

**Senate Education Committee
School Choice Testimony
August 24, 2012**

Good afternoon Chair Shapiro, Vice Chair Patrick and members of the Senate Education Committee. I am Brooke Terry, Grassroots Coordinator for the Taxpayer Savings Grants Coalition and we strongly support school choice for Texas. We are a coalition of concerned parents, business leaders, tea party groups, free market groups, and education reform organizations that have come together to support Taxpayer Savings Grants and school choice in general.

TEXANS WANT SCHOOL CHOICE

In May 2012, more than 1.1 million Texans voted in support of school choice. 85 percent of Texas Republican primary voters voted in favor of school choice. Voters want Texas *“to fund education by allowing dollars to follow the child instead of the bureaucracy through a program, which allows parents the freedom to choose their child’s school, public or private, while saving significant taxpayer dollars.”*

LATINOS WANT SCHOOL CHOICE

A large percentage of Latinos support school choice as well. A May 2012 poll of Latinos in Arizona, Florida, New Jersey, New Mexico, and Nevada found that 91% of Latinos believe “vouchers and tax credit scholarships in some form should be available to parents.”¹ According to a poll by the Friedman Foundation that interviewed 772 Latino voters, 68% of Latinos voters favor vouchers and by a more than 2-to-1 ratio, Latinos are much more likely to favor vouchers than oppose them.²

AFRICAN AMERICANS WANT SCHOOL CHOICE

Of more than 1,600 African American voters polled in 15 states, 70% of African American voters favor vouchers and by a more than 3-to-1 ratio, African Americans are much more likely to favor vouchers than oppose them.³

BUSINESS NEEDS SCHOOL CHOICE

David Dick, a businessman in El Paso, recently described how the corruption and cheating scandal at El Paso ISD is affecting their community. He says, *“El Paso is adversely effected by El Paso ISD failures when recruiting industry to our community. El Paso is full of economic opportunity and potential for employers all across the United States and the public school system is letting us down. It is unfortunate that so many families and their kids are stuck in the failing and corrupt El Paso school district and have no options. Only families with significant financial means are able to remove their kids from El Paso ISD and send their kids to private school.”* David Dick is concerned that if school choice is not available in his community, employers will leave or choose not to set up shop in El Paso and their economy will suffer. He says, *“Passing school choice for Texas children will tell employers that we care about education.”*

¹ April 2012 phone survey was conducted in Arizona, Florida, New Jersey, New Mexico and Nevada. Released by the American Federation for Children and Hispanic CREO in May 2012.

² The Friedman Foundation and Braun Research conducted 15 statewide polls of registered voters on K-12 education and school choice topics over two years beginning in August 2010. The states include: Alabama, Alaska, Arkansas, Idaho, Indiana, Kansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Montana, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Washington.

³ Ibid.

THE MIDDLE CLASS WANTS SCHOOL CHOICE

In closing, it is important to understand that the middle class in Texas wants school choice as well. Last year I moved north of Dallas, to the middle of suburbia, with my husband and two boys. I am surprised by how many moms I meet at church and playdates who are not satisfied with the local public school rated *Exemplary* or *Recognized*. (North Dallas suburbs such as Flower Mound, Lewisville, Keller, Plano, Grapevine, and South Lake).

One mom is concerned that the kindergarten curriculum will be too easy for her daughter Ellen and does not know what to do. Ellen is gifted. Ellen is not yet 3 years old and she already knows her colors and the alphabet. Ellen's parents worry that their daughter will be bored in school and yet they cannot afford the more rigorous private schools in their area. Ellen's mom is considering home schooling her daughter or sending her to the local public elementary school down the street and supplementing her education at home.

I tell parents to research their options and look into local charter schools and virtual schools. I wish I could tell Ellen's mom that she can use a portion of her tax dollars to send her daughter Ellen to a participating private school with a state "Taxpayer Savings Grant." Ellen is a typical example of the many children who would benefit from school choice.

Committee members please pass broad school choice legislation this coming session and help the thousands of students and parents who WANT and NEED more choices in education. Please do not ignore the more than 1.1 million Texans who want parents to have the opportunity to choose the school that is right for their child.

Sincerely,

Brooke Terry
Grassroots Coordinator
Texans for Voluntary Taxpayer Savings, Inc.

ST. RAPHAEL CATHOLIC SCHOOL

With God All Things Are Possible

2310 Woodside Dr. El Paso, Texas 7992

August 23, 2012

Senator Shapiro and the Texas Senate Education Committee:

I would like to take a moment of your time to lend my support to the creation of Taxpayer Savings Grants. My name is Catherine Pynes and I am the principal of St. Raphael Catholic School in El Paso, Texas. Your decision on this matter will directly impact our non-public and private schools throughout the state of Texas and will have a particular impact in the city of El Paso.

El Paso, because we are a border city, has its unique challenges. Our city's population is over 80% Hispanic with a median income of \$38,441. Much of our school's population consists of low income, minority students. These children have very limited choices and opportunities for future success and a higher education. Education is one of the few ways these children can truly improve their lives. Taxpayer Savings Grants are a real chance for a positive change in our children's future.

Taxpayer Saving Grants open the door for parents to give their children so many more options and opportunities to set realistic goals toward higher education. While Texas ranks 6th in the nation for student growth (mostly low income and minority students), Texas ranks 36th in high school graduation. The Taxpayer Saving Grant will allow parents the chance to look toward non-public or private schools as a viable option for their children's education and subsequently help them realize the dream of a higher education.

The freedom to choose a non-public school will also help relieve some of Texas' budgetary issues. The money returned to the Texas public school fund through the Taxpayer Saving Grant will certainly impact the state's budget in a positive way.

If one of Carole Keeton Strayhorn's 1999 principals is to develop a better-educated work force; to have the most educated work force in the nation, it seems to me that the Taxpayer Saving Grants will help Texas reach that goal.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,

Catherine Pynes
Principal, St. Raphael Catholic School
El Paso, Texas

