

Public Testimony: SB 2

by **James Golsan**
Education Policy Analyst

Key Points

- Uncapping Texas' open-enrollment public charter schools greatly increases options for Texas parents and opportunities for Texas students.
- Removing the voter-turnout requirements for the creation of public home-rule charters make them a much more viable option for parents and voters.
- Voters should be allowed to drive the home-rule charter creation process independently of their local school board.

Mr. Chairman, Members, good morning. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on SB 2 on behalf of the Texas Public Policy Foundation. My name is James Golsan, and I'm the Education Policy Analyst at the Texas Public Policy Foundation.

Accountability in Texas' public charter school system is extremely important. While our open-enrollment charters were conceived as learning labs with fewer state restrictions than traditional public schools, they must still be responsible for delivering a high quality education to their students.

Accountability, though, can come from two angles. It can be top down, which is to say a state-driven approach, and it can come from the bottom up, which is to say a parent-driven one. That is why SB 2's effort to uncapped our public open enrollment charter system is so important. Without a cap in place, Texas' parents will have more options for their children's education, and we, as a state, will be much better able to address the needs of the over 100,000 students currently waiting to attend Texas public charter schools. An uncapped system will allow parents to hold irresponsible charter operators accountable using the best tool at their disposal: removing their child from that campus.

SB 2 would also reform Texas' home-rule school districts, which has the potential to make them a much more inviting alternative to traditional independent school districts. The changes will enable citizens or trustees to increase flexibility of their schools at the local level in a number of areas, including who they choose to employ and how they compensate those employees. Such reforms would help empower parents, taxpayers, and educators within a district to provide the best education possible for every student.

In our report on home-rule schools entitled *Improving Efficiency and Local Control in Texas Education: Home-rule Districts and Campus Charters*, the Foundation stressed the importance of removing barriers, such as class-size caps and seat-time requirements, to the expansion of online and blended learning in home-rule districts. SB 2 addresses those important areas well.

Additionally, one of the chief obstacles to home-rule district creation the Foundation discovered in that same report was that the creation process itself needed to be more voter driven. SB 2 takes strides toward making that creation process more voter driven by removing the 25 percent voter turnout requirement. The process however, could be further improved by allowing voters themselves to draft and vote on the charter without needing the approval of their local school board, much like the current process for amending city charters. The Texas Public Policy Foundation encourages the committee to consider this recommendation for inclusion in SB 2.

I would be happy to answer any questions. Thank you. ★

