

Special Needs Vouchers Are an Abdication of the Legislature’s Responsibility to Meet the Needs of ALL Students with Disabilities

Vouchers are not a research-based or proven solution for the real issues faced by students with disabilities and their families. Most communities do not have high-quality private schools with certified educators and inclusive settings as guaranteed in Texas public schools. The result could be **resegregation of students with disabilities** and exposing students to lower quality services with no legal protections.

“Far too many students are being forced to relinquish important civil rights in order to access public education funds. A State should not be able to use “choice” to skirt their responsibility to provide a free, appropriate public education [to students with disabilities]...”

— Denise Marshall, Executive Director, Council of Parent Attorneys & Advocates (COPAA)

Special Needs Vouchers are a Means to a Political End — “Minimizing Resistance” to Broader Voucher Programs

Across the country, special needs vouchers have been used as a political ploy to open the door for broader voucher programs. Reporting on key takeaways from their legislator focus groups on voucher promotion, [Bellwether Research & Consulting’s memo](#) to the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice describes the national strategy:

“[Voucher] legislation that starts small, focused on special needs students, is a model that seems to work as it **minimizes resistance**. Legislators in states that don’t have [vouchers] think opening up the option to special needs students is **the way to start**. Those who have already done this are now looking for ways to **widen the pool of eligible students**.” [emphasis added]

Special Needs Vouchers Undermine the Rights of Texas Students and Families

For years, families with children in special education programs have fought for the rights to **inclusive settings, trained teachers, and legal protections**. Special needs vouchers would wipe out these protections, along with the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and its guarantee to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) **that do not apply in private settings**. This includes the essential right to an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), requiring public school districts to tailor a student’s education to their unique needs.

Special Needs Vouchers Are Insufficient to Cover the Cost of Specialized Services

Proposed voucher amounts to families of students with special needs are insufficient to cover the cost of highly specialized services that many students require. Evidence from Arizona suggests **these programs primarily benefit wealthier families who can further subsidize tuition costs**. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), economists have expressed concern that these vouchers incentivize the delivery of low-quality services to students with less severe disabilities, while excluding students with more severe needs.

SPECIAL NEEDS VOUCHERS JUST AS FLAWED AS TRADITIONAL VOUCHERS

Vouchers for students in Special Education lack the same crucial protections and oversight as traditional vouchers, Education Savings Accounts (ESAs), and Tax Credit Scholarships

		 Traditional Vouchers, ESAs, & Tax Credit Scholarships	 Special Needs Vouchers	 Texas Public Schools
Guaranteed admission	▶	✗	✗	✓
Oversight and accountability for taxpayer-funded education	▶	✗	✗	✓
Parents guaranteed no extra fees for educational program	▶	✗	✗	✓
No-cost transportation	▶	✗	✗	✓
Public reporting of student academic performance based on statewide assessments	▶	✗	✗	✓
Adherence to federal IDEA rights for students in special education	▶	✗	✗	✓
Certified special education teachers, inclusive classrooms, and trained staff	▶	✗	✗	✓

For more about the dangers of special needs vouchers, visit: RaiseYourHandTexas.org/Vouchers.