

# Association of Texas Professional Educators

305 E. Huntland Dr., Suite 300, Austin, TX 78752  
(800) 777-ATPE • (512) 467-0071 • [www.atpe.org](http://www.atpe.org)

**Supporting Your Freedom to Teach<sup>SM</sup>**

**April 7, 2009**  
**Release No. 04-09-01**

**Media contact: Adam Rondeau**  
**[arondeau@atpe.org](mailto:arondeau@atpe.org)**

## Voucher bills threaten Texas public schools

Lawmakers on the Senate Education Committee will hear testimony today on three bills that promise to shift funding from public schools into private, unregulated hands by creating a private school voucher program.

Under the guise of helping special needs students, Senate Bill 183, by Sen. Tommy Williams (R–The Woodlands), and Senate Bills 1301 and 2204, by Sen. Florence Shapiro (R–Plano), threaten to institute the first publicly funded voucher program in the state at the expense of thousands of special needs students.

“Federal and state mandates require school districts to provide specific services to children with special needs, but private schools aren’t subject to the same regulations,” said Jerry Bonham, state president of the 112,000-member Association of Texas Professional Educators. “These proposed vouchers would make it increasingly difficult for public schools to serve the needs of the many special education students whose families wouldn’t be able to use such programs.”

Under Shapiro’s proposals, the private school voucher would equal the per-student funding amount that each district receives for the instruction of the student. In some districts where special needs programs receive minimal funding, this move would sorely undermine a district’s efforts to give the best education possible to students with autism.

Unlike Shapiro’s bills, the bill drafted by Williams would provide vouchers for students with disabilities, but the Williams bill doesn’t specify a specific disorder, thus setting up a situation in which organizations more interested in making a profit than ensuring students are instructed by specially trained personnel in up-to-date facilities could easily exploit the system.

“Special education is a very meticulous process, and by taking this much-needed funding out of public schools, educators would be limited in the level of care they can provide,” said Bonham. “Rather than placing additional pressures on Texas schools, legislators and educators need to work together to provide the necessary training and resources to ensure that every special needs child can succeed.”

###

*The 112,000-member Association of Texas Professional Educators is the largest educators' group in Texas and the largest nonunion educators' group nationwide. Its membership consists of classroom teachers, para-educators, administrators, college students and retired educators. ATPE is committed to advocating for better benefits for all educators, promoting a collaborative work environment and the right of educators to choose the association they feel represents their interests, and providing the best education possible for all Texas school children.*