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Movie looks at the price that privatization poses for El Paso schools, students

The Texas State Teachers Association believes a movie to be screened in El Paso tonight offers a sobering look at the devastating threat that school privatization, including corporate-style charters, poses for El Paso public schools and students.

The movie, *Backpack Full of Cash*, narrated by Matt Damon, follows a tumultuous school year in Philadelphia and other cities where under-funded public schools, besieged by privatization, are put at risk, jeopardizing the education and future of thousands of students.

“Our students will pay the price of privatization,” said TSTA President Noel Candelaria, a former special education teacher in Ysleta ISD. “We can’t let the forces of privatization prevail here in El Paso and undermine our neighborhood public schools where educators strive for success every day.”

Candelaria added: “The financial blow to El Paso school districts will be severe if the IDEA charter chain meets its goal of opening 20 campuses in El Paso by 2023. If not stopped, the privatization may not end there. Under-funded school districts will lose money every time a student leaves to enroll in a charter, even though the districts will remain responsible for educating the overwhelming majority of El Paso children.”

Charter schools were created to have flexibility from some state regulations. Charters have a mixed record, at best, and they will never educate more than a fraction of our students.

According to Texas Education Agency data from 2012-2016, recently analyzed by former State Board of Education member Thomas Ratliff, charter schools in Texas had a dropout rate three and one-half times that of neighborhood public schools and lagged behind in performance measures. The four-year graduation rate for charters was 59.9 percent, compared to 90.8 percent for traditional school districts. Students from neighborhood schools also outperformed charter students on STAAR and had higher ACT and SAT test scores, except for one exam.

“Neighborhood public schools enroll every student who lives in the district and wants to attend, unlike charter and private schools that pick the students they want and reject the ones they don’t, including students who are medically fragile, have special needs and behavior challenges,” Candelaria said.

The *Backpack Full of Cash* screening will begin at 6 p.m. at the Ysleta ISD Theater, 9600 Sims Dr. Before the movie, at 5:30 p.m., Candelaria will join Ysleta ISD Superintendent Dr. Xavier De La Torre and State Board of Education member Georgina C. Perez outside the theater to discuss the movie with the media. The educators will hold a public panel discussion after the screening.