



A Public School Teacher's Perspective on Vouchers

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Vouchers for all are being hotly debated in Texas right now. Proposals in their legislature would allow any student to use a voucher to attend private school or pay for tutoring. For information about vouchers in North Carolina, see our [fact sheet](#).

The state of education in Texas is undergoing a crisis.

Everyone thinks they have an answer to the question of how to fix public education. And yet our state is failing the test. Vouchers, also known by the more attractive sounding focus-grouped term "Education Savings Accounts," are a hot topic in the current legislature. Governor Abbott wants to make history by supposedly reforming education and offering parents school "choice". What he isn't telling us is that more choices do not equal better choices. More choices almost always mean worse choices.

Both sides of the aisle agree that education needs reform. At first glance, vouchers seem like a great solution. Who wouldn't think that parents should have "freedom," and "choices," and that more "competition" will make the market stronger. But that simply isn't what the data shows.

Data shows that vouchers benefit the wealthy who need it the least, hurt the disadvantaged the most, abuse taxpayer dollars, and erase the separation between church and state. Vouchers act like a discount for wealthy students already in private schools. Picture a country club that won't allow any new members, but now their current members get to use taxpayer money to subsidize part of their dues. Not only is everyone else stuck at the public pool, but now we're all paying for a few people to go to the country club, and we have less money to maintain or upgrade the public pool. That's how vouchers work in the states that have them.

There are three kinds of private schools. The first type are elite, exclusive, "country-club" schools that don't want or need more students and won't accept vouchers at all. These schools are able to stay elite because of their exclusivity. Then there are new private schools that pop up after states implement vouchers. New private schools don't focus on quality education at all - they use taxpayer money to market themselves to attract more students and take more public money. After a few months, families realize these schools can't offer what they were selling. Students withdraw, but the school keeps the money. Most of these schools close within four years, but not until after they've made a profit, and the students are left further behind. The third type of private schools are subprime schools that need taxpayer money just to stay afloat. These schools have a 40% failure rate.

Vouchers only offer the illusion of choice.

Many states have tried vouchers, the data shows they failed and abused public resources. Not only do charters and private schools in Arizona, Indiana, Ohio, and Louisiana, have worse educational outcomes than public schools, but when so many programs receive public money, it's impossible to monitor where the money goes in the same way that public schools are held accountable. In Arizona, for example, an audit showed that parents were using taxpayer dollars to buy kayaks and take vacations. We can't claim to value fiscal responsibility and support a shady cash grab for corporate charters, "service providers," and bank fees.

Rural areas will be harmed the most by vouchers, because there aren't enough students to make opening new schools profitable. But rural public schools would still lose enrollment and funding as some parents use vouchers for homeschooling or online schooling. Again, the quality of these options is almost always lower than public schools.

Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick and Governor Abbott are always ready to listen to their wealthy donors and the corporations that are lined up like vultures to make a buck. Recently, Governor Abbott has been on a whirlwind tour of private Christian schools to sell his agenda. He even came to Amarillo on March 2nd to speak at San Jacinto Christian Academy, a tiny school that serves less than 400 students. But the governor refused an invitation to tour Amarillo ISD public schools and listen to the tens of thousands of teachers, students, and parents who would be harmed by vouchers. Even if San Jacinto offered a world-class education, they would never have the capacity to serve a significant number of Amarillo's students.

There are answers on how to actually reform education. We can follow the lead of countries like Finland that consistently rank high on international measures of reading and math skills. Finland doesn't have vouchers. They don't even have private schools. There, every school is public and well

funded. Every student can get a quality education from their neighborhood school, and every student has an equal opportunity to achieve. Finland attracts the best and brightest to the teaching profession by requiring a masters degree and paying them as much as doctors or lawyers. Finnish teachers are empowered, respected, and trusted - essentially the opposite of how teachers are treated in Texas.

Imagine Texas as a state that consistently ranks higher in education than other states and countries, where students excel academically and socially, and find fulfilling careers post-graduation. We can get there, but it will not be by following Governor Abbott's orders. The governor's orders will only lead to the wealthy donor class pocketing taxpayer money while the average student falls further behind.

We know what works. So why don't politicians want to do it? Simple - it's impossible to monetize and profit from this approach the way they can with vouchers.

Reach out to your state senators and representatives to let them know that public schools are the bedrock of our communities. We need to make them stronger instead of tearing them down and selling them for parts.

The right to public education is enshrined in our constitution. We have to guarantee that right to every child, regardless of race, income, or zip code, and the best way to do that is by fully funding public schools.

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