



CITY OF HOUSTON

Sylvester Turner

Mayor

P.O. Box 1562
Houston, Texas 77251-1562

Telephone – Dial 311
www.houstontx.gov

July 21, 2017

The Honorable Larry Taylor, Chair, the Honorable Eddie Lucio, Jr., Vice Chair, and the Honorable Members of the Senate Committee on Education:

As Mayor of the City of Houston, I know the future of our city depends on equitable access to education across zip codes, neighborhoods and socioeconomic lines. We all share a goal for our children: That they have the opportunity to learn, grow, and lead a better life than those who came before them. It is in the interest of that shared dream of opportunity and vision for our future that I oppose Senate Bill 2.

Voucher programs have failed students and communities across the country. The failed statewide voucher programs in other states serve as a red flag when considering comparable initiatives for Texas students. In Louisiana, the failures were so dramatic that a typical K-12 student who scored in the 50th percentile in math could be expected to decline to the 34th percentile after only one year in a voucher program. In third, fourth, and fifth grade the decline was even more dramatic, with students scoring in the 50th percentile falling to the 26th percentile.

While our local public schools are struggling due to inadequate funding, this is a very costly proposal that further drains support and will stunt the educational attainment of the participating students. Shockingly, the bill acknowledges that schools which benefit from this program do not have the same protections for special needs students as public schools are required by law to maintain. While proponents argue it gives a few students a chance to pursue a better education, the track record demonstrates that voucher systems provide the exact opposite.

My childhood was much like the stories of many children growing up in Houston today. I am a product of public schools and did not grow up with wealth or connections, but I had the belief that if I worked hard in school I could achieve my dream of leading a life in service to this great city. Our students shouldn't have to leave their communities to receive a world-class education, rather it is incumbent on us as public servants to bring the world-class education to them.

Under this bill, every student who leaves a high-need traditional public school takes thousands of dollars of funding from that school with them. We cannot afford to further financially compromise our public schools after the legislature's devastating budget cuts in 2011. We need to equitably invest in our public schools and communities, including our vulnerable, underperforming schools, instead of further undermining them with proposals such as SB2.

Vouchers undermines educational opportunity for all children. Let us support strong educational reforms and policies, not unproven gimmicks.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Sylvester Turner", is written over a large, stylized, looped flourish.

Sylvester Turner
Mayor, City of Houston