

Fair Funding for Public Charter Students & Facilities

Close the \$1,000 Gap Per Student

- **Charter Schools are Public Schools:** *The Texas Legislature created charter schools in 1995 as “part of the public school system of this state.” Tex. Educ. Code § 12.105.*

The Charter Statute Says: Flexibility in Exchange for Innovations in Public Education. Flexibility was given to public charter schools to “improve student learning,” “to increase the choice of learning opportunities within the public school system,” to “create professional opportunities that will attract new teachers to the public school system,” to establish a “new form of accountability for public schools,” and to “encourage different and innovative learning methods.” Tex. Educ. Code § 12.001

Statute Does Not Say: Flexibility in Exchange for Less Funding.

- **Charter Schools are Accountable to the Public:** *Strong academic and financial accountability is in place for public charter schools.*

Same Accountability: Charter schools must meet the same academic and similar financial mandates as school districts, including the rigorous assessment standards, increasing curriculum requirements, and the requirement to ensure that students attain post-secondary readiness. Tex. Educ. Code §§ 12.059, 12.104, 12.111.

Additional Accountability for Charters Only: With the passage of Senate Bill 2 by the 83rd Legislature, charter schools are uniquely subject to additional accountability in the form of performance frameworks, and are subject to strict revocation/non-renewal requirements applied only to open-enrollment charter schools.

- **Charter School Students Receive Less Funding:**

- Public charter schools receive \$1,098 less per WADA—and \$1,703 less per ADA—than traditional school districts from the state (Foundation School Program funds 2013-14).
- In facilities funding, public charter schools receive \$0 per student, so they are forced to spend classroom dollars (operating/instructional funds) on facilities.
- On average, charter schools spend \$829 per student from their Foundation School Program Funds to address facility needs. (May 2011, Shortchanged Report)

The legislative priorities of Texas charter schools are essential to bring about increased quality in public education, to provide students with fair funding and to help students and families on waiting lists to find effective education options across Texas.

LEGISLATIVE INITIATIVES:

Fair Funding for Public Charter School Students: The Texas Legislature has provided a variety of options for students to receive education tailored to their needs. But, charter school students are given, on average, less instructional/operational funding per pupil than students who remain in traditional school districts, and charter schools are not eligible to receive funding from statewide programs for facilities like traditional districts do. Texas students deserve facilities funding—no matter where they choose to attend public school.

- There is a \$1,000 gap per student between funding for school districts and charters on average.
- Close the funding gap between students who choose public charter schools and students in traditional ISD schools.

Access to Unused School District Facilities: To best use taxpayer funds, underutilized or unused school district facilities should be available for use by public charter schools.

- Allow public charter schools access to a list of ISD property or facilities closed, unused or underused and located within the charter school’s geographic boundary and allow right of first refusal for purchase, lease or use.
- This allows public school facilities already paid for by the taxpayers to continue to be used as educational facilities.

Property Tax Relief: Facilities leased to public charter schools should be exempt from real property for the duration of the lease so the savings can be best used in the classroom.

- This relief is already provided for traditional ISD schools and private schools.

Risk Pool Access: To ensure better planning and managed risk associated with civil liability, employee benefits, and workers’ comp in public charter schools.

- This access is already provided for traditional ISD schools as a protection for taxpayer dollars.



Staying True to the Mission:

High Quality Public Charter Schools & Best Practices

Texas public charter schools had strong and extensive legislation passed last session; the first major rewrite of charter law in more than a decade. TCSA continues support for Senate Bill 2 and a focus on careful and thoughtful implementation of this charter law to ensure effective due process for charter schools, and an increase in quality schools.

In addition, TCSA supports continuation of staffing and governance flexibilities that remain for charters. Those freedoms are important differences which allow charters to succeed and discover what works for students.

- TCSA supports effective charter school authorizing with strong accountability. Only quality applicants should be allowed to receive a charter.
- The 83rd Legislature passed an increase in the charter cap in Texas which is a small step toward tackling the massive waiting lists, but a state-imposed cap is arbitrary and unnecessary when strong, quality authorizing is in place.

A Quality Education for All Students:

Charters as Partners

Public charter schools and traditional ISDs are beginning to work together to collaborate in areas of instruction, teacher training, and facilities use and to pilot other programs through the establishment of district charters and other partnerships.

Collaboration & Partnerships with ISDs:

- True to the mission and statute creating charters: to share different and innovative learning methods and be an R&D arm in the public school system.
- The Legislature should encourage more collaborations and sharing of best practices through incentives and increased flexibility for both traditional districts and public charter schools.