



TSTA NEWS

TEXAS STATE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION 8716 N. Mopac Expressway, Austin, TX 78759 • 877-ASK-TSTA • www.tsta.org • Fax 512-486-7049

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 30, 2020

Contact: Clay Robison

ClayR@tsta.org

cell: 512.535.8994

TSTA: With IDEA charter expansion, commissioner expands raid on taxpayers

Texas State Teachers Association President Ovidia Molina released the following statement on the education commissioner's decision to allow the IDEA charter chain to add 12 new campuses in Texas:

The IDEA charter chain, which already takes a half-billion-dollar-a-year bite from Texas taxpayers, was given permission by Commissioner Mike Morath to expand its raid on state and local school budgets for additional millions.

It is time for Morath to stop promoting out-of-control corporate charter operators and start regulating them. Instead, the commissioner has approved 12 new IDEA campuses and increased its enrollment cap by 15,000 students, at the expense of existing public schools, which already are struggling with strained budgets from the COVID-19 pandemic. IDEA already operates about 90 campuses in Texas.

Texas and school district taxpayers don't need more charter schools. They need public officials who are dedicated to supporting the traditional public school system, which is encountering extra expenses to educate the vast majority of Texas students during this health emergency and will continue to do so. Before approving the IDEA expansion, the commissioner in this year alone already had approved amendments allowing other charter operators to add 49 new campuses in Texas.

IDEA essentially operates private schools that collect tax dollars. Its board is unaccountable to taxpayers, it poaches tax funding from real public schools and it has engaged in financial and management practices that cast doubt on its commitment to sound educational policies. Not too long ago, it spent donor money, not to educate kids, but to lease a luxury San Antonio Spurs box to entertain administrators. And it would have spent millions to lease a corporate jet, if media publicity hadn't killed the deal.

The commissioner also found that IDEA owed the Teacher Retirement System \$130,000 and repeatedly failed to meet reporting deadlines for grant money.

IDEA says it is cleaning up its act. But the commissioner should have grounded IDEA's expansion plans in Texas and kept them grounded, at least until school districts had time to recover from the COVID economic downturn, which may require several years.

(For IDEA state funding, see line 55, Total FSP/ASF State Aid, at this link. \$497 million for 2019-20.)

<https://tealprod.tea.state.tx.us/fsp/Reports/CrystalReportViewer.aspx?rpt=6&year=2020&run=29329&cdn=108807&format=html>