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The Public Voice of Private Schools in Texas

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Educational Quality and Diversity

TANS is engaged with public policy groups, TEA, and legislators to consider the effectiveness of legislative initiatives which are designed to accomplish the following:

Affirm the independent missions of private schools.

Provide parents the ability to select from more diverse, high quality educational options.

Promote cost savings in public education.

Protect the adequate funding of public schools.

Affirm the independent missions of private schools

In a state proud of educational progress in the public sector, private schools have always served to increase the quality of life in Texas and to increase the strength of Texas' national reputation. Texas private schools educate students in a variety of ways that provide creativity to our collective public mind. Texas needs the dynamic innovation of private schools to shape the lives of students on whom we will rely for our future.

Provide parents the ability to select from more diverse, high quality educational options

According to the US Department of Education, approximately 300,000 Texas children attend private schools. Parents select private schools because of their ability to teach what they consider important, in a manner that they consider appropriate.

For lower-income families whose only options are less-than-satisfactory schools, this ability is even more critical. Texas private schools competently provide at-risk students with individual attention, nurturing environments, and high academic standards.

Promote cost savings in public education

Expenditures on Pre-K to 12 schools are the largest portion of the state budget, at around \$50 billion each year. The average cost to educate each student exceeds \$10,000. Over the next two years, the 300,000 students in Texas private schools will save the state as much as \$6 billion.

States like Pennsylvania and Florida have introduced programs which credit corporate contributions to educational scholarship funds for private education. In 2008-09 Florida's Tax Credit Scholarship Program saved the state \$36.2 million in public education costs, while enabling more than 20,000 parents to select a more suitable school for their children.

Protect the adequate funding of public schools

Traditional "school choice" ideas are often based on the premise that money currently being spent on public education ought to be shifted to private schools. TANS maintains that parents can be empowered with more options and the means to make those choices without compromising the funding of public schools.

October 1, 2010—82nd Legislature

TANS Research Related to Tax Credits and School Choice Issues

Executive Summary:

If anything that benefits families is going to be honestly debated and passed in Texas, it will have to be properly framed. The term “vouchers” is effectively dead. Not only do most states (including Texas) have in their constitutions provisions prohibiting state monies going to religious institutions (called Blaine amendments), the general public perception of vouchers is “the public funding of private schools” – and neither the general public nor private schools would endorse this concept.

What has been tried and found successful in a few states is a universal tuition tax credit – money that would otherwise go to the state funding of public schools stays in the hands of those who are themselves funding education. At some level, this tax credit can benefit the families of students attending either public or private schools depending on how broadly the legislation is written. The greatest success has been in states with a personal income tax where the tax burden is lessened for designated families who are spending personal income for alternative education. Since Texas does not have a personal income tax, the other option that has proven most successful is a business tax credit for companies investing in education. Additionally there is the option of individual tax credits which may be applied against educational expenses – which would need to be universally applied to all families spending money on education, not just families with students in private schools.

Currently those states with a universal tax credit system have the credit tied to a sliding scale based on the annual per-child public school expenditure and focusing on applying the credit to those families who fall below the poverty line. Florida has a promising program which developed Scholarship Funding Organizations (SFO) who are responsible for the receipt and distribution of corporate funds to eligible students attending participating Florida private schools. Scholarships are primarily awarded to low-income students. The program falls under what Florida calls the Florida Tax Credit (FTC) Scholarship Program created in 2001. Participating corporations can receive a dollar-for-dollar tax credit up to 75% of its state income tax. During the 2008-09 school year, scholarships of \$88.6 million were awarded to a total of 24,871 students enrolled in 1,002 participating Florida private schools.

The largest hurdle in Texas might very well be charter schools – a legislatively-created alternative to public schools in 1995, yet still funded and regulated by the state albeit to a lesser degree. While the primary purpose of charter schools is to “improve student learning,” so far they have proven unsuccessful and many lawmakers believe the solution is to increase the number of charter schools currently capped at 215 in Texas. The “waiting list” for charter schools continues to rise and since the percentage of minorities in charter schools is actually greater than in traditional public schools, charter schools are given greater attention as a viable alternative to assist minorities in overcoming educational disparity.

We are still seeking more information from various sources in Texas about these issues.



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Evans: How private schools can save the state money

Charles T. Evans, *SPECIAL CONTRIBUTOR*

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Published: 4:22 p.m. Friday, May 14, 2010

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As the 2011 Texas Legislative Session gears up, all eyes are on the state budget. House Appropriations Committee Chairman Jim Pitts recently predicted a 2012-2013 budget shortfall of \$15 to \$18 billion. Looking at the whole state budget pie, pre-K to 12 public schools will be the largest slice at around \$50 billion per year, and the average cost to educate each student will exceed \$10,000 per year.

An often overlooked fact is that while the budget hemorrhages over the next two years, Texas private schools will actually save taxpayers as much as \$6 billion. The 300,000 students who attend private schools require little or no public school services, thus relieving the state of having to support their education.

Additionally, many families whose children attend private schools are also homeowners who pay property tax dollars to their local ISDs. In effect, those families make a double contribution to the strength of their neighborhood public schools, while exercising the vital privilege of having their children educated as they please.

Realtors, business recruiters and Chambers of Commerce all know how important private schools are to the quality of life in Texas. Educational quality and diversity is a crucial element as families and businesses consider a move to Texas.

In 2007, private schools employed 23,620 Texas teachers, providing stable, professional employment for college-degreed, community-minded citizens. By our estimate, the total earnings of full-time private school employees injected into the 2007 economy was more than \$888 million. And that number continues to grow, because the number of private schools and students continues to grow.

What other industry simultaneously contributes to local tax coffers, saves taxpayers billions and stimulates the economy?

Meanwhile, a movement is forming which could benefit the state budget even more. Ten states, from Arizona to Rhode Island, have adopted tax credit or deduction programs which allow individuals or businesses to pay less tax in exchange for contributions to non-profit scholarship programs. The key to the success of these programs is that the decrease in taxes is far less than the cost to educate a student in public school.

In a recent report, Brooke Dollens Terry at the Texas Public Policy Foundation noted a study which found that an education tax credit program in Texas could save the state \$508 million in year one, and \$15.9 billion over ten years. A well-designed program saves money, preserves the overall funding structure of public schools, and provides parents with more educational options for their kids.

Given our current budget woes, education tax credits are worth considering. Legislators who study these programs will find that they can be the most politically plausible and fiscally responsible way to increase educational quality and diversity in our state.

In the end, private schools could play a part in fixing the Texas budget.

Charles T. Evans is the Executive Director of the Texas Association of Non-Public Schools.

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Principles Relating to School Choice Legislation

Introduction

The Council for American Private Education (CAPE) is a broad-based national organization representing private schools. In its vision statement, CAPE recognizes that America's children have greater opportunities because of access to an array of high-quality schools. CAPE's mission is to preserve and promote educational pluralism so that parents have a choice in the schooling of their children. In keeping with its vision and mission, CAPE offers the following principles to guide school choice legislation at the state and federal levels.

Choice initiatives have taken various forms, including government vouchers for parents, tax credits/deductions for parents, and tax credits/deductions for corporate or individual contributors to programs that award scholarships. Because any one of these approaches might be best in a given situation, these principles are intended to apply to all of them.

General Principles

- Funds relating to school choice should flow through parents rather than directly to schools.
- School choice initiatives should not in any way infringe upon the existing right of private schools to control the hiring of staff.
- School choice programs should safeguard the right of private schools to control the instructional program and curriculum, and should not add restrictions or regulations in this regard beyond what may already exist in state law.
- School choice programs should allow schools to retain their admission policies.
- Test scores should never be allowed to become a sole or dominant indicator of achievement or failure.

Level and Distribution of Benefits

- Benefits to families should be substantial enough to allow families to select from a variety of schools.
- Benefits should vary with family financial need to ensure that families with the greatest need receive the greatest benefit.
- Families with children already in private schools should be eligible for benefits.

Responsibilities of Participating Schools

- Participating schools should comply with federal, state, and local requirements that currently apply to private schools, including those relating to civil rights, nondiscrimination, background checks for employees, and student health and safety. However, choice legislation should not give rise to additional regulation of private schools.

Approved by CAPE's Board of Directors, March 2006