

Just say 'No,' again, to school vouchers

After Election Day, Gov. Greg Abbott is more confident than ever that he has the votes to pass his "school choice" voucher program during next year's session of the Texas Legislature, which gavel in on Jan. 14.

It's not "school choice" as Republicans say, but "school's choice." Public schools educate all students. Private schools choose whom to admit, what to teach and have no accountability.

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.

A majority of Texas voters do not want vouchers, despite Republican statements that we do; 65% of voters in Gillespie County, a heavily Republican county, oppose school vouchers (Fredericksburg Standard, 10/9/2024).

A few other important facts: The costs of a voucher program are astronomical. Arizona's voucher program, enacted in 2022, "will likely bankrupt the state," according to Arizona Gov. Katie Hobbs. Voucher costs in 2023 were over five times an initial \$65 million estimate. (Source: NEA)

Boerne ISD employs more than 1,500 people, three times the number of the no. 2 employer, H-E-B. School vouchers will divert even more funding away from public schools, necessitating draconian cuts in school budgets ...



and likely, employment.

60% of Texas counties don't even have a private school.

"For these places, public schools are often some of the last vestiges of civic life," said state Rep. James Talarico.

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, knowing that 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.

And it's not just Republicans in the Texas Legislature pushing for vouchers. House 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 home-school. One of the bill's co-sponsors was Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-Ga).

We also need our local school boards and

superintendents to fight to keep vouchers from being passed. Boerne ISD already loses funds due to recapture — more popularly known as "Robin Hood" — funding mechanism.

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

Everyone opposed to vouchers needs to keep the pressure on our two Texas legislators, Sen. Donna Campbell (512-463-0125) and Rep. Ellen Troclair (512-463-0490).

Your calls and emails will demonstrate that many of their constituents strongly oppose school vouchers.

Many of us are still trying to come to terms with the results of Election Day. As the great Sen. Elizabeth Warren said, "The path ahead won't be easy. It isn't what we fought for. But it's the path before us — and I believe in our ability to keep up the fight. Take the time you need and then reach down deep to find the strength to keep going."

The Kendall County Democratic Party (KCDP) is definitely in to work for equality, justice, compassion and diversity. KCDP and Texas Democrats will continue the fight for a Texas that protects and celebrates all Texans by ensuring they are able to build the life they dream of.

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

Laura Bray is Chair of the Kendall County Democratic Party.