



Education Saving Accounts Harm Efforts to Fully Fund Public Schools

TLEEC Testimony Against House Bill 3, submitted by Kaci Wright to the Texas House Public Education Committee, March 11, 2025

Dear Chairman Buckley and members of the Public Education Committee,

My name is Kaci Wright, and I am an IDRA Education Policy Fellow testifying on behalf of the Texas Legislative Education Equity Coalition (TLEEC) against House Bill 3. The coalition is a statewide collaborative of more than 38 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, bilingual education, as well as fair funding and enhanced college access and success.

TLEEC opposes HB 3 because research shows that voucher systems across the country are ineffective for students and divert necessary public funding away from public schools. The majority of Texas public school students are Latino, Black, and from households earning low incomes. Twenty-three percent are emergent bilingual students, and 14% receive special education services. These students stand to lose the most from a universal, statewide voucher program.

School Vouchers Divert Funds Away from Public Schools

As a former teacher, I have witnessed firsthand the support our students need, and I do not believe that education savings accounts will help.

Each school where I have worked has wanted to do more to increase opportunities for students but was held back by the increase in inflation and the turnover of staff. Schools are struggling. The state legislature has the power to help. But a voucher program would be a step in the wrong direction.

Voucher programs are expensive. The proposed budget would designate \$1 billion to be invested in the program while, across the state, school districts are having to close schools and cut resources due to budget deficits. Any investment in a voucher program will ultimately undermine the Legislature's efforts to put more funding toward public schools. Instead of vouchers, this body needs to prioritize how much public schools need right now in order to catch up with inflation, the needs of our students, and goals for our state.

We know from other states' examples that voucher bills like HB 3 drain money from schools by putting pressure on the state budget and reducing school districts' attendance funding (Griffith & Burns, 2024). With Texas considering a larger and more expensive voucher program than any other state, it is likely that it will only lead to a large bill at the expense of taxpayers and public schools.

Taxpayer Dollars Should Never Fund Discrimination

Not only do private schools get to cherry pick the students they accept, they also do not have to follow state and federal special education and anti-discrimination laws. These are laws we put in place to protect our students and create an environment where they feel safe and encouraged to learn. As a public-school

teacher, I worked every day to ensure I upheld the law and delivered what my students needed to succeed.

Private schools don't have to follow the same laws as public schools, yet they will be receiving public tax dollars. The "no strings attached" approach this voucher bill has will allow private schools to continue or even create policies that can threaten certain student populations who have historically been discriminated against in educational settings, hence the need for laws to begin with. Texans' money should never fund an environment where discrimination from admission, educational services and a child's opportunity to succeed is even a possibility.

Recommendations

TLEEC urges the following recommendations:

- Keep public dollars in public schools; and
- Focus on legislation that makes key investments toward the basic allotment, accounting for inflation, and targeted funding for special populations including emergent bilingual students and students in special education.

Thank you for your consideration.

For questions, please contact TLEEC either through Kaci Wright at IDRA (kaci.wright@idra.org), Dr. Chloe Latham Sikes at IDRA (chloe.sikes@idra.org) or Jaime Puente at Every Texan (puente@everytexan.org).

Resources

Griffith, M., & Burns, D. (2024). Understanding the Cost of Universal School Vouchers: An Analysis of Arizona's Empowerment Scholarship Account Program. Learning Policy Institute. <https://doi.org/10.54300/682.951>

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) – Tejas Foco
Asian Texans for Justice	San Antonio Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
Austin Justice Coalition	SEAT (Students Engaged in Advancing Texas)
Big Thought	Southwest Region Youth Legislative Action Center
Black Parents and Families Collective	Texas American Federation of Teachers
Breakthrough Central Texas	Texas Association for Bilingual Education (TABE)
Coalition of Texans with Disabilities	Texas Association for Chicanos in Higher Education (TACHE)
Culturingua	Texas Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education (TADOHE)
Dr. Hector P. García G.I. Forum	Texas Association of Mexican American Chambers of Commerce (TAMACC)
Easterseals Central Texas	Texas Center for Education Policy at the University of Texas – Austin
Educators in Solidarity (EIS)	Texas Hispanics Organized for Political Education (HOPE)
Ethnic Studies Network of Texas (ESNTX)	Texas League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)
Every Texan	Texas NAACP
Houston Community Voices for Public Education	Texas State Teachers Association (TSTA)
IDRA	The Arc of Texas
McNeil Educational Foundation for Ecumenical Leadership Measure	UnidosUS (formerly known as NCLR)
Mexican American Civil Rights Institute (MACRI)	UP Partnership
Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF)	
Mexican American School Board Members Association (MASBA)	