

# Houston Jewish Day School Community Testimony in Support of School Choice



*Testimony Delivered to the Texas Senate Education Committee on 8/24/12*

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee,

Thank you for holding this important hearing and for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the school choice proposals being considered by the committee today. My name is Daniel Cotlar, I am the CMO of Blinds.com, ranked Best Place to Work in Houston by the Houston Chronicle. I come before the committee today representing the 6 Orthodox Jewish Day schools in the Houston area. These schools provide exceptional Secular and Judaic education, and they emphasize traditional values and a love for our country.

As a group, we believe that every child—regardless of income or zip code—should have access to education of their parents' choice. This is how we keep our Jewish tradition alive. That is why every Jewish day school spends a substantial percentage of their budget on financial aid for struggling families. In fact, most of the students in our Houston schools receive some kind of financial assistance based solely on need.

I'll give you an example from one of our schools, Torah Day School. I am a graduate of Torah Day, and today my children attend this school. Last year, Torah Day School collected only 35% of its budget through tuition – the remaining 65% came from private financial aid to parents in need of assistance. Imagine what it's like for a lower or middle-class family with 2 or more children, trying to come up with tuition...and that's from after-tax dollars. The money simply isn't there; the school can only ask so much.

Our schools are not trying to attract only the wealthiest families or the smartest students. We are simply committed to the idea that no Jewish family who wishes to enroll should go without a quality Jewish and secular education, just because they cannot afford to pay tuition and still provide for their family.

These efforts to accommodate every family have a tremendous impact on how we operate. Every new hire or new program is scrutinized closely - "Should we spend this money or should we use it to ease the tuition burden on our parents?"

So there's tension between our two priorities: quality education and affordability. Every year, we have to turn away needy students when scholarships run out. And the most heart-wrenching aspect of my communal work as an active member, parent, and supporter of our schools, is seeing a family who does not enroll because there were other families in greater need of financial support.

That is why I am speaking before the committee today. To ask you to consider the plight of our families who know the best education option for their children, but cannot afford even a heavily subsidized price. And to consider the plight of our schools – who want to accept every student, but cannot afford to.

The programs you're considering today have the potential to put a quality education in the hands of every parent - and I promise you that the Jewish schools in Houston will do our part to assist parents in this struggle. Please make these programs a reality. For our parents, for our teachers, and most of all for our children—our future.

Thank you for your continued support. God bless you, and God bless Texas."

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Daniel Cotlar  
Orthodox Jewish Day Schools of Houston