

## **SCHOOL CHOICE LEGISLATION FAILED THIS SESSION BECAUSE LEGISLATORS FAILED TO BRING BILL UP FOR A DISCUSSION**

"There are a lot of wonderful public schools and teachers in Texas, and we commend them and want to see them succeed. We are disappointed that Texas Senators and Representatives did not choose to discuss **vouchers**: to deny these kids options is mind-boggling. We must do a better job to educate parents to speak up and become advocates for their children," says Connie Sadowski of the Austin CEO Foundation. Parents overwhelmingly want to be able to choose their child's school. See photos of the School Choice Legislative Day at the Texas State Capitol [view event photos](#), [event photos](#), [event photos](#) and more [event photos](#)

**Georgia Passes Special-Needs Bill** School Reform News, Heartland Institute June 2007 by Karla Dial, Senate Bill 10, signed by the Georgia Governor on May 18, 2007, allows parents of disabled children to use the money the state would have spent educating their children in public schools to send them to the public or private school of their choice. The average **voucher** will be about \$9,000, and an estimated 4,100 students will use them when they become available this autumn. Read story: <http://www.heartland.org/Article.cfm?artId=21114>  
Read text of bill [http://www.legis.state.ga.us/legis/2007\\_08/sum/sb10.htm](http://www.legis.state.ga.us/legis/2007_08/sum/sb10.htm)

**Charter Proposal Would Fail Students** By Jamie Story May 22, 2007

Across Texas, hundreds of charter schools educate thousands of the state's neediest students. But SB 4 would have shut down many of these schools. The intent sounds laudable: strengthen the entire charter school movement by rewarding good schools and closing bad ones. It is the definition of "bad", though, that worries many charter school operators, students, and parents. SB 4 would have revoked charters whose total liabilities exceed total assets by more than 20 percent of total expenditures. The bill would also shut down charters in which fewer than 25 percent of students passed both the math and reading portions of the TAKS in the most recent two years. Read entire story (written before bill failed) at [http://www.texaspolicy.com/commentaries\\_single.php?report\\_id=1501](http://www.texaspolicy.com/commentaries_single.php?report_id=1501)

**SB 1943 Failed: Would have allowed UIL Participation for Private School Students**

Texas Home School Coalition May 25, 2007 by Tim Lambert

SB 1943 would have allowed private schools to participate in UIL activities. The bill passed the Senate and was voted out of the House Education Committee, set for a vote by the Calendars Committee for yesterday, but was so far down the calendar that the bill was not voted on. Read more <http://www.thsc.org/sb1943.asp>

**Seniors find out in May they cannot graduate this Month**

Fort Worth Star Telegram Wed, May. 23, 2007 BY DIANE SMITH [dianesmith@star-telegram.com](mailto:dianesmith@star-telegram.com)

**Board Member McClung said "the district hadn't done enough to teach the students. We have failed African-American and Hispanic kids,"** she said. "We have five low performing high schools, and all of them are predominantly African-American." A move to let seniors who failed TAKS take part in graduation ceremonies died with a split vote by the Fort Worth school board. "We've got to make an exception," school board trustee Juan Rangel urged the board during Wednesday morning's special meeting. "An exception today doesn't mean we have lowered the bar." Read More <http://www.star-telegram.com:80/news/v-print/story/111990.html>

**Austin Chamber Education Legislation Update : Greater Austin Chamber Drew Scheberle** May 21, 2007

After many months, the Texas Legislature is in its final week. With many long-term actions deferred for additional study, structural education issues had been fairly quiet...until last week. SB 1031 changed everything very quickly. Last Monday, the Texas House eliminated the need to pass a graduation exam, or one in 5th or 8th grade, then sunset the whole Texas accountability system in 2011, unless a new system is created and passed through the legislative process before then. To boot, the House proposed eliminating the exit TAKS tests, which require a student to demonstrate knowledge in algebra, geometry, biology, integrated physics and chemistry, English III and writing, and social studies, beginning with 9th graders in 2011. The House replaced it with an expectation students attempt 12 end of course tests. Geometry, biology, English III and a 9th grade social studies class count for 25% of their final grade. A student can still fail these tests and all end of course tests and still graduate. Read more [www.austinchamber.com](http://www.austinchamber.com)

**DESPITE OVERWHELMING VOTE IN HOUSE, ANTI-voucher LANGUAGE STRIPPED FROM APPROPRIATIONS BILL**

Conferees explain no likelihood of **voucher** bill passing

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The House voted for it 129-8, but that wasn't enough for a prohibition on public school **vouchers** to make it through the conference committee process. Budget conferees decided last night to strip a rider that prohibited the Texas Education Agency from spending money on a public education **voucher** program or a voucher pilot program. Craddick, citing the need to get back on the calendar, brought the discussion to a close but not before he reminded Democrats that a motion to instruct on the matter had been rejected by the House. Heflin afterward said he was "sorely disappointed" in the conference committee. "If this is so benign, why was it stripped out?"

**One in 10 Austin seniors fails TAKS test; Percentage of students ineligible for graduation varies by campus.** By Katie Humphrey AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF Friday, May 11, 2007

One in four seniors at Austin's Johnston High School will not receive diplomas later this month because they failed to pass the state's exit exams. The situation is the same at Reagan and Travis high schools, where 24 percent of seniors will not graduate, according to figures released Friday by Austin school district officials. Anderson and Bowie high schools, where 97 percent of students passed the exit-level exams, will graduate the largest percentage of their senior classes.

Overall, 419 of almost 3,900 Austin seniors 11 percent failed one or more sections of the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills. Some of the students also do not have enough credits to graduate. [Read entire story](#)

40,200 seniors won't get diplomas over TAKS

Houston Chronicle May 12, 2006

**Considering half the minority students in Texas drop-out plus these failures we are spending more on losers than winners!** [Read entire story](#)

**WHY EDUCATORS QUIT: Lack of support, too much paperwork**

**Thursday, April 26, 2007 San Francisco Chronicle**

If working conditions at the middle school where Jim Lammers taught for 11 years had not been "set up to fail," he might have stuck around. But like thousands of other teachers across California, the former Marin County teacher of the year quit the profession in frustration.

Click for entire story: [Teachers leaving profession in droves](#)

**When a student's in trouble, should parents know?**

**By Amanda Paulson Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor**

US privacy laws prevent counselors from informing parents of danger signs. But many say they should know if their young adult children or their roommates need help. [click](#) for entire story

**'Death Grip' by Unions** BY IRA STOLL - Staff Reporter of the Sun April 18, 2007

President Bush's first-term education secretary, Rod Paige, is talking about the "death grip," the "stranglehold," that teachers' unions have on public education in America.

His new book is titled "The War Against Hope: How Teachers' Unions Hurt Children, Hinder Teachers, and Endanger Public Education." The unions, he writes, are "arrogant" and "destructive." They defend incompetent teachers and oppose merit pay for teachers who excel. "No special interest is more destructive than the teachers' unions, as they oppose nearly every meaningful reform," he writes.

Lest New York City teachers get all riled up at him, there's a catch: The book actually praises the president of New York City's United Federation of Teachers, Randi Weingarten. It says she is among those union leaders who "have exhibited the unique ability to achieve, or at least to strive to achieve, the proper balance between the interests of the public education system and the well-being of the union's members."

Mr. Paige is a director of News Corp., but his main work is as chairman of Chartwell Education Group, a less-than-two-year-old company with about two dozen employees that consults on education reform.

"The system is not performing," he says. The people who suffer most, he says, are minorities and disadvantaged students. "The union is sitting on both sides of the negotiating table," he says, referring to the power of the unions in electing the politicians they are negotiating with in collective bargaining. The result, he says, are "systems whose main purpose is the employment well-being of the adults in the system."

"This book is about raising the issue for public discussion, because I believe the American public is a wise public," he says. "As Americans, we know better than this."

"It's the truth," he says. "All you've got to do is look at a union contract...It speaks for itself."

Are **vouchers** allowing public school students to escape to private schools part of the solution? As education secretary, Mr. Paige spearheaded a successful effort by the Bush administration to win congressional approval for a school **voucher** program

Continued BY IRA STOLL - Staff Reporter of the Sun April 18, 2007

in the District of Columbia, whose well-funded public schools have a dismal record when it comes to student performance on standardized tests. "I'm very proud of that program," Mr. Paige says. "We've got parents lining up."

What of the latest scandal to hit the New York City schools, the high school teacher on the Upper West Side who led a group of students on a trip to Cuba in apparent violation of the federal sanctions on the Communist government led by Fidel Castro? While declining to get into specifics since he hadn't personally investigated the details, Mr. Paige did say that he felt the "appropriate response has to be aggressive and quick."

Aggressive is one thing Mr. Paige certainly is; his book recounts the fury he kicked up when, as education secretary, he likened the National Education Association to a "terrorist organization," a choice of words for which he quickly apologized. He makes no apology, though, for calling attention to the power of the unions.

***"The people need to understand," he says. "The power needs to be rolled back so we can have a more proper balance between the interests of the employees and the interests of the parents, students, and taxpayers."***

### **Committee hears hours of testimony on school vouchers**

By ELIZABETH WHITE Associated Press Writer in Austin American Statesman  
March 30, 2007

AUSTIN — A Senate committee heard hours of testimony from parents, educators and experts on a controversial school voucher bill on Thursday. Supporters argued the measure would give parents a choice in their children's education and opponents said it would hurt public schools.

The Senate Education Committee spent most of the day on the legislation that would create a pilot program to allow some parents to send their children to public or private schools in or outside of their home districts using tax dollars.

//--> The bill from Sen. Kyle Janek, R-Houston, applies to districts in counties with a population of 750,000 or more — the state's urban centers — and would require students to demonstrate their eligibility each year. Students eligible for the voucher program would include, for example, those from lower-income homes who are at risk of dropping out.

"A large body of empirical studies has shown that school choice policies improve the academic performance of public schools," said testimony from Greg Forster, a senior fellow and director of research at the Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation. "We estimate that even a modest school choice program in Texas would reduce public school dropouts by up to 17,000 students per year, every year."

The Senate Education Committee did not plan to take action on the bill Thursday.

Opponents argue that a voucher program will drain money from the public school system and that taxpayer dollars shouldn't go to schools that are not accountable to the state. Proponents say it will create competition, thereby improving public schools.

Former Sen. Bill Ratliff questioned whether the state's charter school system could accomplish the same goals as a voucher program.

"We want all children in Texas to have access to a good education, not just the chosen few who can access a voucher program," said Ratliff, who now chairs Raise Your Hand Texas, which says it seeks to strengthen and improve public schools. "We don't know how under this bill we will be able to determine whether the students using state-funded vouchers are receiving a good education since these schools are not accountable to anyone."

## **Voucher part of budget bill falls**

by Jason Embry Austin American Statesman March 30, 2007

In a vote that was largely overshadowed by a debate on teacher pay, the House voted overwhelmingly for language in the state budget barring the use of state funds for private-school vouchers.

The vote was a major change from 2005, when the House just barely fended off voucher plans. One reason for Thursday's vote is that voucher opponents have had much more success recently running against them in campaigns than voucher supporters have had touting them.

Also, the language is not likely to survive until the end of the budget. So voucher supporters didn't want to take a tough, potentially dangerous vote against what may prove to be just a symbolic provision.

Having said all that, it's hard to see the vote as anything other than troubling for voucher advocates.

## **Texas Should Beware of 'Regulationitis'**

### **CALIFORNIA: Deep flaws found in school system**

A yearlong, \$3 million evaluation of California public schools by more than 30 education experts reveals a "deeply flawed" system that misdirects school money, emphasizes paperwork over progress, and fails to send the best teachers into the neediest schools. "Getting Down to Facts" -- a collection of 22 studies -- begins with the sobering reminder that despite years of academic reform, California students of all ethnicities still score among the worst in the nation on tests of basic reading and math....read entire story [here](#)

## **Senator Kyle Janek R, Harris County introduces **voucher** bill**

**March 8, 2007**

**view in word or adobe acrobat click [here](#)**

## Austin Bureau

AUSTIN — Former U.S. Education Secretary Rod Paige touted school vouchers Monday as one way to address the state's dropout problem, which suggests will cost Texas taxpayers \$377 million a year just for the 120,000 students expected not to graduate with the 2007 high school diploma.

"Obviously, school choice won't solve all of our problems. This is just one tool to broaden the reach," said Paige, who had been superintendent of an Independent School District before President Bush elevated him to education secretary during the president's first term.

Paige and former Texas A&M Chancellor Robert McTeer embraced vouchers during a Capitol briefing sponsored by the Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation, which promotes private school vouchers.

But voucher proposals have not attracted a majority of support in the Legislature. School choice proponents want to give parents the ability to send their child to any school — public or private — at taxpayer expense.

"Until the state can provide that access to everybody, we can't be talking about vouchers," said Rep. Trey Martinez Fischer, D-San Antonio. "I'd like to see hearts that every child in San Antonio could go to the school of their choice and get the best education, then maybe I'd be open to vouchers."

A Friedman Foundation study indicates a modest school-choice program would reduce public school dropout rates and save taxpayers money. Other studies, the report says each Texas high school class loses 120,000 students by the time of graduation because of dropout.

The report puts the statewide dropout rate at 33 percent and has it soaring to 50 percent in the state's largest cities. Studies by other researchers reach similar conclusions.

Each of the state's dropouts costs taxpayers an average of about \$3,168 a year for the rest of their lives because of increased Medicaid costs and lost revenue caused by dropouts who can't lead productive lives, the study said.

In the past, dropouts could survive in manufacturing and other jobs requiring little more than physical labor, said McTeer, an economist. "That's not true anymore."

"The jobs that are left require more training, more education and more skills," he said.

McTeer warned that Texas will "resemble the makeup of underdeveloped countries" unless it gets a handle on dropouts.

Both he and Paige said school choice would create "competition" that would force public schools to improve while allowing young children to get a better education.

But critics want lawmakers to fix the bad public schools.

A pilot project diverting tax dollars into private schools represents the start of "the private enterprise system taking over our public schools," said the founder of Parents For Public Schools of Houston, a group that promotes excellent public schools for all children.

It's the wrong direction, especially "when we have a society made up of so many different types of people, different races, different languages," she said. "We need a public school system that will create citizens out of all these different people."

## **Q&A: James Leininger**

### **Voucher advocate vows to continue pushing**

#### **Sunday, February 11, 2007 Austin American Statesman**

After more than a decade of spending millions of dollars to promote legislation that would allow Texas students to take public dollars to private schools with vouchers, James Leininger of San Antonio has yet to get a bill through the Legislature.

The publicity-shy physician and businessman has been pleading his case before newspaper editorial boards all over the state. He is trying to have the Legislature establish a pilot program that would test vouchers in nine school districts in five cities: Austin; Dallas; Fort Worth; Houston; North Forest, in Houston; San Antonio; South San Antonio; and Harlandale and Edgewood, both in San Antonio.

Leininger sat down with American-Statesman editorial writers, reporters and executives last week to talk about his latest effort. Excerpts from that conversation follow.

**Austin American-Statesman:** A top aide in education to Gov. George Bush, when he was here, said, "What Governor Bush told us about vouchers was, 'Put it on the agenda, for discussion, but don't push it,' " suggesting kind of a lukewarm attitude toward vouchers. Why did Bush have that kind of reluctance to engage you on this issue?

**James Leininger:** At some point there, I think Governor Bush was thinking about running for president, and that certainly was not a main thrust of his educational policy at that time. So, it wouldn't surprise me if he said that. I would point out that he has just advocated vouchers nationally through No Child Left Behind.

Every session since 1993, voucher legislation (has been) introduced, and despite a considerable investment of time and energy by proponents, (it) never quite clears all the hurdles. To what do you attribute the legislative reluctance to adopt some sort of school choice legislation?

I think the reluctance is a status quo deal. The public schools have 700,000 employees in Texas and a very, very powerful lobby here.

If you talk to the teacher lobbies, they don't see themselves as political powerhouses.

Well, they look big to me. And I'm just one guy, you know?

Did you say that the (pilot) voucher program would take 5 percent of the student population? How much for their vouchers? How many students are we talking about — about 20,000?

That's maximum.

How much would the voucher be?

Well, what I would say is, around \$7,000 would probably be a good average.

When we studied this issue we found that if every kid did take advantage of the voucher program — with about 20,000 or so kids — that there would not be enough seats in private schools for every kid that wanted a voucher. Where would they go?

Well, the 19,000 or 20,000 students I mentioned represent the number of seats in private schools in the five (cities) available now or that they could expand into. If there were more students than that (who) wanted to choose a private school, then there would be a waiting list.

Why are you coming here now?

The change of heart right now is very simple. We have 4,000 kids that we've given scholarships to under the Edgewood Horizon program, and that program runs out next year. The money's gone, and the time's gone. If the Legislature doesn't act, those kids are going to be out on the street.

Have you had conversations with the governor and the lieutenant governor and the speaker about this year's legislation? And what have they told you about their level of commitment?

The governor, lieutenant governor and the speaker have all been helpful and committed to giving more choices to poor children for a long time. I haven't had any specific conversations with them about this session because, frankly, we're revising the bill and trying to get all the legal advice so that it passes all constitutional muster in our state. So we don't have a final bill to present to anybody or to talk to anybody about as of yet for this session.

How does your program address how the private schools must behave in terms of acceptance of applicants should they use state money?

This is all about choice, and the individual school can choose to take money from the state or choose to not take money from the state. And that would be up to them.

Continued Q& A Dr. Jim Leininger

The legislation that we're proposing is very strong in accountability. The first thing it says is, if you take these students, you have to abide by all of the state and federal and discrimination, health and safety rules. Second thing is, you have to be accredited or have to be going through the process of being accredited, which is like a three- or four-year process. But if you're not up to speed along the way . . . they won't accredit you.

Thirdly, the comptroller will analyze the progress of the program every year. The fourth thing is, they will be tested every year. They have to be tested either by the TAKS test or a test of higher academic rigor.

Then, lastly, they're held accountable by the parents. If the parents don't like what's going on, then they're going to jerk them out and put them in a different school.

Will the private schools be forced to change their admission requirements to allow a broader segment of the population that has a school voucher?

I don't think you can force anybody to do anything. This is about choice. So, whatever the admission policy is, is what their admission policy is.

And if the best and the brightest leave the public schools? How does that help the public schools?

What would happen is the opposite. The lowest income, the most at-risk . . . are the ones that were desperate to leave. The ones in the National Honor Society and the captain of the football team are not leaving our schools here.

Who would provide transportation for those children?

Well, we've had almost 8,500 kids in this program over the last 15 years in these two (San Antonio) programs and not a single one of them was provided any transportation or any money for transportation. Every one of them took care of the transportation themselves.

If vouchers don't work, are you willing to get behind other efforts to improve public schools in Texas?

I've always been behind many other efforts to improve public schools in Texas. I will do everything that I know to do to help these kids get a break.

### **Voucher backers focus on minority dropouts by Aman Batheja Star Telegraph Staff Writer February 8, 2007**

AUSTIN — Framing the issue as the latest front in the civil rights movement, thousands of parents, educators, and students descended on the state Capitol on Wednesday to support school vouchers.

The rally, sponsored by a coalition of groups including Texans for School Choice and the Hispanic Council for Reform and Educational Options, aimed to build support for the creation of a pilot voucher program for low-income students in major cities, including Fort Worth.

"We've got hypocrites in this building," said Howard Fuller, a former superintendent of Milwaukee public schools, pointing to the lawmakers in the Capitol building who send their children to private schools.

Several speakers said vouchers could reduce the dropout rate for minority students in Texas.

Although he was not a speaker at the rally, Republican activist James Leininger grabbed attention just for his appearance. Leininger, of San Antonio, has spent millions of dollars in recent years backing Republican candidates who support vouchers and other conservative causes, but he has tended to keep out of the public eye.

He said the focus on minority students at the rally appears to be an effective approach.

"It never occurred to me to think of it in that way, but I do think it's a civil right to get an education," Leininger said. "I think, frankly, this is the first generation when that's not happening."

Leininger said he thinks it was too early to tell whether voucher legislation has a chance in this session.

### **Continued Voucher backers focus on minority dropouts**

**by Aman Batheja Star Telegraph Staff Writer February 8, 2007** Gov. Rick Perry and Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst, both voucher supporters, said recently that they don't believe vouchers have enough support from lawmakers to pass this year.

The pilot program proposed by the Austin-based Texans for School Choice would allow a limited number of low-income parents in the state's five largest cities, including Fort Worth, to use public money to send their children to a private school or another public school.

Supporters of the program say the increased competition for students would improve public schools as well and give low-income students a chance at a better education.

"Monopolies can't deliver the goods very well," ABC News correspondent and voucher advocate John Stossel said at the rally. "Everything works better under competition."

Opponents argue that such programs would divert revenue from public school budgets. They also say that tax money shouldn't go to schools that are associated with religious institutions or are not accountable to the state.

Don Miller, superintendent of the Catholic Diocese of Fort Worth, led two bus loads of supporters to the Austin rally.

The group, mostly parents, also brought along 1,150 letters from others in the area supporting voucher legislation. The letters were delivered to the offices of Rep. Phil King, R-Weatherford, and Sen. Kim Brimer, R-Fort Worth, Miller said.

Mansfield pastor Kyev Tatum, who led a bus load of supporters from Tarrant County to the rally, said the obstacle lies in minority lawmakers who won't properly lead on the issue.

"The only way it will have a chance is if the black and brown legislators wake up. . . . We can't get [state representative] Marc Veasey's support because he can't stop playing party politics," Tatum said, referring to the Fort Worth Democrat.

Veasey said he has no plans of backing down on his opposition to vouchers.

"I'm a proud product of the Fort Worth ISD, my wife is a proud product of the and my child will be also," Veasey Fort Worth ISD . . . said.

Tatum said several area churches, including the Harmony Missionary Baptist Church in Fort Worth are ready to establish schools as soon as Perry signs voucher legislation.

In response to the rally, groups such as the Texas Federation of Teachers and the Baptist General Convention of Texas urged members to call their representatives and express their opposition to school vouchers.

"Teachers and most parents realize that vouchers are destructive and ineffective, but we need to make sure that lawmakers — who are under siege from high-dollar special-interest groups — get that message," Texas Federation of Teachers President Linda Bridges said in a statement.

**Thousands at Capitol rally in support of school vouchers see [www.ceoaustin.org/newsletter](http://www.ceoaustin.org/newsletter) Parents 'Increasingly Desperate' for School Choice February 7, 2007 Offering an A+ for School Choice By Robert McTeer Updated January 9, 2007**

As chancellor of The Texas A&M University System, I was so focused on getting "our fair share" of higher education funds that I barely noticed the important effort to introduce choice and competition into Texas public education. Choice and competition work wonders in many sectors.. It wasn't that long ago that the introduction of high-quality Hondas and Toyotas into the U.S. market not only broadened the choices available to American consumers, but ultimately improved Ford and Chevrolet quality as well.

My first encounter with the idea of school choice and competition was in the late Milton Friedman's 1962 classic, *Capitalism and Freedom*. Friedman has successfully advocated many market-based solutions to public policy problems throughout his distinguished, Nobel Prize-winning career. But in his nineties he has singled out parental choice as his most important unfinished business and established a foundation to promote it. Friedman summarized the frustrating history of getting choice programs adopted. He says the efforts usually start out with broad parental and public support as a means of dealing with at-risk students and failing school systems, but that organized resistance by trade union leaders and the education bureaucracy generally prevail.

Competition can be frightening to those long shielded from it. When the Monetary Control Act of 1980 required the Federal Reserve to begin charging for check services it had been providing free to financial institutions so private banks could better compete with us, I was only a month into my job as head of the Fed's Baltimore office. We promptly lost over 40 percent of our check-processing business to private-sector competitors. But we eventually recovered most of it by improving our services and otherwise emulating private-sector profit incentives. Government monopolies are usually run by good people, but competition makes them better.

I met many fine students and teachers when I later became president of the Dallas Fed. We conducted an annual essay competition for high school students. We also sponsored a competition in which students studied economics and competed with mock meetings of the Fed's Federal Open Market Committee. I'm proud to say that our Texas teams won the national championship in three of the first four years we participated—Bryan High School in 1996-98—and then Midland High School won in 2000.

The students I met through these competitions were awesome. But they were the cream of the crop. While Texas has many excellent students in all its public schools, and has many excellent schools, it also has too many schools that don't measure up. Texas has a high drop-out rate. Of those who do graduate, only half go on to college, and many of them require remedial work.

The Dallas Fed also conducts conferences and workshops to help teachers gear up to teach economics. I was pleased to learn recently that A&M System Universities and others, largely on behalf of the Texas Education Agency, actively support teacher education, not only by training new teachers, but also by helping existing teachers in nearby high schools raise their quality of instruction. I know firsthand that Texas has many competent and confident teachers. But, like the students I met, the teachers are probably the cream of the crop who self-select into improvement programs.

In contrast, I'm afraid that many teachers, being human, naturally fear competition and accountability. Even so, they owe it to the kiddos to suck it up and give choice and competition a chance. Courage is not the absence of fear, but the willingness to do what needs to be done despite fear. In this increasingly competitive, globalized world we live in, we can't afford to be second best. We can't afford to neglect improvement opportunities in order to remain in our comfort zone.

Many will say that I'm stepping over the line between higher education and public education—that I've stopped preaching and gone to meddling. Maybe so, but I do have a dog in this fight. If good players help make good coaches, then better prepared students are needed to help make Texas higher education world class. So, let's hope that, as our legislators grapple with the complexities of school finance, they will also try to find a way to introduce choice and competition into Texas schools.

Robert D. McTeer is currently Distinguished Fellow, [National Center for Policy Analysis](#) former chancellor of The Texas A&M University System and former president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas.

## Why We Need School Choice

by Jamie Story December 29, 2006

Reality has set in. Texas schools are trailing much of the United States, and United States schools are trailing the rest of the world. Over the years, the “solution” offered for ailing schools has been an infusion of new resources. Unfortunately, these “reforms” have done nothing to increase outcomes, and generations of students have suffered in the meantime. We *must* find a true solution now.

School choice is the most effective and efficient means to improve student achievement. It provides immediate help to students trapped in failing schools, while encouraging competition that leads to increased outcomes for *all* students, from public and private schools alike. School choice is the most promising solution for our schools *and* our children.

## Schools Must Improve

Texas students are being underserved by public schools.

- Almost 40 percent of Texas students fail to graduate high school.<sup>1</sup>
- 88 percent of Texas public schools are rated “Acceptable” or higher, but this designation only requires that 35 percent of students demonstrate proficiency in science, 40 percent in math, and 60 percent each in reading, writing, and social studies.<sup>2</sup>
- Texas students exhibit the 3rd-lowest SAT scores and the 8th-lowest ACT scores among the 50 states, despite having below average participation rates on the two tests.<sup>3</sup>
- Over the past ten years, SAT scores in Texas have increased by only one point, while the average for the rest of the country has increased by 18 points.<sup>4</sup>
- Half of all students in Texas two-year colleges, and 40 percent of all college students statewide, require remedial coursework.<sup>5</sup>

Those favoring the status quo often boast that 4th and 8th-grade Texas students have recently outperformed the national average on several subjects of the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Unfortunately, besting the national average is hardly impressive, as the U.S. ranks near the bottom of industrialized countries in student achievement.<sup>7</sup>

## Traditional Approaches Have Fallen Short

For decades, vast resources have been increasingly devoted to public education in Texas, in the hopes that more money will positively impact student achievement.

- Between 1960 and 2001, real per-student spending tripled.
- From 1995 to 2005, teacher salaries increased by almost 25 percent in real terms.
- The student-to-teacher ratio has decreased from 24:1 in 1969 to 15:1 today.<sup>8</sup>

Teacher salaries have increased, class sizes have decreased, and overall spending on public education has ballooned—but academic achievement has remained essentially stagnant. Money has never been, and will never be, the solution for our ailing public schools.

## Existing School Choice in Texas Promising, but Insufficient

While the infusion of more resources has failed to make a difference academically, there are *real reforms*, costing nothing, that have been proven to increase student achievement. The most promising—and most immediate—is school choice.

Currently, Texas has two broad forms of school choice: public school choice and charter schools. Public school choice (through Public Education Grants and the No Child Left Behind Act) gives students in low performing schools the opportunity to transfer to another public school. But this privilege is underutilized, largely because schools are not required to accept

transfers. As a result, fewer than 1 percent of eligible students actually access public school choice through these means.

Charter schools provide another form of school choice that has shown great promise, but has failed to reach all of the students who need it, largely because of a legislative cap limiting the number of charter schools. This cap, along with a series of regulations more burdensome than those faced by traditional public schools, has prevented charter schools from reaching their potential.

### **Continued Why We Need School Choice by Jamie Story**

While public school choice and charter schools have contributed to increased achievement for a relative handful of students, they are insufficient to meet the needs of all Texas children. **Vouchers** are the missing piece of the school choice puzzle.

What would school choice in Texas look like?

Texas already finances schools on a per-student basis, with adjustments made for district and student characteristics. When a student leaves a school for any reason, be it moving or dropping out, the money attached to that student leaves as well. But under school choice, only a portion of the student's allotment leaves the public school, meaning per-student spending in that school actually increases.

Also, consider that the typical school choice program involves fewer than five percent of students, while more than half of Texas urban public school students fail to graduate.<sup>18</sup> Clearly, the Texas dropout crisis is a far greater financial drain on schools than school choice would be.

Expanded school choice will improve academic outcomes for all Texas students, will increase racial integration, and will help to reduce the inequities faced by students of various socioeconomic backgrounds. School choice through **vouchers** will give Texas students more opportunities for success. *Jamie Story is the education policy analyst of the Texas Public Policy Foundation. To view the article in its entirety click [here](#).*

### **San Antonio's proven that school **vouchers** work well**

#### **Edgewood experiment a clear success in all ways** By GREG FORSTER and JAY P. GREENE Dec. 25, 2006,

As the Texas Legislature gears up for another debate over school **vouchers** in the coming session, naturally Texans are looking for evidence on whether **vouchers** work. They should look at the long-running **voucher** program in San Antonio. As with programs across the country, the evidence shows that **vouchers** work.

While Texas doesn't have a government-sponsored school choice program, San Antonio has had a **voucher** program funded with private contributions since 1998. It allows students in public schools in the Edgewood school district to attend private schools they otherwise couldn't afford.

Many people think that **voucher** programs will hurt public schools, draining them of the talent and resources they need to succeed. Others suggest that **vouchers** will improve public schools by exposing them to greater competition. Because most students will remain in public schools even with a **voucher** program, the most important empirical issue about **vouchers** is determining how they will affect achievement in public schools.

We conducted an analysis to determine whether Edgewood's public schools have been improving or declining since the creation of the **voucher** program. We compared the year-to-year changes in Edgewood's performance with those of other Texas school districts, controlling for factors such as race and income.

We found that Edgewood started producing outstanding academic improvements after the **voucher** program was created. What had long been an extremely troubled school district began to outperform 85 percent of Texas school districts given their demographic characteristics.

That may come as a surprise, but it shouldn't. Nationwide, there is a large body of research finding that public schools exposed to **vouchers** make superior test score gains, including four independent studies in Florida, two in Milwaukee, and one each in Maine and Vermont.

On top of all this, we are not aware of any empirical studies in the United States that have found that public schools get worse because of school vouchers. That's an impressive track record.

The evidence that vouchers work for the students who use them is even stronger. There have been eight studies of vouchers that used "random assignment," the scientific gold standard, to compare very similar treatment and control groups. Seven of the eight studies found that voucher students outperformed students

Continued Forester & Greene

who applied for vouchers but did not receive them. The eighth also found higher test scores for voucher students, but the result failed to achieve statistical significance.

Other questions have been raised about vouchers, such as whether they will provide adequate services to disabled students, whether they exacerbate racial segregation and whether they will undermine the teaching of civic values. In all three cases, the evidence shows that vouchers produce better results than public schools.

We conducted an empirical analysis of a voucher program for disabled students in Florida. We found that disabled students using vouchers to attend private schools received better services than they had received in their public schools. They were also bullied and assaulted much less often by their peers — a major problem for disabled students.

There have been seven studies of racial segregation in voucher programs in Milwaukee, Cleveland, and Washington, D.C., that use valid empirical methods. All seven find that the private schools participating in these programs were less racially segregated than the public schools in those cities.

Public schools assign students to schools by neighborhood, ensuring that residential segregation will be reproduced in schools; vouchers break down neighborhood barriers.

And what about the teaching of civic values? Pat Wolf of the University of Arkansas collected the results of all empirical studies that measured the civic values of public and private school students — whether they tolerated the rights of those they disliked, whether they voted, whether they volunteered, and so on. Across the board, the available studies overwhelmingly found that private school students had stronger civic values than public school students.

San Antonio students get a better education because of vouchers — including not only the students who can choose the school that works best for them thanks to vouchers, but also the students who remain in public schools and benefit from vouchers' competitive effects.

Now the only question is whether the rest of Texas wants to reap the same benefits as San Antonio.

*Forster is a senior fellow at the Milton Friedman Foundation; Greene is head of the Department of Education Reform at the University of Arkansas. They are authors of "Education Myths" (Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).*

## **Texas Senate Committee Examines School Choice Options**

By Connie Sadowski

Heartland Institute *School Reform News*, Chicago heartland.org

The Texas Senate Education Committee heard testimony to address the mandate given by Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst (R) to evaluate successful school choice programs' impact on students, parents and teachers.

"The growing movement to let parents have more say in where, and how, their children are taught is healthy for public education," said state Sen. Kyle Janek (R-Houston), a member of the education committee. "What is needed is for government to stop standing in the way of this much-needed discussion."

The Senate committee, in preparation for the legislative session to begin January 9, invited attorneys to testify on the constitutionality of publicly funded vouchers, as well as experts to explain the pros and cons of school choice programs and charter schools.

Sen. Florence Shapiro (R-Plano) the education committee chair, said she will make sure her committee's focus is "what is truly in the best interest of the child" by working on a plan to ensure Texas schoolchildren who are not succeeding will have better choices, either at another public school or a private one. The report, due in December, will be approved by a majority vote of the committee and will include recommended statutory or agency rulemaking changes and fiscal cost estimates.

**Continued School Choice Options Examined by TX Senate Committee by Connie Sadowski  
Improving Communities**

The efficacy of school choice and their impact on students, parents and teachers can be best seen in looking at the privately-funded Horizon Program said its founder Robert Aguirre.

The program, currently in its eighth year, reached a peak in 2003-04, when it enrolled 2,032 students representing 15.8 percent of the Edgewood Independent School District (EISD). Any student in Edgewood ISD—the district with the lowest per-capita and household incomes in San Antonio—can use a privately funded Horizon voucher worth \$3,600 to \$4,700 to attend a private school or transfer to a public school.

**Vouchers** have proven to revive inner-city neighborhoods, spur new housing starts and increase the tax base for those public school districts Aguirre said. EISD's taxable property value per pupil increased from \$29,893 in 1997-98, when the Horizon program began, \$50,550 in 2003-04, he said.

Before Horizon, Aguirre said this area of San Antonio had no new home starts since 1955. He attributed the increase to new home builders who began advertising "educational **vouchers** as a benefit of home purchase," he said. In addition, he testified, **vouchers** encourage districts to be more interested in parents' opinions. When the EISD heard the Horizon program was forming, the district hired a professional polling company that "queried its families door to door and asked how the public school system could better serve them," he said. more of this story [www.ceoaustin.org/newsletter](http://www.ceoaustin.org/newsletter) Dec 2006

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