



March 25, 2015

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Dear Senator Donna Campbell and members of the Texas Senate,

SB 276, otherwise known as the Taxpayers Savings Grant Bill, will provide equal access to a first class education and remove barriers that prevent parents from choosing the best school for their child. Under the bill, a grant will be provided equal to 60% of what the state spends per-student on annual maintenance and operation (M & O) costs, or roughly \$5100, for students who choose to transfer to a private school. Taxpayers will save the other 40% or approximately \$3500 for each public school student who chooses to accept the grant.

According to National Center for Policy Analysis' Senior Fellow John Merrifield, the Taxpayer Savings Grant program is likely to save taxpayers \$2 billion in the first two years of implementation. If even a fraction of those savings are captured and reinvested back into education, it would lead to an increase in per-pupil spending at public schools.

When students are not engrossed in the curriculum, they quickly become confused, bored or develop discipline problems. Public schools exacerbate boredom by prescribing a one-sizes-fits-all curriculum to a diverse student population. For Texas students, vouchers may provide more individualized curricula and specialized schooling that addresses these problems.

- Surveys have found that 40 percent to 60 percent of suburban, urban and rural students are not engaged with public school content.
- Increasing the variety of schools will incentivize public schools to improve performance, efficiency and compete with specialized schools.
- In Texas, school choice would foster competition and could be implemented through universal tuition vouchers, as well as corporate and individual tuition tax credits.

Ruled constitutional by the U.S. and Texas Supreme Courts, a school voucher program could be structured to ensure funding levels per public school student remain steady at no new cost to the taxpayer. By reimbursing private school tuition for Texas students, more school choice would increase competition, raise available public per-pupil funds, make classrooms more manageable for teachers, save taxpayers money, increase local economic output and raise property values.



- A broad school choice program would foster competition and significantly reduce system-wide problems such as falling productivity, discipline issues and high drop-out rates.
- By giving families more control over their educational spending, every family is able to spend their voucher on the school that is most suitable for their child's needs.

School choice does produce results. Since 2010, there have been at least 16 academic studies on charter school performance. Fifteen studies found students in charter schools perform better than their peers in traditional public schools. Of the 12 empirical studies on private programs, 11 found school choice improves student outcomes.

Around the nation, states like Georgia opened the door toward school choice in recent years, but it is not enough. Voters adopted a charter school amendment in 2012 to help expand the number of charter schools, but the bureaucracy has once again resisted creating many new charters. There are lotteries and waiting lists. Georgia has a limited tax-credit scholarship program with 15,000 students and a special-needs voucher program with 3,416 students; both have more pupils wanting scholarships than there are scholarships available.

Texas should avoid limited programs that require students to wait — possibly years — before they are allowed to have a choice. Already, 110,000 students are on a waiting lists. Demand will continue to exceed supply as parents seek more choice. A Luntz Global study in 2013 found 73 percent of Americans support school choice, and 64 percent of parents said that “if given the financial opportunity,” they would send one or all of their children to a different school.

But Georgia – like most states – still restricts the future of too many students because of family income. It happens because pupils are assigned to a public school based on their address. If we truly believe in freedom, we will provide educational access to all children. That opportunity will come only when this state embraces free-market competition to improve education. That means school choice for all students, especially in both Georgia and Texas.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Allen B. West". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Lieutenant Colonel Allen B. West (U.S. Army, Ret.)
President/CEO National Center for Policy Analysis