter.org/assets/Florida/Florida-Hidden-Voucher-Expansion.pdf>.
- Mead, J. F. & Eckes, S. E. (December 2018). How School Privatization Opens the Door for Discrimination. National Education Policy Center, [https://nepc.colorado.edu/sites/default/files/publications/PB%20Mead-Eckes%20Privatization\\_4.pdf](https://nepc.colorado.edu/sites/default/files/publications/PB%20Mead-Eckes%20Privatization_4.pdf).
- Mills, J., & Wolf, P. (May 10, 2019). The Effects of the Louisiana Scholarship Program on Student Achievement After Four Years. EDRE Working Paper, No. 2019-10. [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3376230](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3376230)
- Prothero, A., & Harwin, A. (February 28, 2020). Private School Choice Programs Fall Short on Transparency, Accountability. Education Week. <https://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/private-school-choice-programs-fall-short-on-transparency-accountability/2020/02?r=2000718806#database>
- PFPS. (May 2023). Keep Public Funds in Texas Public Schools. Public Funds Public Schools.  
[https://pfps.org/assets/uploads/PFPS\\_Texas\\_Policy\\_Brief\\_-\\_Final.pdf](https://pfps.org/assets/uploads/PFPS_Texas_Policy_Brief_-_Final.pdf)

*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.*