

JUST say 'NO' to vouchers ... again

Gov. Greg Abbott is boasting that he now has the votes to pass his "school choice" voucher program during next year's session of the Texas Legislature.

He's confident because during the recent primary he ran a successful "revenge campaign" against incumbents from his own party who helped defeat vouchers during the last legislative session.

This, despite consistent polling showing most Texans do not support vouchers.

A poll by the Texas Hispanic Policy Foundation found that "opposition to vouchers is strong among all gender, race and partisan lines."

Even worse is the fact that this campaign to defeat incumbents was largely funded by an out-of-state billionaire whose spending shows he wants to destroy public schools in favor of private, religious schools.

For evidence of the disastrous budget ramifications of voucher programs, we need look no further than Arizona. In a March 24 editorial decrying vouchers, the San Antonio Express-News said, "About 75% of the (Arizona) students receiving vouchers had no history of attending Arizona public schools, according to 2022 Arizona Department of Education data."

Also, "Initially projected to cost \$64 million a year, the Arizona voucher program is now blowing a hole in the state budget with an estimated annual price tag of more than \$900 million." The same could likely happen in Texas if a voucher bill passes.

Private schools are not



held to the same standards as public schools. They don't have to demonstrate student progress by using state-mandated tools; they can discriminate against children with disabilities; they do not provide transportation; and they do not provide free or reduced-price lunch programs.

Texas schools already rank 42nd nationally in per-pupil spending. And yet Abbott and Republicans want to pull even more dollars away from public education in order to give a handout to wealthy families who don't need it.

A coalition of Democrats and some Republicans in the Texas House defeated vouchers three times in the last Legislative session, since such a program will further erode already anemic funding for public schools, especially rural ones with few or no private options.

Rural school districts are the center of the community and very often the area's biggest employer, so vouchers have impacts that go beyond the student population.

After the Texas Democratic Convention in June, Texas House members announced a focus to flip some seats in the November election to cut into that three-vote margin. At the convention, Rep. Gina Hinojosa (D-Austin) said, "Every single Democrat we elect to the Texas House could

be the difference to save our neighborhood public schools."

And it's not just Republicans in the Texas Legislature pushing for vouchers. Rep. Chip Roy (R-Texas) filed a bill in January 2023 that would "(allow) federal funds to follow a student" even if a child is enrolled in a private school or homeschool. One of the bill's co-sponsors was Marjorie Taylor Green (R-Georgia).

We also need our local school boards and superintendents to fight to keep vouchers from being approved. Boerne ISD already loses funds due to recapture funding mechanism, commonly known as "Robin Hood" funding.

We must not lose even more money to an absurd and evil voucher program.

Texas Republicans have made it clear they plan to cram vouchers through next year, whether we like it or not. Democratic legislators will be our only line of defense to defeat them once again.

Nobody needs to know that you voted for a Democratic candidate for the Texas Legislature or any other office; it's a secret ballot. If public education is important to you, then voting for a Democrat this November is your only option.

For details on our activities and advocacy and how to get involved, call our office at 830-331-1243 or visit kodems.us.

Laura Bray is Chair of the Kendall County Democratic Party and a delegate to the Democratic National Convention.