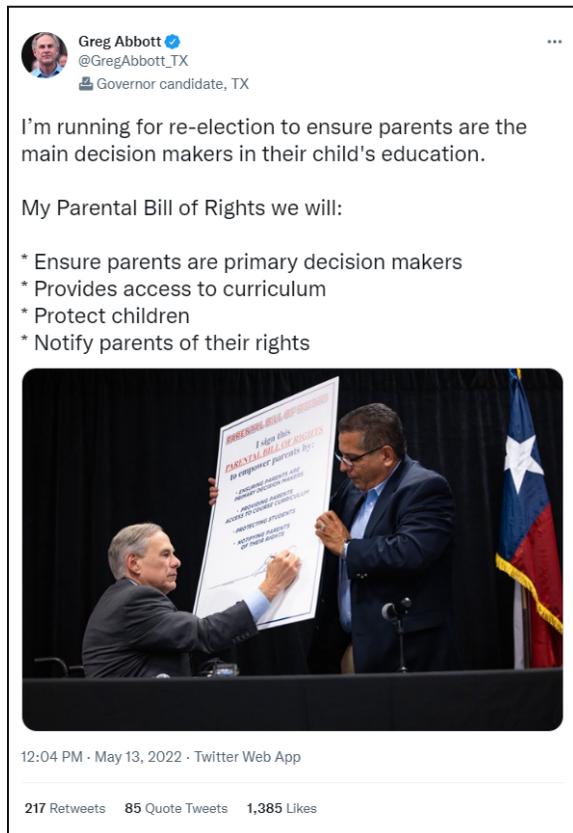


Texas Voucher Proposals - 88th Texas Legislature

Background/context:

- Governor Abbott:
 - May 2022 (from remarks delivered in the event pictured below, right; clearly aligned with and informed by principles of TPPF campaign described below): "Empowering parents means giving them the choice to send their children to any public school, charter school, or private school with state funding following the student."



- Dan Patrick:
 - [May 2022](#):
 - "I am in full support of Gov. Abbott's statement that he will support school choice in the upcoming legislative session. I have long advocated for parents' right to exercise choice in the education of their children..."
 - "Texas has over 5 million students in our public school system. That's more students than some states have people. We can support school choice and, at the same time, create the best public education system in America. These issues are not in conflict with each other..."
 - "Parents are speaking out across Texas and America more than ever that they want a stronger say in their child's education. After all it is the parents – not the education system or the unions – who should have the final say over their children's education. No one should be surprised by that."

- January 2022:



- Rural Republicans:
 - Rural Republicans are self-aware of the role they must play if vouchers are to be defeated in 2023. They recognize the possibility of conflict with their Republican colleagues in the state legislature but also personally with Governor Greg Abbott. Intra-Republican party conflict is a powerful influence on Texas politics/government, with a tremendous focus among members of the SREC on Governor Abbott. Some of those same rural Republicans have recently been alienated/targeted by party leadership.
 - There is [a long and sour history](#) behind rural Republicans' entrenched opposition.

- [Texas Public Policy Foundation \(TPPF\)](#):
 - The conservative think tank, a bellwether of conservative Republican politics and policy in Texas with connections at national organizations such as ALEC, has been pushing and fundraising off of a campaign for “education freedom reforms” called the “Set the Captives Free Campaign” since 2021.
- Voucher legislation has recently passed in states including [Arizona](#) (a particularly bad “universal voucher” scheme with no accountability measures), a bad omen for Texas public education as our schools continue to be the most salient front on culture war issues.

Considerations/Possibilities:

- Connection with Anti-CRT/Anti-SEL/Anti-LGBTQ legislation: Based on the suggested TPPF framework and remarks by Governor Abbott, observers are concerned that vouchers could be tied to the anti-CRT/anti-SEL/anti-LGBTQ/anti-(science-based) sexual education culture war movement within the Republican party.
 - Could be tied to HB 3979/SB 3, anti-CRT legislation passed in 2021 which has given rise to vigilantism/witch hunts by radicalized individuals and new parents groups established for the purpose (at least some of which are “astroturf” organizations funded by outside interests).
- Not a certainty: Unlike earlier in the spring, people around the Capitol have begun to feel like the likelihood of significant voucher legislation passing is not a near certainty (and could perhaps be unlikely). Uvalde and other trends/forces have changed things, though much can still change from now to the 88th Legislative Session. We will work to ensure that its passage is highly unlikely.
- Rural Republicans crucial members of anti-voucher coalition: Rural Republicans and urban Democrats who represent historically segregated and underserved communities represent crucial members of the pro-public education majority whose votes must be secured in order to defeat voucher schemes.

Talking points:

- “Vouchers are a tax break for the rich.”
 - The large majority of vouchers are received by households that were already sending their students to private school prior to the new policy. They simply serve to subsidize wealthy households’ private education at great public expense.
- “Vouchers do not increase access.”
 - Vouchers are typically not representative of enough value for policymakers’ stated intended recipients to access private options. Transportation is a particular challenge.
- “Vouchers do not improve quality.”
 - All private schools are not created equal. Many private schools do not provide a benefit to a student compared to the experience they could have had at a local public school.
- “Vouchers hurt public schools.”
 - Texas public schools are struggling to recover from COVID-19 and grappling with mental health. Vouchers will only take more money away from public schools when they are already confronting a perfect storm of challenges.

Bottom line: The Texas Legislature will be on the hook in the 88th Legislative Session for increasing the basic allotment and providing a long-overdue cost-of-living adjustment for retired teachers, along with making substantial investments in other priorities including mental health, school safety, and property tax relief. These decisions are likely to be made within the context of persistent inflation and financial uncertainty. Now is not the time for the state to experiment with vouchers, an incredibly complex and untested system that would have significant and difficult-to-forecast financial implications for the state and for our school districts that are already operating on the razor’s edge, a system that would likely serve only as a tax break for the rich (as rural Republicans know).

Further reading/resources:

- [Why vouchers are unpopular in rural Texas](#)
 - Jay Leeson in the Dallas Morning News: “Vouchers are unpopular in places where public schools are the lifeblood of community.”
- “School choice” proponents/anti-public education actors are working to build Latino support: <https://twitter.com/TPPF/status/1541904277672689664>, <https://www.houstonchronicle.com/opinion/outlook/article/Opinion-Latinos-want-school-choice-and-Texas-17271831.php>