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Focus on Policy

Bringing Education Issues into Clear View

School Vouchers: The Myth and the Reality

KEY POINTS

- Politicians have debated school vouchers for nearly fifty years, even though research has yet to prove that they are effective for students.
- "Tax credit" and "scholarship" programs are the new names for vouchers, but they do the same exact thing – remove much-needed funding from a state's public education budget.
- In reality, vouchers don't provide true choice for parents and students, don't promote accountability and don't produce academic gains.
- A better approach is to focus all efforts and resources into improving public education for 5 million Texas students.
- **SEE PAGE 10 FOR RYHT POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS.**

The School Voucher Debate

It has been almost five decades since school vouchers, or public tax-funded subsidies for students to attend private schools, were first introduced as a public policy option. Despite millions of dollars spent by voucher proponents to convince lawmakers and the public that vouchers are the answer to the challenges our students face, the public school community claims that "school vouchers still remain controversial, unproven, and unpopular."[1]

So why, after five decades of debate, does this issue draw so much attention, with local, state and national politicians taking strong positions on opposite sides?

The truth is the debate about vouchers is more about partisan rhetoric than the educational and fiscal implications of voucher programs in practice. Independent evaluations of these programs conclude students who leave the public school system with a voucher don't do significantly better in school than the classmates they left behind. Studies of the funding consequences of voucher programs do not support the contention that states save money by sending taxpayer dollars to the private sector.

Therefore, the debate is more about the support of public education versus the abandonment of it. It's about serving a few at the expense of all. And in Texas as in other states, it's about who truly makes the choice regarding what kind of education public school students deserve.

School Vouchers: A Primer

In its simplest form, a school voucher is a government subsidy of private schools funded by taxpayer money, in most cases money otherwise earmarked for public education. Voucher funds are applied toward part or all of a student's tuition at a private school, including religious schools of all faiths. The dollar value of the voucher, student eligibility, and eligibility of schools to participate in receiving vouchers vary significantly by program. "Universal vouchers" were the earliest version, a plan under which students receive a set dollar amount to leave the public school system and attend a private school, paying part or all of the private school tuition with the voucher.

Often a universal voucher has a very different outcome depending on the circumstances of the student. Imagine two students under one program, one from an affluent family already attending a private school, and another from a family with an income below the federal poverty level. Both would be eligible to receive a voucher of equal value to attend a private school.[2] The student from the low-income family has to make up the difference between the amount of the voucher and the tuition charged by the private school that he or she chooses to attend. The student from

School Vouchers 101: A Pop Quiz

Select the Correct Answer:

A) Vouchers are public tax dollars used to subsidize private and religious schools

B) Supporting vouchers AND accountability is an impossibility

C) There is no student performance or financial accountability required by private schools receiving voucher students

D) Accountability for vouchers is equal to government intrusion into private education

E) All of the above

If you answered "E" you've passed! For an explanation of A-E, read on...

the wealthy family essentially gets a taxpayer-subsidized "discount" to attend the private school his or her family can already afford.

Other voucher programs operate differently, or have narrower definitions of who can use the voucher and how it can be applied, but the bottom line is always the same – funding that could be used to support public schools for all goes to pay for private schooling for a few.

A Voucher by Any Other Name...

Over the years, voucher initiatives have evolved from straightforward universal voucher programs to more complicated and obscured plans. Originally understood to be simple government education subsidies, vouchers now have a variety of different names and characteristics. After Florida's 1999 statewide voucher program was declared unconstitutional by the Florida Supreme Court in 2006, the program was revived in 2010 under a different name and operational method. The creation of the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program (formerly the Corporate Tax Credit Scholarship Program) represented a new "stealth" type of voucher. During the 2011-12 school year, scholarships of $147.4 million were awarded to a total of 40,248 students enrolled in 1,216 participating Florida private schools.[3]

Here are the main categories of vouchers:

- Traditional **School vouchers** are subsidies given directly to parents to pay for tuition at any private school. Vouchers are funded through state tax dollars. *Alternate names: Taxpayer Savings Grants, Student Scholarship Program, Parental Choice Scholarship Grants (or practically anything with the word "Scholarship" in it).*

- **Tax Credits** are the newer, renamed types of vouchers. They fall into two categories: 1) personal use tax credits that go directly to parents as reimbursement for tuition payments to a private school or 2) donation tax credits issued by the state to corporations or individuals who have donated to education funds at private and religious schools. The person or corporation making the donation, to be used for vouchers, receives a dollar-for-dollar tax credit from the state.

  Under these types of vouchers, the effect on state budgets is less evident as tax dollars don't flow directly from the state to parents. But make no mistake – there is still a serious budgetary impact as the state receives less in general revenue from the participating corporations – general revenue that could go to public schools. Legislation creating this type of voucher is more likely to be referred to appropriations committees than to education committees for consideration. *Alternate names: Education Tax Credits, Tuition Tax Credits, Corporate Tax Credits and Tax Credit Scholarship Program (again, note the use of "Scholarship").*

DON'T BE FOOLED!

ALTERNATIVE NAMES FOR VOUCHERS

Scholarship Program
Tax Credit Scholarship
Corporate Scholarship Program
Taxpayer Savings Grant
Education Tax Credit
School Choice Scholarship

Existing Programs

Currently, Texas does not have a voucher or tax credit program. Students who choose to attend private schools do not receive subsidies from the state to pay for their schooling.

Nationally, private school voucher programs exist or have been legislated in various states, counties and cities. The table on pages 3-4 gives an overview of existing voucher programs nationwide, including the cost of the programs and the number of students they serve.

Why are school vouchers so controversial?

In the early nineteenth century, Horace Mann's vision of schools that would be open to all people formed the basis for our public school system – a birthright to every American child. School vouchers undermine this system by creating civil rights, social justice, equity, accountability and public transparency issues. Given that the whole nature of vouchers is to remove students and funding from the public school system, obvious questions arise about what happens to the students who leave and those who remain in public schools. How are their academic opportunities affected? Are the taxpayer dollars that leave the system spent wisely? Do public schools suffer with the departure of students and funding?

This paper seeks to address these questions, and to dispel many of the common myths surrounding vouchers. These myths not only make the issue confusing for parents and the public, they make it difficult to honestly assess the effects of school voucher programs.

School vouchers undermine [the] system by creating civil rights, social justice, equity, accountability and public transparency issues.

Public School VOUCHER PROGRAMS in the U.S.

STATE	PROGRAM	ENACTED	NUMBER OF STUDENTS IN PROGRAM	COST OF PROGRAM ANNUALLY
Arizona	Individual School Tuition Organization Tax Credit	1997	27,476 (2010-11)	$52M
	Corporate School Tuition Organization Tax Credit	2006	3,626 (2010-11)	$8M
	Lexie's Law	2009	115 (2011-12)	N/A
	Empowerment Scholarship Account	2011-12 special education students only 2013-14 to be expanded to students in failing schools	150 (2011-12) 90,000 expected to be eligible	$1.5M TBD
Colorado	Douglas County Program	2011 never enacted; program found unconstitutional; appeal process pending	Up to 500	N/A
Florida	McKay Scholarship Program	1999	24,194 (2011-12)	$152M
	Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program	2007	40,248 (2011-12)	$147M
Georgia	Special Needs Scholarship Act	2007	2,003 (2011-12)	$19M
	Tax Credit Scholarship Program	2008	8,131 (2011-12)	$50M cap
Indiana	Indiana Voucher Program	2011	9,324 (2012-13)	$36M
	Corporate and Individual Scholarship Tax Credit Program	2009	590 (2010-11)	$814,000
Iowa	Individual School Tuition Organization Tax Credit	2006	10,820 (2010-11)	$11M
Louisiana	School Choice Pilot Program for Certain Students with Exceptionalities	2010	206 (2011-12)	$445,000
	Student Scholarships for Educational Excellence	2008 program found unconstitutional; litigation pending	4,944 (2012-13)	$26M

(continued on next page)

STATE	PROGRAM	ENACTED	NUMBER OF STUDENTS IN PROGRAM	COST OF PROGRAM ANNUALLY
Mississippi	Mississippi Dyslexia Therapy Scholarship for Students with Dyslexia Program	2012	TBD	TBD
Ohio	Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program	1995	5,603 (2011-12)	$17.6M
	Autism Scholarship Program	2003	2,236 (2011-12)	$42.6M
	EdChoice Scholarship Program	2005	13,195 (2010-11)	$58M
	John Peterson Special Needs Scholarship	2011 to begin 2012-13	TBD	TBD
Oklahoma	Lindsey Nicole Henry Scholarships for Students with Disabilities	2010	150	$115M
Pennsylvania	Pennsylvania Educational Improvement Tax Credit	2001	42,339 (2010-11)	$52M
	Educational Opportunity Scholarship Tax Credit	2012	To begin in 2012-13	$50M
Rhode Island	Corporate Scholarship Tax Credit	2006	460 (2010-11)	$1.3M
Utah	Carson Smith Scholarship Program	2005	635 (2011-12)	$3.7M
Virginia	Education Improvement Scholarships Tax Credits	2012 launching in 2013-14	TBD	TBD
Washington, D.C.	D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program	2004	1,584 (2012-13)	$17.8M (federal)
Wisconsin	Milwaukee Parental Choice Program	1990	20,300 (2010-11)	$131M
	Racine Parental Choice Pilot Program	2011	500 (2012-13)	$3.2M

(See the **Sources II** section at the end of this paper for a list of sources for this chart.)

Dispelling School Voucher Myths

Myth 1: Vouchers are about choice

Perhaps no other myth is as misleading as the one claiming school vouchers empower parents to make meaningful choices about their children's schooling. In reality, private schools and legislators are the entities that truly get to choose. Legislators design the programs, and private schools admit the students they wish to accept - when, where and how.[2] As one example, under the Cleveland voucher program, participating private schools did not alter their pre-voucher admission policies and were able to reject students based on past academic performance or discipline records.[4]

Traditional public schools must serve all students regardless of disability and special education status, family income, language proficiency or academic standing. In fact, of the 55 million students in the United States, nearly 50 million, or 90%, attend public schools.[5] Private schools are under no such obligation, but are free to place restrictions or requirements on student enrollment to "weed out" those they do not wish to serve. Services for special education students – if services are offered – are solely driven by the private school's authority. Some private schools may determine that the school's resources are unable to meet the needs of certain students with disabilities.

Of the 55 million students in the United States, nearly 50 million, or 90%, attend public schools.[5]

Myth 2: Voucher dollars and private schools are held accountable

School vouchers redirect public dollars to private schools that are not required to comply with state accountability requirements, open-record laws or statewide academic standards. It is duplicitous that some elected officials in Texas strongly advocate for tough accountability standards, high-stakes testing and measurable student achievement for public schools, while at the same time supporting vouchers.

Students who leave the public school system with a voucher are not required to take state standardized tests while they attend their private school. Even if they participate in some form of standardized testing, those results are not required to be made public to state education agencies or the taxpayers who are funding voucher programs.

Beyond lacking academic accountability, voucher programs sacrifice public transparency by redirecting funds to private entities that are generally not required to have formal governing bodies. Governance requirements include: open meetings to parents and the public; regular financial audits made available to the public; and reports that reflect budget decisions, teacher qualifications, curriculum decisions, standardized test scores and more.

One real-world example of the accountability deficiency is the Florida special education voucher program called the McKay Scholarship Program. McKay students do not have to participate in the statewide annual assessment program, the McKay schools are not required to report information on student outcomes and the state collects minimal information from students participating in the program.[6] Lack of transparency makes it impossible to assess the effectiveness of the program, which should be a fundamental requirement for any program that operates with taxpayer dollars.

Myth 3: Vouchers improve the academic performance of students

Not only do vouchers benefit a limited and select number of students, studies continue to show that the few students served do not perform better academically than students in public schools. See the chart on page 6 for a summary of evaluations of some of the country's larger programs.

Myth 4: Low-income students and students with special needs have the most to gain from vouchers

A major misconception of voucher programs is that the amount of the voucher will equal the cost of private school, thus allowing all students the option to attend a private school. However, because school voucher programs most often redirect a set dollar amount of public funds regardless of private school tuition costs, many parents must substantially supplement the amount of the voucher to be able to afford private school. Since low-income families are often unable to make up the difference between the voucher amount and the true costs to attend private school, it is impossible for many students to benefit from a voucher program.

Similarly, taxpayer savings grant or corporate tax credit voucher programs provide only a portion of the costs charged by private schools, leaving the burden of the difference in tuition as well as the cost of additional associated items such as uniforms, books and activity fees for the parents to pay.[2] In Cleveland, parents are responsible for either 25% or 10% of tuition depending on their gross family income, as well as registration fees, materials fees and other comparable expenses. Further, private schools frequently do not have the capacity to accept the number of applicants. For example, the Louisiana voucher program was only able to accommodate 5,600 of the 9,750 eligible applications (about 60%) from low-income students in 2012 because participating private schools did not have sufficient spots available.[7]

With regard to students with special needs, nonpublic schools in the United States do not receive Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) federal funding and are not required to offer special education services. For voucher programs, the implication is many students who apply

MYTH 3: The Truth Behind Existing Voucher Programs

CLEVELAND

Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program

Beginning in 1996, the Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program awards vouchers for students in kindergarten through grade 12, with a lottery selection process that gives preference to low-income families.

Lower-income parents receive $3,450 a year per child, including a 10% match from the family. Those above the income threshold receive $2,700, with a 25% family match.

EVALUATION A seven-year study from the Center for Evaluation and Education Policy at Indiana University found the performance of students who used vouchers continuously from kindergarten through grade six did not differ significantly from students in the public school comparison groups. Also, 90% of students who left the voucher program were minority students.[1]

A 2006 study showed no academic advantages for voucher users, and in some cases, voucher users performed worse in math.[2]

FLORIDA

Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program

The Florida Tax Credit (FTC) Scholarship Program allows corporate donations to fund scholarships to children from low-income families.

In 2012-13, the scholarships to attend an eligible private school were $4,335.

EVALUATION David Figlio of Northwestern University has studied the data from the FTC program since 2006. In his latest analysis, test score gains for voucher program participants were "virtually identical" to income-eligible non-participants remaining in Florida public schools.[3]

INDIANA

Indiana Voucher Program

Indiana's statewide voucher program began in 2011-12. Begun in 2011-12, families with incomes of up to $61,000 are eligible to receive vouchers on a sliding scale based on income. The maximum voucher amount is $4,500 for elementary and middle school students and slightly higher for high school students.

EVALUATION Only one in five of the private schools in Indiana's school voucher program had a passing percentage on state exams, making them lower than the statewide average. An analysis of voucher funding revealed private schools with below-average test scores receive a disproportionate share of state voucher dollars.

At least a dozen private schools accepting vouchers have scores below the passing rate of the public school district where they're located.[4]

MILWAUKEE

Milwaukee Parental Choice Program

Participating families receive a specific amount per student— $6,442 in school year 2010-11—to attend the participating private school within the city of Milwaukee.

Voucher students are selected by a lottery; participating students do not have to meet private school admissions requirements.

EVALUATION Patrick Wolf of the University of Arkansas completed a comprehensive longitudinal study, showing mixed results of the voucher program. Achievement rates of voucher and public school students were statistically similar after three years.[5]

In collaboration with other researchers, Wolf published additional research showing African American voucher students were disproportionately more likely to leave the private schools, as were students in schools admitting proportionally more voucher students, showing vouchers may not provide a long-term solution to those who are among the most disadvantaged.[6]

NEW ORLEANS

Student Scholarship for Educational Excellence

Started as a pilot voucher program in 2008 and was expanded to statewide program in 2012. The voucher is issued by the state if a student either comes from a household earning less than $57,000 annually for a family of four, or if the child is enrolled in an underperforming public school rated as a "C" "D" or "F" under the state accountability system.The voucher is equal to 90% of the total state and local funding per student (about $7,500 in 2011) or the private school's tuition and fees, whichever is smaller.

EVALUATION An analysis of state test results by the Cowen Institute of Tulane University shows that in most grades and subjects voucher recipients in New Orleans were outperformed by students at failing public schools.[7]

WASHINGTON, D.C.

D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program

The D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP) awards need-based annual scholarships to eligible District children to attend a participating private D.C. elementary, middle or high school of their parent's choice.

Individual scholarship awards are $12,205 for high school and $8,136 for elementary and middle school students.

EVALUATION In a 2009 evaluation from the U.S. Department of Education, students applying from "schools in need of improvement" did not experience increased student achievement.[8]

Of all accepted voucher students, five of 10 subgroups experienced some gains in reading compared to public school counterparts, but the gains were not statistically significant. No math gains were found.

(See the **Sources III** section at the end of this paper for a list of sources for this chart.)

for vouchers do not find placements with private schools, because the schools are not required to educate students with disabilities.[8]

The U.S. Department of Education found in a 1998 survey that 85% of large central city private schools would "definitely or probably" *not* be willing to participate in a voucher program if they were required to accept "students with special needs such as learning disabilities, limited English proficiency, or low achievement." Eighty-six percent of all religious schools expressed the same unwillingness to participate.[9]

Myth 5: School vouchers are popular among the public
For decades the American public, ultimately responsible for paying for school voucher programs, has rejected these proposals. The table below provides a history of public votes regarding school vouchers.[10]

In Utah, the first statewide universal voucher legislation was passed in 2007, allowing any student in Utah to be eligible for a private school voucher differentiated based on income. After the governor signed the bill into law, advocacy groups gathered 124,000 signatures to put the program on hold and place the measure before the voters in a statewide referendum. More than 60% of voters rejected the program, delivering a strong defeat to voucher supporters.[11]

Indiana launched school vouchers in 2011-12 with 3,919 students participating. For 2012-13, it is estimated only 9,324 students are participating despite the 15,000 slots available.

What's more, a 2012 Gallup Poll showed 55% of the public opposed the idea of allowing students and parents to choose a private school at the public school expense.[12]

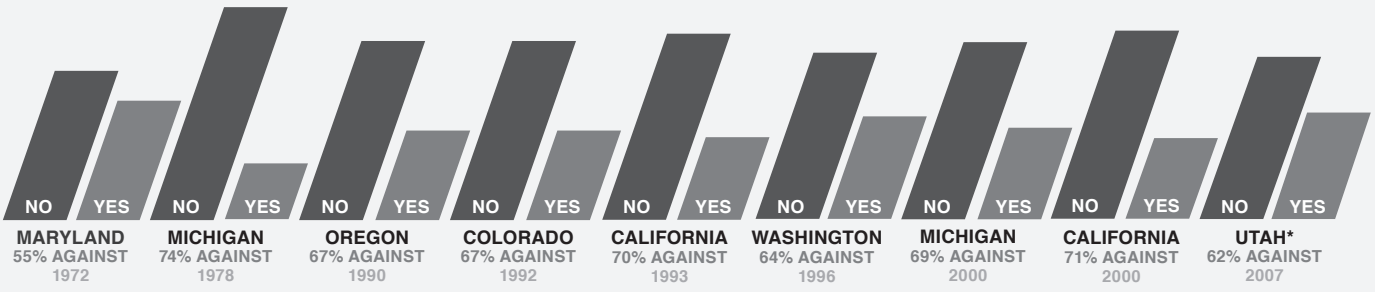
Myth 6: Vouchers only go to private schools everyone approves of and that are high-achieving
Although the specific policies of voucher programs vary greatly, many voucher programs allow students to use vouchers or tax credits at any private school, including schools that are sponsored or directed by religious institutions of diverse backgrounds and faiths. In 2012 the U.S. Census Bureau reported over 40 self-described religious identifications among the adult population.[13] Voucher programs could potentially spark the growth of private religious platforms from all faiths around the world, resulting in independent and self-governing educational programs for our American students without oversight and public transparency.

Louisiana's school voucher program has been under scrutiny since its inception in 2010. Because public tax dollars are being used to fund different religious groups' schools, the resulting competition between religious groups for government funding put pressure on the Louisiana government to show preference to one group over the other. [14] [15]

Similarly, vouchers can potentially be used at private schools that have not demonstrated high academic or ethical standards. Many parents simply assume because a school is "private" it is better and more successful at educating students than the public school system. Because private schools are unregulated and not monitored by a central governing agency, it is much more difficult to determine their effectiveness in preparing students.

The Florida McKay voucher program is an example of an unregulated program, and it has suffered allegations of financial and academic abuses. For example, in 2001, Bethel Metropolitan Christian School was accused of misappropriating government funds, verbally and physically abusing students, hiring unqualified teachers, providing students with inadequate supplies including uniforms and textbooks, and providing students with inadequate special education services.[16]

THE VOTERS' CHOICE: A HISTORY OF STATE REFERENDA ON VOUCHERS



* Voters in Utah repealed a program already created by the state Legislature, rather than voting on a proposed program.

Myth 7: Voucher programs can actually *save* taxpayer money at the state and school district level

A common claim regarding vouchers is they will result in savings for states and taxpayers because students will be attending private instead of public schools. In practice, this does not play out, as school vouchers require states to fund both public and private school systems. For example, the California school voucher program (rejected in 2000) projected additional costs to state taxpayers totaling $3.2 billion to provide vouchers for students already enrolled in private schools.[17] Similarly, the Milwaukee voucher program allows an increase in property tax levies in order to compensate public schools for the reduction in state aid inflicted by the voucher program – an additional increase that taxpayers must bear.[18]

Voucher programs have demonstrated a damaging financial impact on public schools and student programs.[2] The voucher program in Milwaukee with 20,300 participants in 2010-11 was estimated to cost taxpayers over $130 million. More than one third of the money (38.4%) was taken away from the Milwaukee public schools and its students.[18] Similarly, the Cleveland voucher program "diverts up to $19 million a year from a Cleveland public school fund aimed at educating disadvantaged students."[19]

Clearly, additional costs to the state are incurred when students already enrolled in private schools are allowed to participate in voucher programs. A study of the Cleveland voucher system revealed that only 21% of voucher students previously attended Cleveland public schools.[20]

Even voucher plans that allow school districts to retain some funding when students depart using a voucher can ultimately cost districts and the state because of the fixed costs associated with educating children (classroom teachers, utilities, etc.). Studies of existing school voucher programs indicate that students rarely transfer in significant numbers from a single grade at a single school. Most commonly, vouchers draw students from throughout the schools and districts, creating little savings in the cost of operations and maintenance.[2] Simply because one or two students in a classroom leave to attend private schools does not mean that the classroom no longer needs a qualified teacher, facilities, utilities and all other resources required for an effective learning environment.

Myth 8: The public school system lacks options

Voucher proponents try to lead parents and the public to believe that students are "stuck" in underperforming public schools, and that vouchers are the only way out. But the truth is that federal, state and local policies regarding public school choice have expanded the array of options for students to transfer within the public system to meet their interests and unique needs. A 2012 survey conducted by Raise Your Hand Texas of 66 of the largest school districts in Texas indicated there are more than 321,000 students in Texas public schools who attend a school other than the one to which they are geographically assigned. If you add charter schools, more than 476,000 students are taking advantage of public school choice. That's more than the number of students who attend all Texas private schools combined.

> *There are more than **321,000** students in Texas public schools who attend a school other than the one to which they are geographically assigned, and **476,000** if you include charter schools. That's more than the number of students who attend all Texas private schools combined.*

The following is a description of the numerous public education options.

Public Education Grant Program

In 1995, the Texas Legislature created the Public Education Grant (PEG) Program [TEC §29.201 - 29.205]. The PEG program permits parents whose children attend schools on an annual "PEG list" to request that their children transfer to a different school in their district, or to a school in another district. Specifically, students are eligible to receive a PEG if the student's campus (1) had 50% or more students that did not meet the academic standards at any time during the preceding three years or, (2) received an academically unacceptable rating at any time during the past three years. Under PEG guidelines, the school district where the student is residing must provide transportation to the school of choice.[21]

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Transfers

Parents of students attending Title I schools failing to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), the federal benchmarks for public schools, for two or more consecutive years have the choice of transferring their children to schools that are not in need of improvement.[22]

Additionally, the Unsafe School Choice Option (USCO) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, amended by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, requires states to establish and implement a statewide policy allowing students who attend a persistently dangerous public elementary or secondary school, or students who become victims of a violent criminal offense while in or on the grounds of a public school that they attend, to transfer to another safe public school.[23]

Intra-district Transfers
The Texas Education Code (TEC) allows school boards to adopt intra-district transfer policies for students transferring to other schools *within the same district*. The vast majority of Texas school districts have adopted such policies.

Inter-district Transfers
Under the TEC, a transfer *between* school districts is also an option; most districts have also adopted these policies.

Furthermore, the TEC also allows for students who were victims of a violent crime such as bullying or sexual assault to transfer *between* school districts.

Magnet Schools
Magnet schools are public schools focused on specific curricula such as mathematics, science, or the arts. Magnet schools attract students from across the boundaries of a school district, typically through a selective application process.

Charter Schools
Charter schools, established in 1995 in Texas, are publicly funded schools created with the intent of increasing the choice of learning opportunities within the public school system. The State Board of Education (SBOE) may grant an open-enrollment charter to one of the following entities:

OPTIONS AVAILABLE TO STUDENTS WITHIN THE TEXAS PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM

Public Education Grant Program
Students in underperforming schools may transfer to a different school in their district or to a school in another district. Transportation is provided.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Transfers
Students in schools that don't meet AYP can transfer. Also, students who are unsafe in their school environment may move to a different school.

Intra-district Transfers
Texas law allows for districts to adopt policies regarding students attending a different school within the same district.

Inter-district Transfers
Students can also work with their district to potentially transfer to a different school district. What's more, students who have been victims of crime or bullying may transfer.

Magnet Schools
Magnet schools attract students from an entire district, and are focused on specific curricula such as mathematics, science, or the arts.

Charter Schools
While subject to fewer state laws than traditional public schools, charter schools are public schools that offer choice to parents, while still following fiscal and academic accountability policies established by the Texas Education Agency (TEA).

Campus or Campus Program Charter
Parents or teachers may create their own charter if a majority choose to. These charters would also operate within the public school system and be held accountable academically and fiscally.

an institution of higher education; a governmental entity; or a non-profit corporation that has tax exempt status under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. While churches and other faith-based organizations may apply for an open-enrollment charter, these entities must establish a separate nonsectarian organization exempt from taxation to hold the charter, as Texas public funds may not be paid to a sectarian organization.[24]

While subject to fewer state laws than traditional public schools, charter schools must follow fiscal and academic accountability policies established by the Texas Education Agency (TEA). Charter schools are monitored as well as accredited. In 2011-12, there were more than 134,000 public school students enrolled in 482 open-enrollment charter schools in Texas.

Campus or Campus Program Charter

Texas school boards may grant a charter to parents and teachers if presented with a petition signed by (1) the parents of a majority of the students at that school campus; and (2) a majority of the classroom teachers at that school campus. Charters granted in this way must describe the educational programs to be offered and must be held accountable for their academic and financial performance.

Conclusion

While our nation's public schools are trying hard to respond to the rapid and significant changes and heightened expectations in our global society, true reform efforts are needed to ensure the success of all our students in the years to come. These efforts, which focus on teacher quality, successful classrooms and academic standards should not be confused with the political rhetoric surrounding the voucher debate. Reform efforts must continue to focus on public education for all, not vouchers for a few. The success of Texas and the nation depends on it. ★

Raise Your Hand Texas Policy Recommendations

Vouchers aren't truly about choice. If we want to increase student choice, let's do it at a scale that can meet the needs of nearly five million Texas students by improving public school options.

Raise Your Hand Texas believes public dollars should stay in the public system, with a focus on improving educational opportunities for all Texas students. Because vouchers and tax credit programs take this focus (and much-needed funding) away from public schools, RYHT opposes legislation aimed at creating voucher programs, regardless of the chosen vernacular or terminology being used.

Instead, RYHT recommends improving Texas public schools so that students and parents may be confident they are receiving a high-quality education. This includes funding schools appropriately, having a strong but fair accountability system, providing all children with high-quality early education and much more.

The voucher debate is about politics, not policy. RYHT recommends that the state stay focused on what matters most – a strong education for all Texas children.

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An electronic version of this report can be found here:
http://www.raiseyourhandtexas.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Vouchers_Myth_Reality.pdf

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