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SCHOOL CHOICE: FACT V. MYTH
Testimony Before The House Committee On Public Education
Regarding House Bills 12, 1263 and 3042
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Three Reasons Why Vouchers Are Good for Texas

Reason 1. *Children benefit from school choice.*

Ten large scientific studies of voucher programs prove:

- ✓ Academic achievement improves for most students who use vouchers to enroll in private schools – no students suffer academic losses;
- ✓ Low-performing and economically-disadvantaged students achieved most academic gains from vouchers;
- ✓ Students with vouchers are closing the achievement gap within 3 years;
- ✓ Students who use vouchers have more culturally diverse classmates, exhibit better citizenship skills, are more likely to graduate, and more likely to attend college; and
- ✓ Students in public schools that compete with private schools for students achieve levels of performance almost 30 percent higher than the performance of public school students living in areas without school choice.

Reason 2. *Vouchers are the most efficient way of funding public education.*

Vouchers control escalating public school costs:

- ✓ Without any increase in funding, public schools achieve higher student outcomes where public schools compete with private schools for students;
- ✓ Construction costs can be avoided by awarding vouchers to offset enrollment growth;
- ✓ When disadvantaged students used vouchers, public schools can invest more funds into regular classroom instruction; and
- ✓ Because private schools educate all students, including disadvantaged students, at almost one-third less the cost of public schools, vouchers will reduce state education costs.

Reason 3. *Vouchers are the best way to improve public education.*

- ✓ Public education can be provided by government-operated or private schools;
- ✓ Parents choose the school that best meets their child's educational needs;
- ✓ Competition for student enrollment is the strongest form of educational accountability and will improve government-operated, as well as private, schools; and
- ✓ How well children are educated counts more than where children are educated.

Three Myths About Vouchers

Myth 1. *Charter schools prove that school choice doesn't work.*

- ✓ No comparison can be drawn between vouchers and charter schools – charters represent another form of public schools whereas vouchers are associated with private schools;
- ✓ When it comes to curriculum and instruction, there is very little difference between most charter schools and traditional public schools whereas private schools are very different from both charter and traditional public schools;
- ✓ Charter schools are heavily regulated by the state – more heavily regulated than traditional public schools in Texas – whereas private schools are not subject to state regulation; and
- ✓ Student achievement in charter schools is generally lower than student achievement in traditional public schools whereas students in private schools generally outperform their peers in both traditional public and charter schools.

Myth 2. *Vouchers take away funding from public schools.*

Large voucher programs in two cities demonstrate that public schools coexist and thrive in conjunction with school choice.

- ✓ The Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, enacted in 1990, is the nation's oldest and largest tax-supported voucher program for low-income students. In the decade of choice, real per pupil spending in public schools increased 24 percent; and
- ✓ The Horizon Program in Edgewood School District of San Antonio was created in the 1989-99 school year. Per pupil spending increased from \$6,059 in the 1997-98 school year to \$7,845 in the 2003-04 school year, despite a 7 percent decrease in enrollment. During this same period of time, average teacher salary rose from \$32,753 to \$40,992.

Myth 3. *Vouchers will destroy public education.*

- ✓ Children in 49 states now use privately-funded voucher programs to attend private schools. Public education and government-operated schools are still financially viable in each of these states;
- ✓ The State of Maine has issued vouchers for public school students to “tuition-out” to private schools since 1873. The state pays tuition for over one-third of the students enrolled in Maine's private schools today. Funding, as well as enrollment, in Maine's public schools continues to rise; and
- ✓ The first system of Texas public schools, created by the 1876 Constitution, allowed parents to redeem government education funds at any school operated by a municipal government or a private school. Public education originally operated as a hybrid of government-operated and private schools – there is no evidence that this hybrid harmed government-operated schools.

RECOMMENDATION:

Over four million students attend Texas public schools. The student population is rapidly growing and increasingly diverse: over 50 percent of the student population comes from economically-disadvantaged homes, over 14 percent are enrolled in Bilingual Education, and 12 percent are enrolled in Special Education Services. Public schools are overwhelmed, and many economically-disadvantaged students are poorly served, according to numerous measures (state assessments, the National Assessment of Educational Progress, and tests of post-secondary readiness). Introducing vouchers as a supplement to government-operated schools would allow public education to meet the needs of all Texas children.

❖ *Enact a voucher program now to provide relief to children who are poorly served by Texas public schools.*