

Texas House approves education savings account program

April 17, 2025

After hours of debate, the Texas House of Representatives approved for the first time in the state's history a plan to send public funds to private schools, including religious schools.

The House voted 85-63 in the wee hours of the morning on April 17 to approve a bill authored by Rep. Brad Buckley, R-Killeen, to establish an education savings account program.

The voucher-like program—Gov. Greg Abbott's top legislative priority—will provide about \$10,000 to each participating private school student and up to \$2,000 to each participating homeschool student.

"It's time to provide the full array of options for students and their families," Buckley said.

'The false flag of parental choice'

Charles Foster Johnson, executive director of Pastors for Texas Children, offered a dissenting view, calling the education savings account program "a reckless subsidy that rips public dollars out of our neighborhood schools and hands them to unaccountable private institutions."

"This scheme fails our poorest children, violates the Texas Constitution and uses public tax dollars to fund the establishment of religion—all under the false flag of 'parental choice,'" Johnson said.



John Litzler

John Litzler, public policy director for Texas Baptists' Christian Life Commission, expressed disappointment in the House vote approving the education savings account program.

"While we are disappointed in the House's passage of Senate Bill 2, the Christian Life Commission remains committed to the same values we've always held: supporting public education and promoting religious liberty," Litzler said.

Education savings accounts offer a "tightly controlled" and "parent-directed" approach to educating students that prioritizes "the state's most vulnerable students," Buckley asserted.

The program allocates \$1 billion toward education savings accounts families can direct to schools for tuition and other expenses.

While 80 percent is dedicated to students with disabilities and—broadly defined—low-income families, the general population is able to apply for the remaining 20 percent.

Opponents of the bill characterized the "universal" nature of that 20 percent as making the program available to "millionaires and billionaires." The House rejected several amendments that would have placed an income

cap on program eligibility.

Call for referendum rejected

The House voted in favor of a motion by Buckley to table an amendment introduced by Rep. James Talarico, D-Austin, calling for a statewide referendum on the education savings account program.

Talarico said the idea originated with conservative activists who support what they call “school choice” and initially was supported by some Republican lawmakers

However, he asserted, Abbott threatened to veto bills proposed by any Republican who voted in favor of Talarico’s amendment and told the lawmakers he would make their primary elections a “bloodbath.”

“The governor has said private school vouchers are widely popular. ... I would think the governor would welcome an opportunity to finally have a mandate on this controversial topic,” Talarico said.

He urged his Republican colleagues to exercise courage, demonstrate independence and vote in favor of the referendum.

“We do not serve the governor. We serve our constituents. ... This is the people’s House, not the governor’s House,” Talarico said.

‘About power and profit’

Johnson noted the pressure Abbott applied to House Republicans to vote in favor of the voucher-like education savings account program.



Charles Foster Johnson

“We thank God for the faithful lawmakers who stood strong—every House Democrat and the courageous Republicans who formed a new ‘moral caucus’ by putting children and conscience ahead of party,” Johnson said.

Gary VanDeaver of New Boston and Dade Phelan of Orange, former Speaker of the House, were the two Republicans who voted against the education savings account bill.

“This vote was not about what’s best for Texas children—it was about power and profit,” Johnson asserted. “A handful of billionaire donors have bought our legislature, and Gov. Abbott has handed our public school system over to them in exchange for political favor.”

Jeff Yass, cofounder and managing director of the Philadelphia-based Susquehanna International Group and an ardent supporter of “school choice,” made the [largest single campaign donation](#) in Texas history to Abbott.

The governor supported the primary opponents of rural Republicans who defeated a voucher-style proposal in the 2023 legislative session, changing the makeup of the Texas House.

Prior to considering the education savings account bill, the House voted 144-4 to give preliminary approval to a school funding bill that will provide

\$8 billion over two years.

Lawmakers voted on the funding bill after extensive debate and consideration of multiple amendments. The bill will increase the basic allotment per public school from \$6,160 to \$6,555, with 40 percent earmarked for school staff salaries.

Litzler voiced support for the House school funding bill, which includes close to \$2 billion in special education funding and \$750 million to increase teacher pay.

“Since Texas is now on a path to divert public funds to private schools, it will become increasingly important each legislative session that Texas passes bills to fully fund public education,” he said.