



TSTA NEWS

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TSTA: Vouchers are not opportunities for most students; they are about crippling or killing public education

As we begin a new school year, many districts throughout Texas are struggling with inadequate budgets, including multimillion-dollar deficits, which threaten to shortchange millions of school children of the programs and classroom resources they need for success. Our schools need help, but taxpayer-funded vouchers are getting the most attention from many legislators.

“More public education funding should be the Legislature’s top priority, not taking tax dollars from public schools,” Texas State Teachers Association President Ovidia Molina said. “But the House Public Education Committee has put taxpayer-paid vouchers, which would transfer tax funding from public to private schools, high on its to-do list with today’s interim hearing.”

She added: “School districts are struggling financially mainly because Gov. Greg Abbott last year torpedoed any effort to increase the basic funding allotment for public schools in a political tantrum over the House’s rejection of vouchers. Now, the House committee is focusing on the governor’s misplaced priorities.

“Despite what proponents claim, vouchers are not about improving opportunities for most children. They are about crippling or killing public education by providing private school subsidies to wealthy and upper-middle-class families at the expense of everyone else. Left behind would be middle- and low-income families who couldn’t afford most private schools even with vouchers. Their children –most of Texas’ students – would remain in public schools whose budgets and student opportunities would continue to shrink.”

Once approved, most taxpayer-paid voucher programs continue to grow, at the expense of public schools. A universal voucher program – which Abbott is seeking for Texas – was created in Arizona two years ago at an estimated annual cost of \$65 million. The cost quickly jumped to \$332 million a year and was expected to hit \$429 million this year, according to an analysis by a nonpartisan fiscal and economic policy think tank. It has been blamed for helping to create a \$1.4 billion state budget shortfall.

The Legislative Budget Board estimated that one voucher program that failed in Texas last year would have cost taxpayers \$512 million in the first year before ballooning to almost \$1 billion in the third year and who knows how much after that.

This pattern of increasing voucher expenditures – at the expense of public schools – has been documented in several states with existing voucher programs. According to a report, linked below, issued last year by a partnership between the Education Law Center and the Southern Poverty Law Center, states with long records with vouchers have seen

substantial increases in state funding for vouchers as per-pupil funding for public schools has either declined or increased at a much slower rate than voucher spending.

Here are a few examples:

- Florida has multiple voucher programs, and spending on three of the oldest programs increased by 313 percent between 2008-2019, while per-pupil funding for public education was cut by 12 percent.
- Georgia increased spending on vouchers by 883 percent between 2009-2019, while cutting per-pupil spending on public schools by 1.9 percent.
- Indiana increased voucher spending by 796 percent between 2012-2019 and cut per-pupil spending on public schools by 1.5 percent.
- Arizona increased spending on voucher programs by 270 percent between 2008-2019, while cutting per-student spending for public education by 5.7 percent. Then in 2022, the state created the fast-growing universal voucher program, mentioned above, that already has helped blow a big hole in the state budget.

[The Fiscal Consequences of Private School Vouchers](#)