



## **SB 1 Poses a Threat to Public Education in Texas and to Our Most Vulnerable Students**

**TLEEC Testimony Against SB 1, submitted by Rebekah Skelton to the Texas Senate Education Committee, October 10, 2023**

Dear Chairman Creighton and Honorable Members of the Senate Education Committee:

My name is Rebekah Skelton, and I am testifying against Senate Bill 1 on behalf of the Texas Legislative Education Equity Coalition (TLEEC), a collaborative of 30 organizations and individuals with the mission to improve the quality of public education for all children, with a focus on racial equity. We advocate at the local, state, and national levels for high-quality teaching, curriculum and instructional practices and for bilingual education for emergent bilingual students, as well as fair funding and enhanced college access and success.

Our testimony today focuses on our deep concerns regarding SB 1, which would establish an education savings account (ESA) program in Texas.

TLEEC strongly opposes legislation that takes public money away from public schools under the guise of “parent empowerment.” In the proposed voucher plan, Texas families will be left with fewer choices, poorly funded public schools, and a diminished public education system dedicated to serving all students, including those with the greatest needs.

### **Funding Education Savings Accounts Means Funding Discrimination Against Students**

If SB 1 becomes state law, public schools stand to lose significant state and local funding, which will be diverted to unaccountable private institutions. Children are much more vulnerable to discrimination in private schools because they are not required to serve all students equally. Students with disabilities, in special education, bilingual education, or of diverse religious and gender identities could all be denied admission and educational services (Abrams & Koutslavis, 2023). In this case, it is not the *parents’* choice, it is the *schools’* choice. Public money should not be used to fund discrimination against students.

### **ESAs Divert Scarce Resources to Institutions Lacking Transparency and Accountability**

Education savings accounts also lead to serious accountability issues. Private schools would not be required to disclose to parents and the public how they operate or how they manage their finances. They are not required to administer the STAAR and are not rated by Texas’ A-F accountability system.

Our public schools already have great needs without losing more of their scarce resources to these unaccountable institutions. Any plan to divert public money to private schools would reduce the services

public schools can provide and make it harder to keep the teachers we need employed. Teachers' salaries are lagging behind inflation and leave many juggling multiple side jobs to make ends meet. Bilingual and special education programs are grossly underfunded and facing 30-year teacher shortages (Cross, 2017). Our basic allotment currently ranks in the bottom 15 states in the nation (The Education Trust, 2023), and Texas ranks 41<sup>st</sup> in the nation for per-pupil funding (Hanson, 2023). Our attention should be focused on closing these gaps, not putting more money into the hands of the privileged few.

We do not need to look far to see how voucher plans are playing out in other states. In Arizona, the vast majority of families applying for vouchers already enroll students in private schools, meaning the vouchers act as a subsidy to privileged families who can already afford private schools (Fischer, 2022). And even after decades of voucher systems in effect, researchers have found there is no evidence that they significantly increase student achievement (Spector, 2017).

## Recommendations

We urge the legislature to strengthen our public schools by increasing the basic allotment and keeping public money in public schools. Research has shown that school funding is the most important factor when it comes to providing children with a high-quality education (Latham Sikes, 2022). Any effort to divert public funds to private schools is not the answer. Giving private schools an advantage at the expense of public schools is contradictory to our responsibility to educate all Texas students and would exacerbate problems like school segregation and disparities in the quality of education students receive.

Our children are counting on us to give them the education they deserve. Keep public money in public schools.

For questions, please contact TLEEC either through Dr. Chloe Latham Sikes at IDRA ([chloe.sikes@idra.org](mailto:chloe.sikes@idra.org)) or Jaime Puente at Every Texan ([puente@everytexan.org](mailto:puente@everytexan.org)).

*The Texas Legislative Education Equity Coalition (TLEEC) is a collaborative of organizations and individuals with the mission to improve the quality of public education for all children, with a focus on racial equity. The coalition convenes organizations and individuals who advocate in the interest of public school students at the local, state and national levels.*

## TLEEC Member Organizations

ARISE Adelante	National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS)
Austin Justice Coalition	– Tejas Foco
Big Thought	San Antonio Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
Breakthrough Central Texas	Texas American Federation of Teachers
Children at Risk	Texas Association for Bilingual Education (TABE)
Coalition of Texans with Disabilities (CTD)	Texas Association for Chicanos in Higher Education (TACHE)
Dr. Hector P. García G.I. Forum	Texas Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education (TADOHE)
Easterseals Central Texas	Texas Association of Mexican American Chambers of Commerce (TAMACC)
Educators in Solidarity	Texas Center for Education Policy, University of Texas – Austin
Ethnic Studies Network of Texas (ESNTX)	Texas Hispanics Organized for Political Education (HOPE)
Every Texan	Texas League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)
Houston Community Voices for Public Education	Texas NAACP
IDRA	Texas State Teachers Association (TSTA)
McNeil Educational Foundation for Ecumenical Leadership Measure	The Arc of Texas
Mexican American Civil Rights Institute (MACRI)	The Education Trust in Texas
Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF)	UnidosUS (formerly known as NCLR)
Mexican American School Boards Association (MASBA)	

## Resources

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- Cross, F. (2017). Teacher shortage areas nationwide listing: 1990–1991 through 2017–2018. U.S. Department of Education Office of Postsecondary Education. <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/pol/bteachershortageareasreport201718.pdf>
- Fischer, H. (September 8, 2022). Most applying for Arizona vouchers already go to private schools. Arizona Daily Star. [https://tucson.com/news/local/education/most-applying-for-arizona-vouchers-already-go-to-private-schools/article\\_34d75b9a-2968-11ed-812b-f7dad22200b5.html](https://tucson.com/news/local/education/most-applying-for-arizona-vouchers-already-go-to-private-schools/article_34d75b9a-2968-11ed-812b-f7dad22200b5.html)
- Hanson, M. (2023, September 8). U.S. public education spending statistics. *Education Data Initiative*. <https://educationdata.org/public-education-spending-statistics#texas>
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- Spector, C. (February 28, 2017). Vouchers do not improve student achievement, Stanford researcher finds. Stanford University News. <https://news.stanford.edu/2017/02/28/vouchers-not-improve-student-achievement-stanford-researcher-finds/>
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