



## **HB 100 Poses a Threat to Students' Civil Rights with Devastating, Discriminatory Impacts on Vulnerable Students**

**TLEEC Testimony Against HB 100, submitted by Diana Long to the Texas Senate Education Committee, May 22, 2023**

Dear Chair Creighton and Honorable Members of the Senate Education Committee,

My name is Diana Long, and I am testifying against HB 100 on behalf of The Texas Legislative Education Equity Coalition (TLEEC), a 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 bilingual education for emergent bilingual students, as well as fair funding and enhanced college access and success.

Our testimony today focuses on deep concerns regarding the establishment of an education savings account (ESA) program. With the 88<sup>th</sup> legislative session quickly coming to an end, it is disheartening to witness the unwavering efforts to pass legislation that would divert precious resources away from public schools, hindering the very foundation of equal opportunity and access to quality education that our nation holds dear.

### **Funding Education Savings Accounts Means Funding Discrimination Against Students**

TLEEC does not support any mechanism that inherently takes public money away from public schools under the false disguise of “parental choice.” Under a voucher plan, Texas families will be left with fewer choices, poorly funded public schools, and a diminished public education system dedicated to serving all, including those with the greatest needs. Public schools stand to lose significant money comprised of state and local funding. But the cost of running those schools remains. The lights have to stay on. It is imperative that the legislature recognizes that they are constitutionally held responsible for “establishing the support and maintenance of an efficient system of public free schools” (Texas Const. Article VII, §1).

Public funds should go to the schools that educate, care for and raise Texan children. Any plan to divert public money to private schools would reduce the services public schools can provide and make it harder to keep teachers we need employed. At the same time, children may be subject to more discrimination from private schools because they are not required to serve all students equally. Students with disabilities, in special education, bilingual education, or of diverse religious

and gender identities could be denied admission and educational services (Abrams & Koutslavis, 2023). In this case, it is not the “parents’” choice, it is the “school’s” choice. Public school money should not be used to fund discrimination against students.

Education savings accounts and other similar voucher programs lead to serious accountability issues, considering that they use *public* money. Private schools would not be required to disclose to parents and the public how they operate or how they manage their finances. Private schools also are not required to administer the STAAR test or be rated under the state’s A-F accountability system.

We do not need to look far to see how voucher plans are playing out in other states. In Arizona, the vast majority of families applying for vouchers already enroll students in private schools, letting the vouchers just act as a subsidy to those already attending (Fischer, 2022). And even after decades of voucher systems in effect, researchers have found there is no evidence that they significantly increase student achievement (Spector, 2017).

TLEEC stands firm against any attempts to pilfer money from our state’s 5 million public school children. Support of any voucher or education savings account plan takes public money and accountability out of the hands of Texas students, parents, educators and communities.

**Public schools are the cornerstone of democracy, and we must strengthen them.**

The pursuit of vouchers disregards the immense value that public schools bring to our communities. Public schools serve as the bedrock of our democratic society, fostering diversity, tolerance, and social cohesion. They provide a common ground where children from different backgrounds come together to learn, grow, and appreciate one another's perspectives. By diminishing the resources available to public schools, we risk weakening this essential fabric that holds our society together.

Furthermore, the promise of vouchers as a remedy for education fails to acknowledge the complex challenges that plague our education system. Rather than pursuing quick fixes, we must focus on long-term, sustainable solutions that address the root causes of educational inequity. Adequate funding, teacher support, curriculum enhancements, and investments in infrastructure are just a few of the critical areas that demand our attention and resources.

**Recommendations**

*The best way to strengthen our public schools is to strengthen our public schools.* As esteemed members of the Senate Education Committee, you have been entrusted with the responsibility to shape the future of our state's education system. I implore you to reevaluate the pursuit of vouchers and instead shift your focus towards strengthening and investing in our public schools. School funding is just one piece of the education puzzle, but research has shown it is the most important when it comes to providing children with a high-quality education (Latham Sikes, 2022). Any effort to divert scarce public funds to private schools is not the answer and worsens the situation. Giving private schools an advantage at the expense of public schools is contradictory to our

responsibility to educate all Texas students and would exacerbate problems like school segregation or disparities in the quality of education some students receive.

For questions, please contact TLEEC either through Dr. Chloe Latham Sikes at IDRA ([chloe.sikes@idra.org](mailto:chloe.sikes@idra.org)), Jaime Puente at Every Texan ([puente@everytexan.org](mailto:puente@everytexan.org)), or Fatima Menendez at MALDEF ([fmendez@maldef.org](mailto:fmendez@maldef.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**

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

### **Resources**

Abrams, S.E., & Koutsavlis, S.J. (March 2023). The Fiscal Consequences of Private School Vouchers. Southern Poverty Law Center, Education Law Center, Public Funds Public Schools.

[https://pfps.org/assets/uploads/SPLC\\_ELC\\_PFPS\\_2023Report\\_Final.pdf](https://pfps.org/assets/uploads/SPLC_ELC_PFPS_2023Report_Final.pdf)

Fischer, H. (September 8, 2022). Most applying for Arizona vouchers already go to private schools. Arizona Daily Star.

[https://tucson.com/news/local/education/most-applying-for-arizona-vouchers-already-go-to-private-schools/article\\_34d75b9a-2968-11ed-812b-f7dad22200b5.html](https://tucson.com/news/local/education/most-applying-for-arizona-vouchers-already-go-to-private-schools/article_34d75b9a-2968-11ed-812b-f7dad22200b5.html)

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>

Spector, C. (February 28, 2017). Vouchers do not improve student achievement, Stanford researcher finds. Stanford University News. <https://news.stanford.edu/2017/02/28/vouchers-not-improve-student-achievement-stanford-researcher-finds/>