

American Association of
University Women

American Civil Liberties
Union of Texas

American Jewish
Committee

American Jewish Congress

Americans for
Religious Liberty

Americans United
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Church & State

Association of Texas
Professional Educators

Delta Kappa Gamma
Texas

Jewish Federation of
San Antonio Community
Relations Council

League of Women Voters
of Texas

National Council of Jewish
Women

Parents for Public Schools
of Houston

Pastors for Peace

Pastors for Texas Children

People for the American
Way Foundation

Texas Advocacy, Inc.

Texas AFL-CIO

Texas Association for the
Gifted and Talented

Texas Association of
Community Schools

Texas Association of
School Administrators

Texas Association of
School Boards

Texas Association of
Secondary School
Principals

Texas Baptist Christian
Life Commission

Texas Classroom
Teacher Association

Texas Elementary
Principals & Supervisors
Association

Texas AFT

Texas Freedom Network

Texas IMPACT

Texas Parent Teacher
Association

Texas Public School
Relations Association

Texas State Teachers
Association

The COALITION for PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Private School Vouchers: An Experiment Taxpayers Can't Afford



October 30, 2014

Sec. Arne Duncan
US Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary Duncan,

The Coalition for Public Schools – a Texas-based coalition of 32 education organizations that support free and appropriate public education for all children, would like to call your attention to a very important issue.

The Texas Education Agency recently submitted an application for the Texas Prekindergarten Expansion Grant. This application requests federal funding for the expansion of pre-kindergarten programs throughout the State of Texas. While most of the grant application is acceptable to the Coalition for Public Schools, there is one section that is not.

On page 9 of the Final PEG Narrative you will find the following paragraph under Model 4: Expansion of High-Quality Slots for Pre-kindergarten Program Choice:

“Model 4 would provide opportunities for parents to send their children to the high-quality pre-kindergarten program of their choice. Establishing both public and private program options for parents is a key component of this model. To this end, the state proposes making available a number of pre-kindergarten program options that would give parents a choice in selecting a pre-kindergarten program. To meet the grant definition of a high-quality preschool program, only public or private programs who are already implementing a full-day pre-k program will be considered for participation in this model. A participating sub-grantee will guarantee that all teachers and teaching assistants have access to the Engage platform. While all LEAs in a selected high-need community will be eligible to participate, ***private preschool programs meeting specific criteria will also be allowed to participate.*** In the parent application process, parents will apply to the sub-grantee through a lottery system. Priority points will be given to parents who choose to send their child to a high-quality pre-kindergarten program. This model will cost approximately \$8,000 per child. If the program selected by a parent is a public school program or private program that has partnered with an LEA, this cost will be reduced, as the state will be providing the allowable half-day ADA.”

This part of the application clearly **provides vouchers for private preschool programs** and is an attempt on the part of the TEA to **divert federal funds to private institutions, even though those funds are clearly intended for pre-kindergarten programs for Texas public school children, which are already underfunded.**

For at least the last 17 years and nine legislative sessions, Texas legislators of both political parties have consistently refused to support vouchers for private schools. In addition, language has repeatedly been placed in state budget riders that expressly prohibits the use of state monies on vouchers to prevent executive action that would lead to their implementation. By approving Model 4 in this application, the federal government would clearly be violating the intent of our elected representatives by allowing the appointed Texas Commissioner of Education to use this application to make an end run around the legislature on this issue.

The Coalition for Public Schools stands firm on this issue and any effort to implement vouchers in our public neighborhood schools. We believe that quality education should be provided for ALL children and that vouchers will redirect taxpayer funds that are collected for the common good to private parties engaged in for-profit ventures.

For these reasons we urge the consideration of the TEA submitted Texas Prekindergarten Expansion Grant application but only with the rejection of Model 4: Expansion of High-Quality Slots for Pre-kindergarten Program Choice.

Respectfully Submitted on Behalf of the Coalition for Public Schools,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Charles Luke". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "C" and "L".

Charles Luke, Ed.D.
Coalition for Public Schools
M: 940-768-8594