

## Texas School Alliance Testimony on SB 2204

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The Texas School Alliance (TSA) comprises 31 of the state's largest districts, serving over one-third of the state's total pupil enrollment and nearly half of all English language learners in Texas. TSA is opposed to SB 2204. This bill would provide funding for students with autism to attend a private school if the student is at high risk for needing residential treatment or institutionalization. The Texas School Alliance has a long-standing position of opposition to the use of public funding for private school vouchers. We believe that the public school system should be strengthened and improved in cases where there are student groups who are currently not being adequately served. We also believe that turning their education over to a private school with little public accountability for results is not in the best interests of the students or the state.

We believe that this bill is different from current practice in which school districts contract for private providers for services to public school students. Under current law, when this occurs, the school remains ultimately responsible and accountable for seeing that students progress academically and that state law is followed. Under the provisions of this bill, this level of oversight is missing. If the state wishes to further encourage the use of contracting with private providers, one positive step would be to ensure that students are able to generate sufficient funding through the state formula system to cover the cost of services.

While this bill is an improvement over SB 1301 in that it establishes an interdisciplinary team to monitor the progress of students, it does not go far enough in ensuring sufficient protections either for the students enrolled or for the tax dollars going to support their education. The team has no specific authority over the private entity. Further, this entity is exempt from the broad array of requirements that currently govern public schools. These laws include requirements for teacher qualifications, requirements for performance improvements, provisions related to student discipline and school safety, and curriculum requirements.

You are considering a number of other bills today that will have an impact on special education services in Texas. We recommend using these proposals as a means to examine current service options for students and to make improvements where necessary.