



March 27, 2007

Testimony on Senate Bill 1000

The Texas Association for the Gifted and Talented (TAGT) is a statewide non-profit educational association that represents over 3000 members who are mostly educators and parents of high potential students identified as gifted and talented under Texas law. TAGT provides extensive continuing education opportunities about gifted education and gifted student development for educators as well as parents. Additionally, TAGT is committed to advocating for the unique educational needs of this high potential population.

On behalf of the Texas Association for the Gifted and Talented (TAGT), I thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill 1000. TAGT strongly opposes the bill for two reasons. One is because the association is opposed to school vouchers of any type that potentially divert money from public education to private schools. Secondly, despite safeguards that have been designed into the bill, it would make educational accountability and financial transparency significantly more difficult.

The identification and support of the unique needs of each learner should be the goal of our public educational system, rather than the segmentation and dilution of available precious resources. This bill creates a classification of the student population that would allow public taxpayers' dollars to be diverted to nonpublic institutions. TAGT believes that public dollars should be used to provide enhanced services to public schools to meet the needs of special populations. To open the door to a special class of students creates a constitutional issue of equity across all populations.

Certainly, gifted and high potential students in the majority of Texas' school districts have struggled to adapt to an educational system that does not challenge them to the capacity of their capability or gifts. Yet, TAGT as an organization is rooted in the commitment that Texas' public schools are the appropriate environment to invest in and affect standards of excellence in the delivery of education services for each student.

This bill is designed to attract support by aiming at a particular student population that undoubtedly deserves help. But a private-school voucher by any other name is still a voucher. Once a bill of this nature is passed, whether it is called a voucher or by some other euphemism, it becomes that much easier to add other groups of students to the list.

School vouchers undermine the ability of public schools to provide needed services to the vast majority of students in these targeted groups. A better goal would be to improve, strengthen, and fund programs that educate autistic children in the public schools. Adequately funding public school programs already in place is the best way to meet the needs of all special students, including those with autism. It is the only means of having financial transparency and appropriate accountability for these expenditures.

Respectfully submitted by
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Texas Association for the Gifted and Talented