

March 20, 2023

Via E-Mail

Senate Committee on Education  
The Honorable Brandon Creighton, Chair  
P.O. Box 12068, Capitol Station  
Austin, Texas 78711

RE: Education Savings Accounts, Vouchers, Tax Credit Scholarships, Tuition Tax Credits, Opportunity Scholarships, Insurance Premium Tax Credits, etc.

To Senator Creighton and Members of the Senate Education Committee:

As officials who are charged with the trust of public education for the 49,000 students across 127 square miles of the Lewisville ISD (LISD) community in Denton County, and as one of the largest districts in Texas, we are submitting these considerations related to Education Savings Accounts (ESAs), which are ultimately school vouchers.

In LISD, our legislative priorities uphold that public dollars require public accountability and parental engagement is essential in each student's achievement and academic success. At this time any of the bills related to ESAs do not require the same public accountability as that of public schools, yet will be funded by taxpayer dollars being provided directly to parents for choosing alternative providers for education. If providing parents freedom from state regulations passed by the Texas Legislature in Texas Education Code (TEC) is the goal of ESAs, then these same freedoms from the statutes should be extended to public schools equally.

A top request from parents in LISD is asking for their child to opt out of STAAR testing. Any basis for ESAs asserting that Texas public schools are failing based on STAAR testing is a flawed premise. Since only public schools in Texas are required to administer STAAR and be graded accordingly in an accountability system that currently overly relies upon this standardized test, there is not an equal comparison of educational performance across private and public schools in Texas. In fact, freedom from STAAR testing and state curriculum requirements can be used as a reason by private schools for parents to choose them instead of a public school.

The conversation around ESAs has brought to light an important question related to the current Texas Education Code statutes: If these were created primarily due to accountability for the use of taxpayer dollars by public schools, then have these eroded parental control in local communities? If all of these statutes are required for accountability of taxpayer dollars then they must be applied, in full, to any educational provider receiving taxpayer funds.

We stand ready in LISD to provide support in reviewing Texas Education Code and providing recommendations that would increase the control parents would have over curriculum, testing, accountability, grading school quality, and more.

Finally, our legislative priorities in LISD assert local taxpayer dollars should stay within LISD. The basic allotment of \$6,160 per student is not fully funding the outstanding education provided to our families. Public education in Texas is under-funded, especially in light of inflationary costs. The basic allotment figure is paramount for all districts in Texas because it is the foundation for how all additional funding in the school finance formula is calculated. Additionally, since \$6,160 per student establishes a low threshold for student funding, a greater share of LISD taxpayer dollars are sitting in the state surplus in the form of recapture. If LISD funds have been distributed to other school districts in Texas, then all we ask for is transparency to show our taxpayers where the recapture dollars have been spent to aid in other district's success.

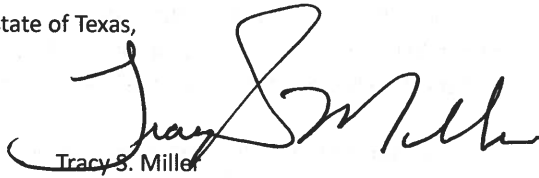
In LISD, we spend on average \$10,000 per student, and without an increase to the basic allotment, we are opposed to any LISD taxpayer funds diverted to ESAs. In light of SB 8, the estimated amount of \$8,000 as the allocation for parents for an ESA, should therefore indicate the basic allotment for school districts should be raised to \$8,000 (at a minimum) and even at that would still be under-funding the amount necessary to provide the robust educational opportunities and choices provided to families in LISD.

We are proud, just as we know you all are, of the great workforce in Texas, which could not have been achieved without the foundation of the great Texas public school system. We believe in parent choice and parental rights and have built a robust local educational system that prioritizes this and we stand ready to partner with all of you in ensuring quality educational systems for all of the children in Texas.

With appreciation for your service to the great state of Texas,



Lori Rapp, Ed.D.  
Superintendent of Schools



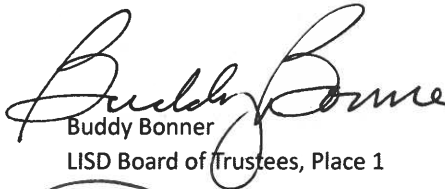
Tracy S. Miller  
LISD Board of Trustees, President




Allison Lassahn  
LISD Board of Trustees, Vice President



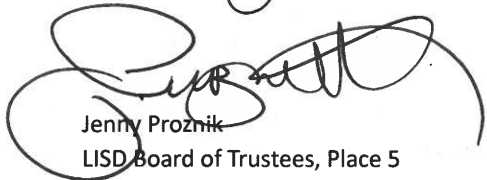
Katherine Sells  
LISD Board of Trustees, Secretary



Buddy Bonner  
LISD Board of Trustees, Place 1



Sheila P. Taylor  
LISD Board of Trustees, Place 3



Jenny Proznik  
LISD Board of Trustees, Place 5



Kristi Hassett  
LISD Board of Trustees, Place 6

CC: Senators representing LISD (Senator Parker, Senator Springer)  
House Representatives representing LISD (Representative Bumgarner, Representative Caprigione,  
Representative Hayes, Representative Patterson, Representative Thimesch)  
House Appropriations Committee Members, Article III  
Senate Finance Committee Members, Article III