



Don't Prioritize Politics and Profits Over the Families Policymakers Should Be Representing

Testimony Against Senate Bill 2, Presented by Lizdela Piñón, IDRA Education Associate, to the Texas Senate Committee on Education (PK-16), January 28, 2025

Dear Chair Creighton, Vice Chair Campbell, and members of the Texas Senate Committee on Education (PK-16)

My name is Lizdela Piñón, Ed.D., and I am a mother of four children with disabilities, including cerebral palsy, autism and dyslexia. I am also an IDRA education associate, where I work to ensure that all students, especially those from underserved communities, have access to equitable and high-quality education. And I was appointed to the State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) Bilingual Special Education Educator Standards Advisory Committee to provide expert advice on the certification and process.

I am here today to strongly oppose Senate Bill 2 because it fails to serve Texas families, especially those with children who have special needs.

Let me be clear: this bill does not provide solutions. It creates greater inequities. Vouchers are being sold as "choice," but for children like mine, there is no choice. Private schools in Texas routinely reject students with disabilities. They are not legally obligated to accept or serve these students, and they often lack the resources, staff and willingness to provide accommodations. My children, like so many others, would be excluded. While public schools – the only institutions required to educate all children – would lose critical funding and be left to pick up the pieces.

The financial realities of this bill also expose its inequity. The average cost of a private special needs school in Texas is over \$22,000 a year. SB 2 offers \$11,500 for students with disabilities. Where is a working family supposed to find the remaining \$10,000 or more? For families already burdened by medical bills, therapies and equipment, this so-called "choice" is an impossible dream.

Meanwhile, wealthy families who can already afford private school will use these vouchers as a discount. This program makes the rich richer and leaves the poor, and particularly children with disabilities, worse off.

Instead of draining money from public schools, why not fix the system that serves all children? Why not fully fund public education so students with disabilities get what they need? Public schools are the only system legally and morally required to serve every child, regardless of ability. Yet, for years, they have been underfunded. Students with disabilities are particularly suffering

because schools lack the resources to provide adequate services, hire enough teachers, and offer critical supports like assistive technology and smaller class sizes.

If we're serious about helping children with disabilities, we need to strengthen our public schools – not abandon them. Fully fund special education programs, reduce class sizes, hire more special education teachers, and provide ongoing training so they can meet the diverse needs of students. Expand access to transition programs so students are prepared for life after high school. And ensure that all schools – not just some – are equipped to give every child the opportunity to succeed.

Senate Bill 2 is not a solution; it is a distraction. It would take money away from the public schools that are working to meet the needs of all children and give it to private schools that serve only a select few. This bill prioritizes politics and profits over the real families you should be representing – families like mine who rely on public schools to provide the education our children need and deserve.

As both a mother and a professional who advocates for education equity, I urge you to reject SB 2 and instead commit to improving the Texas public education system so it works for all children, not just the privileged few.

Thank you, Chair Creighton, Vice Chair Campbell, and members of the committee, for listening to the voices of families like mine and considering the needs of students with disabilities across our state.

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.

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.

Private Schools Didn't Choose Me

Testimony Against Senate Bill 2, Presented by Sixth Grader, Felicita Piñón, to the Texas Senate Committee on Education (PK-16), January 28, 2025

Hello, Chair Creighton, Vice Chair Campbell, and committee members. My name is Felicita Piñón. I am in sixth grade, and I use a power wheelchair because I have cerebral palsy. I love school, dancing and being with my friends.

My mom has tried to get me into private schools before, but they said no because I'm in a wheelchair. They didn't want to deal with things like ramps or making sure I could move around the school. My brother also couldn't go to private schools because he has a feeding tube, and my sister wasn't accepted because she has mental health issues.

Public schools are the only place where my siblings and I can go and feel included. They give us the support we need, like teachers who help, technology that works for us, and spaces that are made for kids like me. Private schools don't offer those things, and they don't have to.

Instead of giving money to private schools that don't take kids like us, please help public schools get better. Fund them so all students can have the chance to learn and grow. Thank you for listening to my story.