



Texas AFT

*A Union of Professionals*

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March 20, 2023

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Sen. Morgan LaMantia  
Sen. José Menéndez  
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Sen. Tan Parker  
Sen. Angela Paxton  
Sen. Drew Springer  
Sen. Royce West

P.O. Box 12068  
Capitol Station  
Austin, Texas 78711

Dear Senate Education Committee Members:

As you prepare to consider and debate various pieces of school voucher legislation, I am writing to you on behalf of the 66,000 members of the Texas American Federation of Teachers to share with you some of the most inspiring things happening in our public schools today.

Of all places, I found this story in my local co-op newsletter (a copy is attached to this letter). In an article dated Feb. 28, 2023, writer Sidni Carruthers highlights several career and technical education programs in rural Texas schools that give hands-on job experience to students.

Del Valle High School's culinary arts and hospitality services program, for example, teaches 470 students how to manage a restaurant and commercial kitchen. About 80% of Del Valle High School's students are enrolled in one of 22 CTE programs. There are welding classes and graphic design classes and classes in which students treat computer-programmed "patients."

These kids earn certifications and college credits, and they get real-life career training in a safe environment. That's what our public schools give students from all backgrounds: an opportunity to thrive.



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That opportunity to thrive — as Del Valle’s and other CTE programs provide — is in danger if you pass any type of private school voucher program. Raise Your Hand Texas estimates that \$10,000 exits a public school campus for every student who would leave through a private school voucher. Moreover, my union has done the math on what bills like Senate Bill 176 specifically would cost: \$2,689,500,000 per year.

In leaked audio, Texas Education Agency deputy director Steve Lecholop has already spelled it out: for public schools, vouchers may mean “one less fourth-grade teacher.”

I do not expect a mass exodus from our public schools should you pass this legislation; according to a 2023 Charles Butt Foundation poll, 89% of Texas public school parents are satisfied with their child’s school. But I worry about the effect of just a few departures on the experience of the 650,000 Texans who work in public education, and the 5.5 million children who learn in our public schools.

I am worried not only about staff layoffs, but about program cuts because I know what districts will cut first: extracurriculars, fine arts, and CTE and vocational training. The latter is vital to student engagement and is highly unlikely to be offered by many private schools.

I urge you, as you consider your vote on school voucher and ESA bills, to remember students like Jocelyn Rosales, a 2021 graduate of Del Valle’s culinary arts program, who summed up her experience like this: “The teachers (at Del Valle) helped me push through and follow my dreams. They convinced me to jump out of my little bubble. And I did.”

We can have fully funded public schools that help kids like Jocelyn thrive, or we can have vouchers. We cannot have both.

Respectfully,

Zeph Capo

President, Texas AFT