

Plano Independent School District

Board of Trustees
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P L A N O
Independent School District

FEBRUARY 2023

Plano ISD is very thankful for the dedication of our Texas legislators and your willingness to represent our community. Your sincere commitment for a strong Texas is recognized and greatly appreciated. We thank you for carefully considering our message and taking the time to do so.

Today, in response to the Governor's action to deem the issue of school choice, among others, an emergency measure for consideration by the Texas Legislature in the 88th Legislative Session, we respectfully reiterate the advocacy position of the Plano Independent School District Board of Trustees and District Administration to preclude the diversion of public funds for any private use.

Texas public schools still struggle to recover from the pandemic, which resulted in the need for additional funding to combat learning loss, provide wraparound services, and grapple with unprecedented staffing shortages in a competitive labor market. Thankfully, there were ESSER funds to help offset some of these additional costs. However, spendable dollars for public schools have been significantly reduced by the impact of 14.5% compounded inflation since House Bill 3 in 2019, the last increase to the basic allotment to fund public schools.

Public school districts are subject to stringent accountability standards and transparency requirements to ensure taxpayers' dollars are spent in accordance with statute, as required by the Texas Constitution. We fully support these financial and academic accountability measures to safeguard taxpayer dollars and confirm the highest academic outcomes for the students in Texas.

Public schools must operate under a multitude of state laws and rules promulgated by the Texas Legislature, the Texas Education Agency (TEA), State Board of Education (SBOE), the State Board of Educator Certification (SBEC), and federal laws and rules including Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). All of these laws and rules pertain to how public schools shall adopt curriculum standards, select instructional materials, hire qualified teachers, include all students, assess student outcomes, and operate with fiscal responsibility. We recognize and support compliance with these statutes and regulations that provide checks and balances for an excellent system of public education.

Additionally, the Texas public school system currently provides choice for families through transfers, magnet schools, innovative academy programs, and charter schools. Furthermore, public schools must accept every student that desires to enroll.

In contrast, if vouchers are approved, private schools would not be held accountable for the use of taxpayer dollars because they are exempt from the requirement to account for their use of funds, do not comply with SBEC rules, and do not comply with the same accountability standards regarding TEA student achievement data. Additionally, private schools have the discretion to decide which students to admit and may discriminately reject students based upon academic failure, physical or cognitive disabilities, or behavior issues.

No credible research suggests that vouchers improve academic performance and, moreover, a study by an independent, nonpartisan policy institute shows the use of school vouchers is equivalent to losing in excess of one-third of a year of classroom learning. There is no reliable business case for funding vouchers which would create a costly, duplicative system of education. Furthermore, the cost of a voucher is not likely to equal the cost of tuition for most private schools and may, therefore, result in an option only for those who can afford to pay the differential and provide their own transportation.

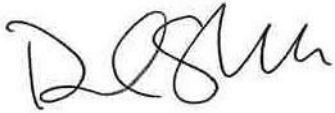
Furthermore, sixty percent of the students in Texas public schools qualify for free and reduced meals based on the federal poverty levels (or stated more plainly, are economically disadvantaged) and would most likely remain in what may result to be underfunded public schools if a voucher program is established. Many times the argument in favor of vouchers is to, indeed, serve these exact students who will most certainly be left behind.

More likely, hundreds of thousands of students who are currently attending private schools or are being home-schooled could begin to receive vouchers, requiring the state to spend much more on education than it does now albeit without accountability for fiscal responsibility or academic outcomes. For example, 80%, 89%, and 75% of students, respectively, in Arizona, New Hampshire, and Wisconsin, states that currently have voucher programs, were previously enrolled in private school and had never attended public school, thereby subsidizing tuition for students who already attend private schools.

If a voucher system is approved, the cost to public schools will be significantly detrimental, as the loss of each student in Plano ISD to a private school will immediately cost the District approximately \$9,800. Likewise, there are compensation and fixed costs that will require adjustment over time, leading to additional short-term financial loss indirectly connected to the loss of students.

Another consideration is that private schools may have a religious affiliation and include religion in the curricula, thereby using public funding to promote religious messages. The Federal Supreme Court has issued an opinion that faith-based organizations may not use direct federal government support to support “inherently religious” activities.

Therefore, in summary, we stand by our priority to preclude the use of taxpayer funds for private use such as vouchers, taxpayer savings grants, education savings accounts, and tax credits. A system that uses any mechanism to fund private education will not guarantee a competitive, educated workforce to meet the demands of employers in Texas. We respectfully ask you to stand with your public schools and the students we serve and oppose any and all efforts to defund public education through the use of vouchers. Public funds need public accountability.



David Stolle, President
Plano ISD Board of Trustees



Dr. Theresa Williams, Superintendent
Plano Independent School District