



OR



TSTA OPPOSES SENATE BILL 15

SB 15 is not necessary: Districts can offer remote learning programs without enabling legislation, and the Center for Disease Control (CDC) recommends several prevention strategies that would allow for safe in-person environments.

- The Texas Education Agency already has the authority to fund districts who decide at the local level that it is in the best health interest of their community to temporarily offer virtual instruction.
- Absent agency action, districts can use federal relief dollars to fund remote learning programs.
- The CDC recommends that students return to in-person learning and maintain that it is a safe option if schools layer other prevention strategies such as masking, screening testing, contact tracing, and active promotion of vaccination.

SB 15 is a path to privatization: Texas already inefficiently funds two parallel school systems. SB 15 would add a third system that would serve only to funnel tax dollars straight into the pockets of unscrupulous private vendors.

- This would play out as a district-level voucher program, whereby districts would contract with virtual school vendors to implement remote learning programs.
- Charter schools, with marketing budgets that far exceed districts', will apply for expansion amendments and market to students statewide. In 2020-21, 21 such expansion amendments were approved by the Commissioner.
- If codified, with or without a sunset, SB 15 opens the door to long term virtual education that will cost the state money and have negative implications on student outcomes.

SB 15 is not good for kids: Students enrolled in full-time virtual schools perform at levels well below their brick-and-mortar counterparts, and new Texas data supports these findings.

- National data shows that across all grades and subjects, students who attend online schools perform worse on state tests than otherwise similar students.
- Texas data suggests remote learning contributed to learning loss across all grades, subjects and household income levels, although economically disadvantaged students experienced much greater learning loss than their non-economically disadvantaged peers.
- The percentage of students meeting grade level in mathematics fell by as many as 30 percentage points in districts where 75-100% of students were learning virtually.
- The American Academy of Pediatrics strongly recommends in-person learning and argues that children are at higher risk of suffering mental health issues and developmental setbacks if they miss out on in-school learning.

SB 15 is not equitable: Data shows that economically disadvantaged students are less successful in remote settings, and students with special needs require in-person services that cannot be met in virtual environments.

- The small minority of students who were successful in remote settings were those with access to parental support and supplemental enrichment activities.
- Students with mental or behavioral health challenges may be more inclined to choose remote learning. It is the responsibility of schools to serve all special needs, and in-person experiences are critical to developing social emotional skills.