

PUBLIC EDUCATION FIRST, TEXAS AFT

The Texas American Federation of Teachers represents 66,000 teachers, paraprofessionals, support personnel, and higher education employees across the state.

This year, our union has heard from a teacher whose students were using the wall to take tests because there weren't enough desks. We've talked to a [middle-schooler whose three favorite teachers are quitting](#) out of exasperation. We've listened to parents frustrated that their children cannot get to school on time because so few bus drivers remain.

These are the real problems Texas schools face, and there are real choices for legislators to grapple with for the next several months. Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick has said he's all in on "school choice," but legislators should remember that school vouchers solve none of these issues.

Vouchers have been branded and rebranded. They can be "opportunity scholarships," "tuition tax credits" or "savings accounts." But whatever you call them, they will drain money from Texas' already underfunded schools. Our state is [39th in the nation for per-pupil funding](#). As recently as 2020, the U.S. Department of Education found that the state, through chronic underfunding, was [denying legally required support to students with disabilities](#).

Our public schools — stretched paper thin and hemorrhaging teachers and staff — cannot afford to lose another dollar. Texas has a constitutional obligation "to establish and make suitable provision for the support and maintenance of an efficient system of public free schools."

That makes vouchers about as un-Texan as you can get.

Vouchers are a threat to Texas' sense of independence

We don't have to wonder if vouchers are the right choice. We have evidence they aren't.

As Josh Cowen, a professor of education policy, [noted in The Dallas Morning News](#) last year, four independent evaluations of voucher programs in Indiana, Louisiana, Ohio and Washington, D.C., all found the same thing: "some of the largest negative impacts on student learning ever seen."

Why would Texas follow in those footsteps?

In Arizona, voucher proponents sold the program as an aid to families in low-income households. In practice, it was used primarily in high-performing districts by wealthy parents, with ["roughly three of every four students who sought school voucher funding \[having\] never set foot in an Arizona public school."](#)

Instead of leveling the playing field, the reality of vouchers is a state government subsidizing tuition for students who already attend pricey private schools.

Vouchers are a threat to local control

Private schools are not held to the same accountability standards as public schools. For example, they are not required to provide fair access and quality services to students with disabilities, a fact that concerned two-thirds of Texas voters in a [2022 poll from Texas Parent PAC](#).

Since its founding, Texas has had among its core principles the precept that citizens should have a say at every level of government. [It's why we vote on everything](#).

So why would Texans send their public tax dollars to a private school — a black box of accountability? Public school parents know what their children are being taught. They vote for the State Board of Education, which approves that curriculum. They vote for their local school board, which is responsible for day-to-day operations.

None of that translates to private school governance. For what benefit? Studies of voucher programs in several U.S. cities have found little to no gains for student achievement.

Vouchers are a threat to Friday night lights

There is no greater threat to our public schools, especially rural schools, than a voucher program. For each student leaving a Texas public school, [a campus would lose about \\$10,000](#) in funding.

Those resources leave the school district, but the fixed costs of running those schools do not. There are still staff to pay, buildings to maintain and meals to deliver.

In rural Texas communities — where schools are often the heartbeat of the community — a handful of students leaving under a voucher program would ultimately cut a teacher's salary and affect the school's ability to fund extracurriculars — including sports.

Are we comfortable with our neighborhood schools scrapping programs like dual-language education, STEM initiatives or vocational training? What about football?

Vouchers are a threat to neighborhood schools

Texas parents value their children's public schools. In a [2022 poll from the Charles Butt Foundation](#), 68% of public school parents in Texas gave their communities' schools an A or B grade. So when the [lieutenant governor](#) brands our public schools as failing, he's mistaken.

Over half the respondents of the Charles Butt Foundation poll, meanwhile, said their public schools don't have enough money.

The last failed voucher bill in Texas was expected to [divert \\$340 million per year](#) from public schools. That's money our neighborhood schools won't have to raise salaries or expand extracurricular programs.

Is this really the "Texas miracle" economy state leaders crow about?

The voucher fight isn't about "school choice." It's about our future and what we're willing to do to support it. The Legislature can decide this spring.