



# ATPE Opposition to SB 1455

## Regarding Virtual School Vouchers

May 7, 2019

The **Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE)** appreciates this opportunity to express our opposition to Senate Bill (SB) 1455, which would greatly expand virtual school programs in Texas.

A growing body of evidence indicates full-time virtual school programs are a poor substitute for brick-and-mortar classrooms. The data show that students enrolled in full-time virtual schools regularly underperform their peers enrolled in traditional classroom settings, as indicated by the multiple Improvement Required (IR) designations documented in the table below, which represents the academic performance of all virtual progress in the state between 2013 and 2018. For these reasons, ATPE opposes any further expansion of virtual schools at this time.

	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013
iUniversity Prep Campus ID 220906007	87/100 Met Standard	Met Standard	Met Standard	Met Standard	Met Standard	No Data
Responsive Education Virtual Learning ID 221801022	55/100 <b>Improvement Required (IR)</b>	<b>IR</b>	<b>IR</b>	Met Standard	<b>IR</b>	<b>IR</b>
Texas Connections Academy at Houston Campus ID 101912100	68/100 Met Standard	<b>IR</b>	<b>IR</b>	<b>IR</b>	Met Standard	Met Standard
Texas Online Preparatory School Elementary ID 236902108	59/100 <b>IR</b>	Met Standard	Met Standard	Met Standard	Met Standard	No Data
Texas Online Preparatory Middle School ID 236902048	75/100 Met Standard	Met Standard	Met Standard	Met Standard	<b>IR</b>	No Data
Texas Online Preparatory School High School ID 236902008	76/100 Met Standard	Met Standard	Met Standard	Met Standard	Met Standard	No Data
Texas Virtual Academy ID 072801145	85/100 <b>Met Alternative Standard</b>	<b>Met Alternative Standard</b>	<b>Met Alternative Standard</b>	No Data	No Data	No Data
Texas Virtual Academy at Hallsville ID 102904010	No Data	No Data	<b>Not Rated</b>	<b>Not Rated</b>	No Data	No Data

Full-time virtual school programs in Texas have been consistently plagued by performance issues. About 81 percent of the state's total full-time virtual enrollment, roughly 11,400 students, are served by three providers: Responsive Education Virtual Learning, which has been labeled "improvement required (IR)" for five of the last six years; Texas Connections Academy, which has been labeled IR for three of the last six years; and Texas Virtual Academy, whose campuses have been either not rated or listed as meeting "alternative" standards. The table above shows a failure rate for virtual schools far above their brick-and-mortar counterparts. By comparison, just 5.1 percent of campuses statewide were rated improvement required in 2016.

University research and government audits of programs in other states tell similar stories:

- Wisconsin: "Virtual charter school pupils' **median scores on the mathematics** section of the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examination were **almost always lower than statewide medians** during the 2005-06 and 2006-07 school years." ([2015, Legislative Audit Bureau](#))
- Colorado: "**Half** of the online students **wind up leaving within a year**. When they do, they're **often further behind academically** then when they started." ([2015 I-News Network](#))
- National: "Across all tested students in online charters, the typical academic gains for math are -0.25 standard deviations (**equivalent to 180 fewer days of learning**) and -0.10 (**equivalent to 72 fewer days**) for reading." ([2015, Stanford CREDO](#))
- National: "Students at K12 Inc., the nation's largest virtual school company, are **falling further behind** in reading and math scores than students in brick-and-mortar schools." ([2012, National Education Policy Center at the University of Colorado Boulder](#))

Many of the concerns regarding virtual schools involve lack of vendor accountability. Until vendors that provide and manage full-time virtual programs can be held to account for substandard performance, limiting the number of potential district and charter school hosts is the only way to effectively track or control performance under the current system. The elimination of bad actors might lead to a scenario where any remaining programs could be identified as high quality and potentially expanded.

The proposal described by SB 1455 would greatly expand the practice of redirecting taxpayer dollars to private, for-profit vendors for the stated purpose of educating Texas students. ATPE and other organizations believes this meets the definition of a voucher.

For the above reasons, we respectfully ask you to **oppose SB 1455**. For additional information, contact ATPE Governmental Relations at (800) 777-2873 or [government@atpe.org](mailto:government@atpe.org).

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*The Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE) has been a strong voice for Texas educators since 1980. It is the leading educators' association in Texas with approximately 100,000 members statewide. With its strong collaborative philosophy, ATPE speaks for classroom teachers, administrators, future, retired and para-educators and works to create better opportunities for 5 million public schoolchildren. ATPE is the ally and the voice of Texas public school educators.*