



Education Savings Accounts Should Not Come at the Cost of Improvements to Texas Special Education

IDRA Testimony against HB 3781, submitted by Chloe Latham Sikes, Ph.D., to the Texas House Public Education Committee, April 11, 2023

Dear Chair Buckley and Honorable Members of the Committee:

My name is Chloe Latham Sikes, Ph.D., and I am the deputy director of policy at IDRA, 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 HB 3781's provisions for an education savings account (ESA) program. The program outlined in Section 29 of the bill contradicts the positive steps made in the prior sections of the bill to improve special education funding and service delivery in public schools.

Creating an ESA that redirects public funds for private uses is inefficient and ineffective for meeting the needs of Texas' students, particularly those with disabilities and receiving special education. In contrast to the bill's provisions for greater special education oversight and support in public schools, parents enrolling a student with disabilities into the ESA program waive their rights to any state or federal disabilities or special education protections. A 2020 study found that only five states of the 29 required that students with disabilities be admitted to private schools benefitting from the voucher programs (Prothero & Harwin, 2020).

Texas has invested time and resources to improve special education funding and services in public schools – where students have legal protections to advocate for those improvements with oversight and open stakeholder feedback. Establishing an ESA with no transparency, accountability or legal protections for the students it purports to serve would come at the cost of the state's work to improve special education.

For more information, contact me at chloe.sikes@idra.org.

References

Prothero, A., & Harwin, A. (February 28, 2020). Private School Choice Programs Fall Short on Transparency, Accountability. Education Week. <https://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/private-school-choice-programs-fall-short-on-transparency-accountability/2020/02?r=2000718806#database>

IDRA is an independent, non-profit organization led by Celina Moreno, J.D. Our mission is to achieve equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college. IDRA strengthens and transforms public education by leading policy analyses and advocacy; dynamic teacher training and principal coaching; useful research, evaluation and frameworks for action; and innovative student, family and community engagement.