

May 15, 2017

The Senate Version of HB 21 is a Voucher Bill, Not a School Finance Bill

The Senate should reject HB 21 because it fails to provide funding needed to remodel Texas' school finance system, and includes a voucher provision that would drain millions annually from public schools

Ann Beeson, beeson@cphp.org and Chandra Villanueva, villanueva@cphp.org

Last month the Texas House of Representatives approved HB 21, a bill that takes important steps toward remodeling our neglected school finance system. But under pressure from school voucher zealots, the Senate Education Committee changed the bill to eliminate funding for the much-needed school finance remodel and to add a misguided voucher program.

The House version of HB 21 was the best chance Texas has had in over 30 years to remodel our school finance system without a lawsuit hanging over us. It would have provided adequate funding to ensure the 5.2 million Texas children in public schools receive a high quality education that prepares them for the workforce Texas businesses need.

The Senate version of HB 21 should be rejected because it is a voucher bill and not a school finance bill.

Recommendation: CPHP urges the Senate to vote no on HB 21 because – unlike the version passed by the House – the bill:

- Fails to provide the \$1.5B needed to remodel Texas' school finance system.
- Includes a voucher provision that would drain millions annually from public schools while failing to protect the rights of children with special needs.

Sponsored by House Public Education Committee Chairman Dan Huberty, the House version of HB 21 had many positive provisions and was a promising first step toward meaningful school finance reform. HB 21 passed the full House with broad support among members, advocates, and other education stakeholders. The House version of the bill:

- Removed some outdated and inefficient elements from the school funding formula.
- Added funding for students with dyslexia.
- Provided a slight increase for English language learners.
- Expanded the current career and technology funding to cover eighth grade and technology application courses.
- Increased the basic allotment in statute to reflect the funding level in the current budget.
- Improved funding equity between small districts.
- Required the commissioner to update the cost of education index, an element of the formula that adjusts for regional cost differences among other costs outside a district's control.

The same organizations that championed HB 21 in the House testified against the bill once the voucher provision was added.

Vouchers Are Wrong For All Texas Kids, Including Kids with Disabilities

CPPP strongly supports policy solutions that ensure students with special needs in Texas obtain the quality education, services and support they need to reach their full potential. Unfortunately, the Senate version of HB 21 would establish education savings accounts vouchers, which are the wrong solution for Texas children. The voucher provisions would:

- Lead to a loss of rights and quality educational opportunities for children with special needs.
- Offer no real choice to low-income families, because the high cost of private tuition would not be fully covered by the vouchers.
- Reduce the amount of funding per student that the state currently provides to students with special needs in public schools.
- Divert significant public resources from Texas' already under-funded public school system to subsidize private school tuition.
- Enable the use of tax dollars without adequate accountability to ensure the quality of education and services.

Beginning in the second year of operation of the voucher program, Texas school districts stand to lose over \$40.7 million annually if 1 percent of eligible students opted for vouchers; nearly \$81.5 million annually if 2 percent opted for vouchers; and over \$122.2 million annually if 3 percent opted for vouchers. See more details at <http://bit.ly/2ppqelh>.

Percentage of students opting for vouchers		Loss of public school funds annually
1%	➔	\$40.7 million per year after 2nd year of HB 21 being in effect
2%	➔	\$81.5 million per year after 2nd year of HB 21 being in effect
3%	➔	\$122.2 million per year after 2nd year of HB 21 being in effect

The Senate should reject the current version of HB 21 – which is a voucher bill and not a school finance bill – and instead support legislation that ensures adequate funding for a school finance remodel.