



Enrich Students' Education Through Public School Investments

IDRA Testimony against HB 1, submitted by Chloe Latham Sikes, Ph.D., to the Texas House Select Committee on Educational Enrichment and Opportunity, November 9, 2023

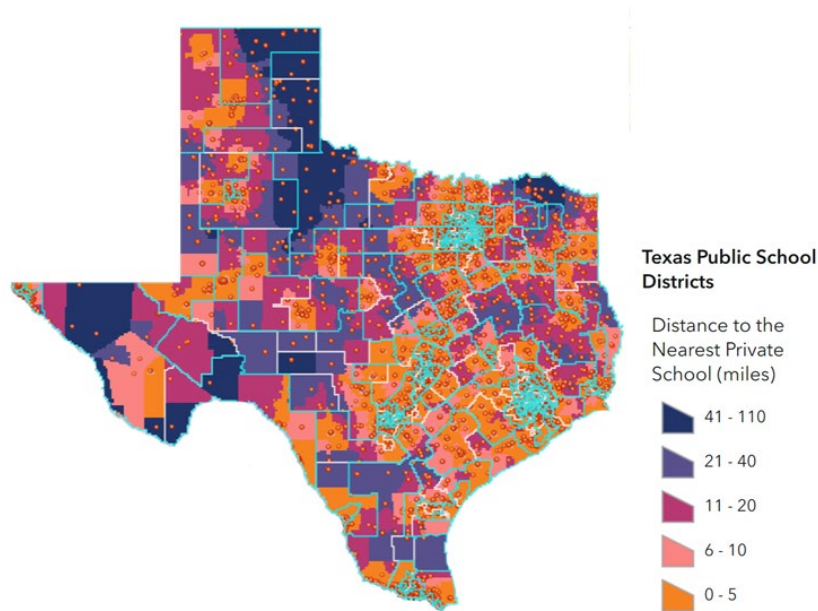
Dear Chair Buckley and Members of the Committee:

IDRA is an independent, non-partisan non-profit committed to achieving equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college.

IDRA opposes House Bill 1 and any other legislative proposals that divert public school funds for private use. The attached brief from Public Funds Public Schools (2023) outlines evidence-based and legal concerns for private school voucher proposals in Texas, including education savings accounts. These programs are expensive and wasteful of public dollars, can lead to school racial and socioeconomic segregation of students in schools, and do not lead to increased educational achievement or opportunities for students across Texas.

Texas Private Schools Are Few and Far Between

According to IDRA's analysis of Texas private schools by distance to public school districts, 23% of public school campuses are at least 10 miles away from the nearest private school, with 13% exceeding 20 miles. The cost of transportation services would come from the ESA amount, with additional costs transferred to the program participant's own family to absorb. For many families, traveling more than 40 miles round trip for students' school is unaffordable and not feasible.



Source: IDRA Map – Distance to Private Schools by Texas Senate and House Districts

HB 1 Promotes Ineffective Educational Programs and Could Increase Segregation

Studies have found that private school vouchers do not improve student achievement. For instance, researchers at the University of Arkansas published a four-year study analyzing assessment data from students who used the Louisiana Scholarship Program. The results concluded that students using the program did visibly worse on state assessments four years later than their counterparts in public schools (Mills & Wolf, 2019). Similar negative trends have held true across programs in Alabama, Indiana, Ohio and Washington, D.C.

There also is concern about the educational opportunities for students in bilingual and special education. Private institutions typically enroll fewer emergent bilingual students and students in special education (Mead & Eckes, 2018). A 2020 study found that private school voucher programs across 29 states rarely require transparent reporting on student achievement or graduation rates or information as basic as teachers' education qualifications. Most of the programs allowed private schools to discriminate against students' religious and gender identities for admission. Only five states of the 29 required that students with disabilities be admitted to private schools benefitting from the voucher programs.

Private school voucher programs lead to racial and socioeconomic segregation and disparate provision of educational services. Studies on comparable programs in other states, such as Indiana, Arizona and Ohio, indicated that they predominately serve white, affluent students already enrolled in private schools (Ee, et al., 2023; PFPS, 2023). HB 1 similarly extends program eligibility to students already enrolled in private schools, regardless of income levels.

HB 1 proposes promising investments in public schools that would enrich students' educational experiences and opportunities. Unfortunately, the proposed investments fall short of what public school students' need for equitable educational opportunities, and the inclusion of a costly and unaccountable private school voucher program jeopardizes any meaningful investments.

Recommendations

IDRA encourages the committee to strike Article 6 of HB 1 establishing a private school voucher program and instead take up key recommendations from the August interim report that focused on targeted supports for students, parents and educators. These include:

- Raising the basic allotment to meet inflation since 2019, by a minimum of \$1,000;
- Funding for in-school programs that offer dropout prevention and high-impact interventions for students considered “at-risk” of leaving school;
- Considering grant programs for authentic parent engagement;
- Expanding funding and supports for Early College High Schools;
- Supporting the teacher workforce, especially for acute shortage areas like bilingual education, special education and STEM.

IDRA is available for any questions or further resources that we can provide. Thank you for your consideration. For more information, please contact IDRA deputy director of policy, Chloe Latham Sikes, Ph.D., at chloe.sikes@idra.org.

References

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