

Texas Senate Committee on Education
Hearings on August 24, 2012
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Good afternoon members of the committee and community.

My name is Lorie Barzano, taxpayer and parent, with a child attending public school here in Austin. I serve as the Co-Chair of the Coalition to Strengthen Austin Urban Schools (Coalition SAUS), a parent-led group which actively supports public education and is the local affiliate of Parents Across America. I also serve on the U.S. Department of Education's Parent Engagement Task Force.

I appreciate the chance to speak here today. However, with just 3 minutes, I will cut to the chase. I come here today to ask/urge you TO DO 5 things and implore you NOT to do 2 other things.

First, I urge you to:

1. Mandate procedures for closing charter schools, the same as those that regulate public schools, and require charter schools to meet all the same academic, class size, teacher certification and fiscal oversight requirements that traditional public schools must meet.
2. Expand the spectrum of mandated accountability measures beyond the sole reliance on and investment in high states testing and include such factors as teacher observations, classroom work portfolios and actual annual student progress.
3. Legislatively minimize the number of instructional days allowed for test preparation and reallocate these days to subject matters that promote student critical thinking skills, deep subject knowledge, intellectual growth and creativity.
4. Demonstrate your commitment to education as a priority and restore the dire budget cuts made during the last legislative session and mandate tighter controls over the education monies being spent in Texas, particularly on charter school companies.
5. Give parents and community members a "real" voice in education policy decision-making by establishing local school councils with real budgetary and staffing authority.

Next, I implore you NOT to:

1. Increase the number of charter school licenses allowable in Texas while so many nonperforming charter schools continue to operate in the state.
2. Approve any education funding in the form of "choice" (your term) vouchers to individual families or "home rule" block grants to individual school districts or continue to increase the use of public bond monies for building new charter schools.

Bottom line: Charter schools DO NOT perform better than traditional public schools. The overwhelming majority of outcomes-based evidence indicates that traditional public schools consistently outperform charter schools. Study after study documents the lower academic performance of charter schools, especially among Black, Hispanic and special education students. Documentation of this fact starts with the quintessential "Multiple Choice" study and its follow-up study, both performed by the prestigious

Center for Research on Education Outcomes at Stanford University

(http://credo.stanford.edu/reports/TX_CHARTER%20SCHOOL%20REPORT_CREDO_2009.pdf).

It simply does not make sense, nor indicate good stewardship of taxpayer dollars, for this body to continue increasing the investment of public education monies in the expansion of charter schools, which have proven a worse return on taxpayer investment than funding traditional public schools.

Bottom line: Ten years of multiple state studies have shown that vouchers ("choice" as you call them) do not have any significant academic return for students. Notably the Education Policy Research Unit out of the University of Wisconsin (<http://epsl.asu.edu/epru/documents/cera1-01-17.pdf>) has performed multiple city and multiple state, longitudinal studies, which clearly document that voucher programs DO NOT produce any significant increase in student achievement. Additionally, the Phi Delta Kappa-Gallup annual poll released just this week clearly demonstrates that vouchers remain politically unpopular with the overwhelming majority parents (<http://dianeravitch.net/2012/08/22/what-we-can-learn-from-the-new-pdkgallup-poll/>), who oppose the introduction of a voucher program in their public districts.

If time permitted, I would detail how charter schools tend to "cherry pick" their student populations. I would delineate how current policy does not create a level playing field between charter schools and traditional public schools, with traditional public schools having to serve all students who show up at their door and meet more rigorous standards in doing so. I would speak to charter schools tapping into the Permanent Fund and draining the already limited public monies available to public schools across the state. Time does not permit today.

Therefore, in conclusion for now, as a parent, I encourage you to spend your time as elected representatives and our money as taxpayers on supporting our public schools. Parents have repeatedly expressed their preference for good, local public schools, not charter schools or vouchers. I thank you for your time and hope you will review the policy implications of the 7 things I have asked you to seriously consider doing toward assuring quality education for all of Texas' children.

Thank you.