

Senate Education Committee
March 29, 3007
Testimony provided by Judy Needham
on behalf of the Texas Association of School Boards

Good afternoon Chairwoman Shapiro and members of the education committee. My name is Judy Needham. I am a school board member from Fort Worth ISD. I've been on the school board for 11 years. Today, I am here on behalf of the Texas Association of School Boards to oppose SB 1506.

******First, thank you Senator Shapiro. You and your colleagues in the last special session increased teacher salaries and gave the district some discretionary funds. We really appreciate the high school allotment, and support move to **END OF COURSE EXAMS** with less emphasis on TAKS. But, SB 1506 will dilute the much-needed funding you just gave us.**

*******Fort Worth ISD has many great schools**

More than 4.3 million of the state's students attend exemplary, recognized or academically acceptable school under the state's accountability system.

In my district, Fort Worth ISD, we have 144 campuses - 5 of which are academically unacceptable. We have put a lot of resources and a lot of interventions toward improving those schools, and this year we intend to have ZERO academically unacceptable campuses. Those interventions include:

- (1) Providing Saturday school, and**
- (2) Daytime, lunchtime, and after school tutorials.**

Our Fort Worth schools serve 80,000 students, 72 % of which are low-income.

******Kids are not trapped in our public schools.**

Our district has a very open transfer policy. If parents are not happy with their local school, they are given the opportunity to transfer to any school in the district. We have special-interest programs, Montessori schools, high academic schools, and

magnet schools. Approximately 5,000 students have transferred from their local school within Fort Worth ISD.

*******With its limited funds, the state has more pressing problems to address than creating a voucher program. There are many competing interests for the state's limited resources.**

Why put state resources into a school choice program when parents already have so many public choices options? And, private schools that WANT to provide scholarships to under-privileged students CAN and DO do that.

This limited voucher program will have STATEWIDE impact.

While only students in the large, urban districts would be eligible for these scholarships, the eligible students can use those scholarships to transfer into surrounding urban and suburban districts. Thus, many Texas districts will be impacted by this “limited” voucher program.

In closing, our Texas students are not trapped in failing public schools. Our state does not need and cannot afford a voucher program.

Thank you very much.