

**Houston Chronicle editorial board rebukes Texas Governor regarding his dogged attempt to con rural legislators into support of vouchers.**

Rural legislators in Texas stood up to their bully governor to defeat a voucher program. A voucher scheme was defeated in regular session of the legislature and in four special sessions called by the Governor to force vouchers on the state.

Rural Texas legislators understand the synergy between the public school system and the community. Ohio rural legislators may wish to learn from the example of Texas rural legislators.

The Senate President in Ohio recently advocated for capital funds for private schools to encourage the spread of private schools to rural areas.

**Rural Republicans held strong. Abbott should give up his voucher scheme. (Editorial)**

By [The Editorial Board](#) Updated Nov 20, 2023 11:30 a.m.

If at first (and second, and third, and so on) you don't succeed, try [strong-arming and threats](#).

That was Gov. Greg Abbott's strategy to try to pass school vouchers in the fourth special session so far. He'll need to find another trick.

Tucked inside an omnibus school spending bill in the House, vouchers made it the farthest yet this year: all the way to a floor debate Friday. Once again, however, a bipartisan alliance stood in Abbott's way, [passing an amendment 84-63](#) that removed vouchers from the bill.

In the first full House discussion on the issue in decades, voucher advocates repeatedly appealed to the needs of the most disadvantaged students who they claimed would be most impacted by such a program: low-income students, bullied kids, sexual assault victims and students with special education needs. House Bill 1 author Rep. Brad Buckley, R-Killeen, promised the bill would prioritize "the most vulnerable," including those with learning challenges.

We've [seen the failures of such promises](#) elsewhere. But consider the numbers here in Texas.

While most private schools say they serve students with some sort of special education need, only 63 across the entire state actually cater to those students, according to testimony from Andrea Chevalier, director of government relations with the Texas Council of Administrators of Special Education.

Those 63 schools, identified by the online database Private School Review, serve approximately 4,510 students in Texas. That's compared to 700,000 students in the public school system currently enrolled in special education services.

Those private schools are mostly in urban centers, have an average tuition of more than \$19,000 and can, of course, reject anyone they want based on their own screening criteria.

“Do you think even 5% of special ed kids that we’re proposing to do the most for would qualify or that there would be a place in a private setting for them?” asked state Rep. Ken King, R-Canadian, during a committee hearing on the bill.

Special education experts know vouchers won't help the neediest. By now, lawmakers should know better too.

Still, it gets worse. The governor has also held hostage desperately needed increases to public special education budgets until he gets what he wants. As part of an omnibus bill, vouchers were mixed with badly needed boosts to public education funding — fine arts dollars, more per-student funding, new teacher stipends and raises and more.

King asked several witnesses how much sugar might be enough for them to swallow his poison pill?

“There is no dollar amount for us that would justify the long-term damage,” said Chevalier.

In the proposed program's first wave, some 40,000 students would get \$10,500 each at an estimated cost of \$461.8 million in fiscal year 2025. But the costs balloon, especially, as many fear will happen, if the Legislature looks to expand the program after getting a foot in the door. Importantly, students currently attending private schools would be eligible for those dollars, betraying the promise made repeatedly Friday that vouchers offered a lifeline to low-income families stuck in their failing zoned school.

We’ve complained — as Abbott has given us ample opportunity to do — about the financial ramifications of vouchers, the lack of accountability and clear, persuasive data showing achievement boosts. But we also oppose vouchers because of the absolute disservice they would do to many students with special needs, students who, even if accepted to a pricey private school, surrender their federal protections against discrimination when they leave public schools.

Friday, Buckley told heart-rending stories of hard-working families struggling on behalf of their special needs students. The government does offer those families not well served by public schools an option: they can challenge their school district in a [due process hearing before a state education official](#), seeking to either force the district to provide appropriate accommodations or to pay for the cost of private schooling. For too many parents, that rare option is still out of reach and requires time and [legal savvy to be successful](#). We'd rather see access to that process strengthened than a sham of a private-school handout.

If Buckley and others really want to help our special education students, they should fully fund our public school system. No poison pill required.

Nov 20, 2023|Updated Nov 20, 2023 11:30 a.m.

By [The Editorial Board](#)

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CC3673 11.30.23 Thursday

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