



HB 1 Poses a Threat to Public Education in Texas and to Our Most Vulnerable Students

TLEEC Testimony Against HB 1, submitted by Rebekah Skelton to the Texas House Select Committee on Educational Opportunity and Enrichment, November 9, 2023

Dear Chairman Buckley and Honorable Members of the Select Committee:

My name is Rebekah Skelton, and I am testifying against House Bill 1 on behalf of the Texas Legislative Education Equity Coalition (TLEEC), a statewide collaborative of 30 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, and for bilingual education for emergent bilingual students, as well as fair school funding and enhanced college access and success.

Our testimony today focuses on our deep concerns regarding House Bill 1, which would establish an education savings account (ESA) program in Texas.

TLEEC strongly opposes legislation that takes public money away from public schools. In the proposed voucher plan, Texas families will be left with fewer choices, poorly funded public schools, and a diminished public education system dedicated to serving all students, including those with the greatest needs.

Funding Education Savings Accounts Means Funding Discrimination Against Students

If HB 1 becomes state law, public schools stand to lose significant state and local funding, which will be diverted to unaccountable private institutions. Children are much more vulnerable to discrimination in private schools because private schools are not required to serve all students equitably. Students with disabilities, in special education, bilingual education, or of diverse religious and gender identities could all be denied admission and educational services (Abrams & Koutsavlis, 2023). In this case, it is not the *parents'* choice, it is the *schools'* choice. Public money should not be used to fund discrimination against students.

ESAs Divert Scarce Resources to Institutions Lacking Transparency and Accountability

Education savings accounts also lead to serious accountability issues. Private schools would not be required to disclose to parents and the public how they operate or how they manage their finances. They are not required to administer the STAAR or to meet state standards in curriculum, and they are not rated by Texas' A-F accountability system.

Our public schools already have great needs without losing more of their scarce resources to these unaccountable institutions. Any plan to divert public money to private schools would reduce the services public schools can provide and make it harder to keep the teachers we need employed.

Bilingual and special education programs are grossly underfunded and are facing 30-year teacher shortages (Cross, 2017). Texas ranks in the bottom 10 states in the nation for per-pupil funding, and the changes in HB 1 would barely bump us up (Education Law Center, 2022). Our attention should be focused on closing these gaps, not putting more money into the hands of the privileged few. As education scholars have noted, “quality schooling shouldn’t be left up to choice or chance but rather...should be understood as a right and provided in the broadest ways” (Horsford et al., 2019, p. 62).

Recommendations

We urge the legislature to strengthen our public schools by increasing the basic allotment by at least \$1,000, continuing to invest in specific student programs for bilingual and special education and keeping public money in public schools. Research has shown that school funding is the most important factor when it comes to providing children with a high-quality education (Latham Sikes, 2022). HB 1 is counterproductive in tying public school funding increases to a private school voucher program.

Our children are counting on us to give them the education they deserve. Keep public money in public schools.

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

The 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)
Austin Justice Coalition	– Tejas Foco
Big Thought	San Antonio Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
Breakthrough Central Texas	Texas American Federation of Teachers
Children at Risk	Texas Association for Bilingual Education (TABE)
Coalition of Texans with Disabilities (CTD)	Texas Association for Chicanos in Higher Education (TACHE)
Dr. Hector P. García G.I. Forum	Texas Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education
Easterseals Central Texas	(TADOHE)
Educators in Solidarity	Texas Association of Mexican American Chambers of
Ethnic Studies Network of Texas (ESNTX)	Commerce (TAMACC)
Every Texan	Texas Center for Education Policy, University of Texas – Austin
Houston Community Voices for Public Education	Texas Hispanics Organized for Political Education (HOPE)
IDRA	Texas League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)
McNeil Educational Foundation for Ecumenical Leadership	Texas NAACP
Measure	Texas State Teachers Association (TSTA)
Mexican American Civil Rights Institute (MACRI)	The Arc of Texas
Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund	UnidosUS (formerly known as NCLR)
(MALDEF)	
Mexican American School Boards Association (MASBA)	

Resources

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- Education Law Center. (2022). Making the Grade. <https://edlawcenter.org/research/making-the-grade-2022.html>
- Hanson, M. (2023, September 8). U.S. public education spending statistics. *Education Data Initiative*.
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- Latham Sikes, C. (August 2022). How Texas Schools Are Funded – And Why that Matters to Collective Success, IDRA Issue Brief. IDRA. <https://idra.news/IBTxScIFunding>