

Written Testimony of David Anderson
General Counsel
Raise Your Hand Texas

Before the Texas Senate Committee on Education
The Honorable Larry Taylor, Chair
May 6, 2021

Senate Bill 1968 by Senator Paul Bettencourt

Position: Oppose

KEY POINTS

- Raise Your Hand Texas opposes any form of school voucher, including a tax credit voucher program
 - Vouchers divert scarce public education funds to private schools, which are not required to comply with federal protections for students with disabilities or report and track spending and student performance
 - State funds should stay in public schools that serve all students
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As Texas continues to respond to the economic and academic impacts of COVID-19 within our public schools, the Texas Legislature should not invest state resources in programs that fail to support our students with the greatest need and create inequities in the public education system. This includes all forms of voucher programs, including tax credit scholarship programs. Raise Your Hand Texas respectfully registers our strong opposition to Senate Bill 1968.

Senate Bill 1968 creates a tax credit voucher program that allows parents of eligible students, including private or home-school students, to receive reimbursement for educational expenses from state funds. The bill allows businesses to contribute to the Family Educational Relief Program and receive a credit of up to a 50 percent reduction in certain state tax liabilities. That is a dollar-for-dollar reduction with no net cost to the business. The state will absorb the entire cost in the form of forgone tax revenue.

Under this program, each eligible child could receive up to \$6,500 for instructional materials, educational therapies, or tuition and fees for private schools. The bill does not require these accounts to be regularly audited. There are no protections for students with disabilities from discrimination or requirements that students receive the same services as in public school. In addition, there is no accountability for student learning paid for with these state funds.

Research on statewide voucher programs has shown significant negative effects on student test scores over time.¹ Texas should not divert public funds to private vendors who are unaccountable and not required to serve all of our students properly.

Raise Your Hand Texas believes state dollars should remain in our public schools. Only public schools serve all students and are required to meet federal standards for those with disabilities or limited English proficiency. Our public schools are equitably funded and held accountable for measurable student results. That is the system that best serves all Texas families and taxpayers.

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¹ *On Negative Effects on School Vouchers*. Mark Dynarski. Brookings.
<https://www.brookings.edu/research/on-negative-effects-of-vouchers/>