

DALLAS MORNING NEWS ' KEVIN SHERRINGTON'S COMMON SENSE TAKE ON STATE FUNDING FOR ITS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Don't mess with Texas football: 'School choice' will ultimately diminish our gold standard

Few things draw us together like the prospect of a good high school football game.



Kevin Sherrington
Sportswriter Speaks Out on School Funding

By Kevin Sherrington

Mar. 1, 2025

Full disclosure: Of our own free will, the lovely wife and I sent all four dependents to Dallas ISD schools, the last stop at Hillcrest. The boys played football, baseball and golf; the girls danced at halftimes and sang in musicals. Not only did they come out unscathed, they loved it, learning enough in the

bargain to qualify for colleges where they played and danced and got out in four years.

Considering our urban public school testimony, you can probably guess which side we take with respect to education savings accounts, a voucher-style program.

Basically, anything that subtracts from Texas' underfunded public schools is a no-go.

Especially if it messes with the state religion.

The unsettling issue came up after an editorial this week in Dave Campbell's Texas Football. Managing editor Greg Tepper warned that a bill already through the Texas Senate and another version about to clear the House "could do real harm to Texas high school football." Judging by the reaction in Austin, you'd have thought he'd proposed painting the Capitol a brighter shade of pink.

Only hours after the Bible of Texas football went online with its view, Gov. Greg Abbott got on X to proclaim the pending legislation "will NOT take away funding from Texas high school football. Period."

No, no one's backing up to Duncanville's field house and making off with their goalposts. Not yet, anyway. That's not how these things work. The governor knows as much.

In a tweet the week before his latest take, Abbott conceded that, when parents move their children from public to private schools, "the funding for that child leaves, too."

Less money means less of something else.

Pretty simple, really.

Long before the prospects of education savings accounts became a near certainty, Texas public high school coaches were already worried about their own. Fiscal issues arising from schools trying to keep up with inflation have meant positions eliminated and budgets slashed. Joe Martin, executive director of the Texas High School Coaches Association, hears all kinds of horror stories from his 28,000 members.

And now comes ESAs.

“Any way you slice it,” Martin told me this week, “it hurts public schools because it takes money from them and gives it to private schools.

“Ultimately, that affects athletics, football as well as all the others we have.”

House Bill 2 would attempt to mitigate part of the loss for public schools currently funded with a basic allotment of \$6,160 per student, which ranks in the bottom 10 nationally. HB 2 would bump it to \$6,380. If it doesn't sound like much, it isn't. HB 2 would also provide money specifically for fine arts, rural schools and prekindergarten and another \$1.8 billion that, among other things, would go to special education.

But will the gains cover the loss in funding from students switching from public to private in years to come? The Legislative Budget Board, which analyzes the financial implications, estimates more than 24,000 public school students will cross over to private in 2027. By 2030, according to the estimate, the number could swell to nearly 100,000.

Multiply 100,000 times \$6,380 and you get a lot of money that has to come from somewhere. A line item on a football budget is as good a place as any to start.

The governor fights the perception. On his latest X post, he noted Texas is one of the only states in the Southeastern Conference's footprint without “school choice,” as proponents call ESAs. As if parents don't already have a choice. Abbott also notes the system doesn't seem to have hurt high school football in Arizona or Florida, a somewhat dubious comparison.

Not sure we want to hold up any other state's high school football model, and I'm certain we don't want to risk what's been built, which is pretty much the gold standard.

Here in Texas, unlike say, Florida, the best programs are in public schools. Private schools have their place, as Tepper wrote, but Texas' football cred was built painstakingly over more than a century in stadiums twinkling on the horizon or lighting up neighborhoods. Half the appeal is the notion that it's

organic. Rosters reflect communities not always obvious to us in our daily walk.

Few things draw us together — rich or poor, left or right — like the prospect of a good high school football game.

Consider the ten 11-man state championship games at JerryWorld, which drew a total of 159,560 fans. Florida's nine title games? A meager 29,738. North Crowley-Westlake drew more on its own.

Before closing, I don't want to leave you thinking I've got anything against private schools. Some of our best friends sent their kids to them. But they're not a panacea, just as public schools aren't as bad as you may hear. Our experience is you get out of education what you put into it. We got more than anyone could have dreamed.

A final note: Our oldest son, the former quarterback, and his lovely wife, a former cheerleader, live with our grandchildren a few blocks from where they went to high school. You can't miss it. The house with the Hillcrest sign in the yard....

Go to <https://www.speakerdoc.com>