

# Voucher bill goes to Texas House after Senate approval

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The Texas Senate approved an education savings account bill that would allow public funds to go to private religious schools. The measure now will be considered in the House of Representatives, where it has faced [stiff opposition in past legislative sessions](#).



Sen. Brandon Creighton, R-Conroe, sponsored Senate Bill 2, legislation to create an education savings account program that he asserted will offer “expanded education freedom.” (Screen Grab)

Senate Bill 2, sponsored by Sen. Brandon Creighton, R-Conroe, passed 19-12 with all but one Republican in favor and all Democrats in opposition. Sen. Robert Nichols of Jacksonville was the lone Republican who voted in opposition.

Creighton asserted the education savings account program the bill creates would offer “expanded education freedom to our students and our families” in Texas.



John Litzler

John Litzler, director of public policy for the Christian Life Commission, noted Texas Baptists' moral concerns agency "historically opposed vouchers, including Education Savings Accounts, on many grounds, but chief among them is concerns about infringement on religious liberty."

Senate Bill 2 provides a \$10,000 education savings account for an approved student without disabilities and \$11,500 for a student with disabilities to attend an accredited private school. Payments are directed by parents but sent directly to the schools.

"Many of the private schools that will receive tax dollars are religious and include religious instruction and worship as part of the curriculum," Litzler noted.

## **Supported by governor and lieutenant governor**

Both Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick and Gov. Greg Abbott have expressed strong support for the education savings account program.

Patrick made Creighton's bill a priority item for the Senate, second only to the state budget.

“Texans across the political spectrum agree that parents must have options to choose the school that best fits the needs of their child to ensure their success,” Patrick said.

During his State of the State address Feb. 2 in Austin, Abbott declared “school choice” an [emergency item](#) for the 89th Texas Legislative Session. Emergency items can be voted on during the first 60 days of the session, a period typically devoted to forming committees and other organizational matters.

“Government-mandated schools cannot meet the unique needs of every student. But Texas can provide families with choices to meet those needs,” Abbott said.

“We will continue to fully fund public schools and raise teacher pay, while also giving parents the choice they deserve.”

The Senate has passed school voucher-style initiatives in previous legislative sessions, but those bills have been [defeated in the Texas House](#) by a coalition of rural Republicans and urban Democrats.

However, Abbott targeted House Republicans who voted against the education savings account bill he supported in 2023. He successfully campaigned to replace 11 House Republicans with new lawmakers who support his voucher-style plan.

Of the \$1 billion allocated for the education savings account program in the proposed budget—twice the amount of a similar bill that passed the Senate in the 2023 session before being defeated in the House—the Senate bill makes \$200 million available to any students.

The bulk of the funds—\$800 million—would be earmarked for special-needs children and “low-income” families, broadly defined as families making five times the federal poverty level.

That means a single parent making \$105,000 a year—or a family of four making more than \$150,000 a year—would qualify. During the Senate debate, Creighton repeatedly referred to the maximum as the combined income of a firefighter and a schoolteacher.

## Opposition voiced

“Pure and simple, this voucher scheme is a scam,” said Charles Foster Johnson, executive director of Pastors for Texas Children.



Charles Foster Johnson

It would benefit “private schools that do not take every child, that do not provide transportation, breakfast and lunch, and that will likely raise their tuition the amount of the voucher anyway,” he said.

A majority of Texas senators long ago “forsook their oath” to support “free public schools,” as required by [Article 7 of the Texas Constitution](#), he asserted.

“So, this is no surprise,” said Johnson, interim senior pastor of Second Baptist Church in Lubbock.

“It is the Texas House that has held the line against private school vouchers session after session, because that is the chamber closest to the people,

who clearly do not want their public-school dollars diverted to subsidize private schools far away from them and religious schools that teach religion contrary to their own,” Johnson said.

However, stopping the measure from passing in the House will be “harder than ever,” he acknowledged.

“Out-of-state billionaires wanting to make money off our kids are pouring millions of dollars into Texas elections to defeat pro-public-education candidates,” he said. “The only resistance we have to this filthy lucre are committed people of faith who refuse to bow to Caesar coming into their church schools.”

[Jeff Yass](#), a billionaire school voucher advocate from Pennsylvania, gave a \$6 million contribution to Abbott’s campaign—the [largest single donation in Texas history](#).

Litzler said the CLC anticipates the House version of an education savings account “may differ significantly” from the Senate bill, noting House members “have a different perspective from senators on this issue.”

## **Governor insists on ‘universal’ program**

Abbott has stated he will oppose any “school choice” bill that is not a “universal” program. Although the Senate bill prioritizes certain students if the number of applicants exceeds available funding, the education savings account “would be universal in the sense that every student, except for children of legislators, would be eligible to apply,” Litzler noted.

“It’s certainly possible that a bill filed in the House would not be universal and would limit ESA availability based on certain criteria like household income or attendance at a school assigned a failing letter grade by TEA,”

he said.

“The House and the Senate would then have to agree on the bill’s language—or reconcile the differing bills. If the Texas Legislature passes a version of an ESA that is not universal, the governor may veto the bill.”

Litzler noted the importance of voters communicating their concerns to elected representatives.

“The most persuasive argument to a state representative is the one that affects you, the constituent, directly,” he said.

“We’ve heard from parents who are concerned because many private schools can’t accommodate their child who has a disability. We’ve heard concern from parents that their public school will be underfunded and may have to cut programs, extracurriculars, or close campuses all together.

“Many of our state representatives are Christians, and several are Baptists. They often share our religious liberty concerns. Legislators want to hear the concerns that their constituents are most passionate about.”