

# AMERICANS FOR PROSPERITY

*Protecting every individual's right to economic freedom and opportunity*

## **SB 1506: urban school choice pilot project legislation**

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**Senate Education Committee**

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I have heard years of the school choice debates and they always center around money. I hope today we focus on children.

### **If we are doing a great job in public schools, why school choice?**

Most of us put our children through public schools, but we had choice – we chose to purchase homes in districts or near public schools we selected. Not all parents have that luxury. Many are stuck in inner-city schools with high dropout rates, high crime rates, and other problems.

Some students can succeed in the current system. But others are at risk of dropping out and are dropping out at alarming rates.

In some school districts, the actual dropout rates are above 50%. Those are shocking and alarming statistics. But these aren't statistics. These are lives – young lives which – deserve a chance, and deserve a choice.

We believe that parents should have the opportunity to select the school – public or private— where their children have the greatest opportunity to succeed. And their education dollars should follow the student.

### **We need to stop funding institutions and start funding students.**

Is it really all about the money? Let's focus on the student, their education, and the resources needed to provide the educational environment most appropriate for the student, selected by the parent.

Education status quo advocates seem to always focus on the money. But school choice advocates can talk money too. According to the National Center for Policy Analysis:

-- Over an expected lifetime of 50 years, one year's class of dropouts will cost Texas taxpayers \$19 billion.

-- The costs of dropouts are concentrated in Texas' large urban districts. Houston and Dallas dropouts cost \$29 million and \$26 million respectively.

-- The unemployment rate for Texas high school dropouts is 7.4 percent compared to 5.5 percent for high school graduates.

-- Texas dropouts earn \$24 billion less per year than high school graduates.

-- Lower earnings of dropouts cost the state \$2 billion in lost tax revenue each year.

-- Dropouts cost Texas taxpayers additional Medicaid costs of \$321 million and additional incarceration costs of \$12 million per year.

-- A modest school choice program in Texas would reduce the public school dropout rate by 8,700 -- 17,400 students per year. This would save between \$27 and \$53 million annually over the expected life of the students.

The 2007 class of high school dropouts in Texas will cost state taxpayers \$377 million this year and every year after, over the course of their lifetime, according to a new study released by the National Center for Policy Analysis (NCPA), Hispanic Council for Reform and Educational Options and the Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation. In addition, the study finds that a modest school choice program would reduce public school dropout rates and save taxpayers up to \$53 million a year in costs associated with dropouts.

### **Who opposes parents having the right to choose?**

Much of the opposition to parental choice is coming from the education community – those whose interest appears to be focused on preserving and increasing funding in the status quo, not in funding the children's education. Their arguments appear to be more institution-based, and less focused on the students' education.

Some of those organizations are using tax dollars to fund their advocacy efforts, and all have a vested interest in maintaining the current monopoly system.

While we realize that these are powerful lobby arms, and legislators must show courage in doing the right thing, we are asking you to put the needs of the children above the put the desires of the educrat lobby.

The Texas Association of School Boards (TASB) has recommend school board adopt a resolution opposing school choice, stating in their Sample Resolution against Vouches private school vouchers would cause a loss of billions of dollars to Texas public schools.

[http://www.tasb.org/issues/resource\\_center/vouchers/resolution.aspx](http://www.tasb.org/issues/resource_center/vouchers/resolution.aspx)

The Texas Association of School Administrators (TASA) has alerted their members to call you to oppose any school choice, and their alert states that the bill will have a "major impact on public schools." <http://www.tasanet.org/files/PDFs/gr/2007/alert.pdf>

Among the Texas PTA's four issues (including clean air) is opposing vouchers:

<http://www.txpta.org/LegPrioritiespdf.pdf>

A key priority for the Parent PAC is to make sure public funds go only to public schools

<http://www.txpta.org/LegPrioritiespdf.pdf>

On the Texas State Teachers Association website, the state A child born in Texas is more likely to fail than in almost any other state. TSTA has a plan to change that. The plan is to "Make the State Shoulder its share of funding" and "reject any plan that shifts public dollars to private entities including vouchers." <http://www.tsta.org/legislative/update/07TSTALEG%20BROCH-web.pdf>

The Texas Federation of Teachers position is to "Block vouchers and equivalent drains on public school funding" <http://tx.aft.org/index.cfm?action=article&articleID=a18fec29-922e-43c3-a1df-e83da3c7c672#plan>

**The bottom line is this: we must focus on students, not institutions.**

It appears that “public schools-only advocates” fear a mass exodus from public schools should the parents have a right to choose the educational environment where they believe their children have the greatest opportunity to learn. The “public schools-only advocates” are fearful many parents would choose to leave the public schools. If they have so little confidence in the product they are delivering, then we have even greater reason to support school choice.

When the “public schools-only advocates” support choice, then we can feel confidence that our children – and our dollars – are being well served in the public schools.

It’s time we give parents a choice so children who aren’t performing in the public schools can have a chance to succeed in another education environment.

I hope the discussion will center on the students and their needs. And I encourage you to have the confidence that I do in parents and their ability to choose the educational environment where their children have the greatest opportunity to succeed. Giving parents a choice will give at-risk students a chance.

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