

# Senate committee adds vouchers to school funding bill

May 23, 2023

In a last-ditch move, the Texas Senate Committee on Public Education attached a school voucher program to a substitute version of a House-approved public education funding bill.

The committee, chaired by Sen. Brandon Creighton, R-Conroe, approved its substitute version of HB 100 by a 9-3 vote along party lines May 22.

Gov. Greg Abbott threatened to call a special session if the Texas Legislature did not send him a “school choice” bill to sign into law. May 29 is the last day of the 88th regular session of the Texas Legislature.

On Twitter, Creighton called the committee substitute bill “a bold blueprint for the future of Texas education.”

“The bill infuses billions of new funds into public education, provides teachers significant raises and finally delivers school choice to Texas parents,” [Creighton tweeted](#).

“I ask anyone who says we can’t empower parents and students with educational opportunities and lift up public education at the same time to look at this legislation.”

## How the Senate and House versions differ

The original HB 100 as presented by Rep. Ken King, R-Canadian, focused on allocating \$4.5 billion in new funds for public school, including raises for schoolteachers, and increasing the basic allotment—the minimum amount schools receive per student—by \$90.



However, the Senate committee version, includes a provision to add education savings accounts for parents that choose to send their children to private schools, including parochial schools.

Specifically, it would provide up to \$8,000 per student each year to pay for tuition, textbooks, tutoring or other educational experiences.

The Senate committee version of the bill, which cuts the increase for education from \$4.5 billion to \$3.8 billion, would dedicate about \$500,000 to the voucher-style program.

It would provide a \$50 per student increase in the \$6,160 basic allotment, which has not changed since 2019.

## **‘Holding ... school funding hostage’**



Charles Foster  
Johnson

Charles Foster Johnson, executive director of Pastors for Texas Children, noted the House rejected private school voucher proposals three times in this legislative session, thanks to a coalition of rural Republicans and urban Democrats.

However, he said, the Senate committee chose to “manipulate the legislative process” by attaching a voucher proposal to the funding bill “under cover of darkness” in the “waning stretch of the session.”

“It is a desperate measure that will fail—even if it means our community public schools don’t get the money they need and our dedicated teachers the pay raise they deserve,” Johnson said.

“If it were good and right, powerful political forces would not be using unfair, deceptive tactics to pass it.”

Michelle Smith, executive director of Raise Your Hand Texas, said lawmakers should focus on increasing the basic allotment for public schools “instead of diverting much-needed resources away” from public education.

“Public dollars should remain in public schools,” Smith said. “Holding much-needed school funding hostage at the eleventh hour to create an unaccountable ESA voucher scheme can only harm the public schools that are at the hearts of our communities.”