



TSTA NEWS

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TSTA sues Longview ISD for exceeding charter enrollment limit

The Texas State Teachers Association (TSTA) today filed a lawsuit against the Longview Independent School District for violating a state law that limits the percentage of a district's students who can be enrolled in charter schools.

In the petition filed in state district court in Gregg County, TSTA is seeking a declaratory judgment that Longview ISD's granting of charter school applications that affect in excess of 15 percent of the previous year's enrollment should be declared invalid and void. The limit is set by the Texas Education Code, Section 12.0522(b).

The total Longview enrollment for the 2018-19 school year was 8,457 students. Six campuses with a combined enrollment of 2,908 students during 2018-19 have been converted to charters. That is more than double the 1,268 students who account for the statutory limit.

"Defendant (Longview ISD) exceeded its statutory authority to grant a charter school application when it granted charter school applications which affected in excess of 15 percent of the district's student enrollment the preceding school year," says the petition filed by TSTA General Counsel Russell Ramirez and TSTA attorney Amanda Moore.

Section 12.0522(c) of the Texas Education Code provides that, regardless of the limit, a district charter may be granted to any campus that has received the state's lowest performance rating. But none of the campuses that Longview has turned over to charters has the lowest performance rating. Three have Bs, and three have Cs under the state's most recent accountability grades.

"Longview ISD also has considered converting the entire school district to charters," said TSTA President Noel Candelaria. "That would remove important educational standards, such as class-size limits for elementary students, which are crucial to effective teaching and learning."

"Charter schools don't have to have certified teachers, don't have to honor teacher employment rights and often pay their teachers less than traditional public schools. All these factors can result in high teacher turnover, which is detrimental to students," he added.

Candelaria also noted that the Longview schools were converted to charters under Senate Bill 1882, a 2017 law designed to provide school districts more funding for campuses and students who need the most help.

"Why is Longview spending that money on campuses with B and C grades and on a charter CEO who, according to the Longview newspaper, is paid \$175,000 a year?" he asked.

TSTA was joined in the lawsuit by its national affiliate, the National Education Association, and its local affiliate, the Longview Educators Association, which has about 100 members among Longview ISD's employees.