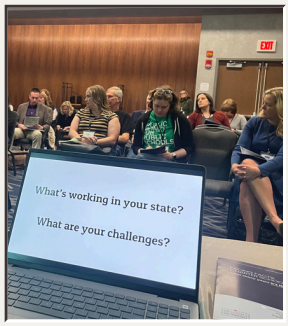

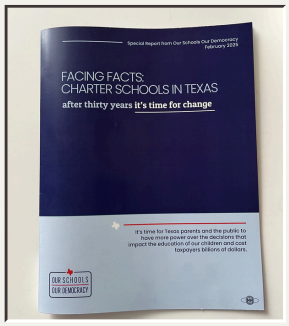

Our Schools Our Democracy 2025: Legislative and SBOE Wrap-Up

OUR SCHOOLS
OUR DEMOCRACY

Major Accomplishments

Increasing Charter School Accountability and Oversight

- Our Schools Our Democracy released a comprehensive report in February 2025 on 30 years of failed charter school policy. The report altered the conversation around charter schools at the Texas Legislature and resulted in several big wins for public school advocates.
- For the first time ever, the State Auditor will conduct a comprehensive investigation into the Texas Education Agency's oversight of charter schools and deliver a public report to the Legislature.
- Before receiving state facility funding, charter schools will now have to certify that no one affiliated with the charter will benefit from related-party real estate transactions.

Protecting Texas Public Schools From Privatization:

- The State Board of Education vetoed two deeply problematic charter applications.
- Responding to Our Schools Our Democracy's research on underperformance among recently-opened charter schools, Board members made a bipartisan request that TEA provide a report on charter enrollment and performance.
- Texas parents and community leaders stood fervently against private school vouchers and new charter schools, delivering compelling public testimony, organizing digital campaigns, and sharing real-life stories with statewide media outlets.

Ending Different Rules For Charter Schools:

- Lawmakers will now be required to hold charter schools to the same standards as our neighborhood public schools in bills addressing school bonds and related-party contracts.

Our Schools Our Democracy (OSOD) launched in February 2025 with a clear mission: to protect the fundamental rights of all Texans to a free, quality public education and to raise the alarm about school privatization through action research, grassroots organizing, and issue advocacy.

Our organization hit the ground running during a challenging legislative session that centered on public schools and education privatization. We released a comprehensive report documenting 30 years of failed charter school policy and worked to implement the report's recommendations. Lawmakers quoted our report in committee hearings, cited our data during floor debates, and ultimately approved an unprecedented budget rider that will require an audit into TEA's oversight of charter schools. Community groups like the League of Women Voters and the Coalition of Texans with Disabilities invited OSOD to present to their members about our work. And we educated young Texans eager to participate in the democratic process by speaking about school privatization at youth advocacy days.

This legislative session, state leaders passed an unpopular and exorbitantly expensive private school voucher program. Charter schools pushed for more state funding without corresponding state oversight. The Texas Education Agency conducted its annual charter application cycle without acknowledging the consistent underperformance of new charter schools or the harms of charter expansion on public school districts. Our Schools Our Democracy serves as a counterweight to these well-coordinated and funded efforts to privatize Texas' public education – efforts which pose a real and present danger to our state, our schools, and our students.

The requirement to audit TEA's oversight of charter schools represents a huge win for Our Schools Our Democracy and, more importantly, Texas public education. So do the thousands of parents, students, and community leaders who showed up for rallies, kept our representatives on speed dial, and stayed night after night to testify against private vouchers and in support of fair school funding. Our Schools Our Democracy is building on that energy so that Texans regain more power over the decisions that affect the education of our children.

Support Our Schools Our Democracy

Your donation fuels our work to protect our public schools, including cutting-edge research, local and statewide educational advocacy, and a regional grassroots network that empowers parents and activists.

Our Public Policy Priorities

Increasing Charter School Accountability and Oversight

The context: In the 2023-2024 biennium, Texas spent $4.4 billion in taxpayer dollars on charter schools. Charter school funding will continue to increase every year because there is little public oversight of charter expansion and no statutory cap on the number of new charter campuses approved in Texas. Despite the exorbitant cost and numerous documented cases of questionable charter school spending, the Texas Legislature has never held a budget hearing on charter schools' growing percentage of state education funds. OSOD's landmark report raised awareness among lawmakers about the many issues surrounding charter schools. The report cited and documented multiple examples of questionable spending by charter schools, concerning related-party real estate transactions, and inefficient state spending on a duplicative and under-performing charter system.

Our work: Our Schools Our Democracy testified in support of House Bill 5571 by Representative Ana-María Rodríguez Ramos (D-Richardson), which would have required the Texas Education Agency to conduct third-party financial audits of charter schools. Although the bill did not pass, Representative Rodriguez Ramos secured a budget rider that will require the State Auditor to conduct a comprehensive investigation into TEA's charter school oversight and deliver a public report to the Legislature.

Our team also worked to ensure that House Bill 2 will make charter facility funding available only to charter schools that annually certify that no governing member, school employee, or their relations benefit from related-party real estate transactions.

Next steps: Our Schools Our Democracy strongly supports a comprehensive audit of Texas charter schools. In the meantime, we will continue to research and report on underperformance, wasteful spending, and failure to serve all students at charter schools. We will build on this win for transparency and accountability to mobilize grassroots and legislative support for our report's recommendations to change how charter schools operate in Texas.

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Sign up for policy and research updates and follow us on social media on Facebook, Instagram, X/Twitter, and Bluesky.

Our Public Policy Priorities

Protecting Texas Public Schools from Privatization

The context: After multiple legislative sessions and millions of dollars from billionaire donors, Governor Greg Abbott and Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick finally forced the passage of a private school voucher program that will cost $1 billion in the first biennium alone. Years of data from voucher programs in other states show how vouchers have subsidized tuition for families who already attend private schools, caused massive shortfalls in state budgets, and failed to improve student outcomes. Despite sustained opposition from Texans across the state, Texas is scheduled to begin the private school voucher program in the 2026-2027 school year.

This year also marked the 30th anniversary of the Texas Legislature first approving charter schools. Since 1995, Texas has spent billions on this inefficient parallel system – with little evidence of improved student outcomes. Yet the Texas Education Agency and the State Board of Education routinely approve new charter operators without fully investigating the harmful loss of revenue to school districts and the students left behind through charter schools' exclusionary policies and practices.

Our work: Our Schools Our Democracy partnered with Texas parents, teachers, and community leaders in the fight against school privatization. At the legislature, we raised concerns to lawmakers and the public about the administrative cost of the voucher program. We created an action center on our website to share resources and help Texans uplift their opposition to vouchers. We launched the "Don't Throw My Kid Away" campaign to mobilize Texas parents to send photos of their children to lawmakers with their personal stories against vouchers. We also recruited parent advocates for a statewide broadcast to share their opposition to vouchers.

At the State Board of Education, Our Schools Our Democracy rallied Texas families and school leaders to testify in opposition to new charter applicants. Alongside affected community members, we raised the alarm about the unproven educational quality, lack of public transparency, and harmful impact of charter expansion to Texas public school districts which continue to serve a vast majority of Texas students. Although the SBOE ultimately approved four charter applications, our work and the testimony of concerned Texans contributed to the Board's decision to veto two highly alarming applications.

Next steps: Our Schools Our Democracy will leverage our research expertise to closely monitor the use of taxpayer dollars by private schools and charter schools. In addition to our ongoing research into Texas charter schools, our team will track the impact of private school vouchers on Texas families and schools and create the infrastructure for Texans to report voucher rejections and other failures of the program to serve all students. Our action research will continue to inform our outreach with Texas families and school leaders as we host information sessions, create community resources, and build a base of informed and engaged Texans to advocate for democratic neighborhood schools.

Charter Cycle	Charter	2023 Academic Rating	2023 Enrollment	Economically Disadvantaged Population
2016	Compass Rose Charter Academy	F (59)	2,701	71%
2017	Yellowstone College Preparatory	F (55)	199	97%
2017	Bridgeway Preparatory Academy	F (50)	117	69%
2017	Legacy School of Sport Sciences	F (53)	447	72%
2018	Reve Preparatory Charter School	F (46)	230	82%
2018	Promesa Academy Charter School	F (53)	313	69%
2018	Bloom Academy Charter School	F (54)	338	86%
2018	Betty M. Condra School	F (57)	175	74%
2019	The Gathering Place	F (46)	628	66%
2019	San Antonio STEAM Academy (SA Prep)	F (52)	156	49%
2021	Rocketship Public Schools	F (53)	307	79%
2021	Thrive Center for Success (a)	F (46)	96	19%
2021	Essence Preparatory Charter School	F (59)	103	74%
2016	Goodwater Montessori	D (69)	410	36%
2017	Etoile Academy Charter School	D (67)	512	97%
2019	Elevate Collegiate School	D (67)	117	89%
2020	Prelude Preparatory Academy	D (60)	98	85%
2020	Royal Public Schools	C (71)	192	98%
2020	Doral Academy of Texas	C (71)	370	43%
2017	Valor Education	B (84)	2,158	24%
2019	Houston Classical Charter School	B (83)	185	70%

Our Schools Our Democracy presented research finding that 81% of all new charter schools approved by the Texas Education Agency and the State Board of Education between 2016-2021 were D- or F-rated (according to TEA's 2023 Academic Ratings). As a result, a bipartisan group of SBOE members have now requested that TEA report on enrollment and performance at recently approved charters.

Our Public Policy Priorities

Ending Different Rules for Charter Schools

The context: The Texas Legislature first authorized charter schools 30 years ago with the promise that this experimental system would be exempt from certain state requirements in exchange for improved student performance. Today, charter schools statewide consistently underperform compared to public school districts. But charters still operate under different, more flexible rules than neighborhood public schools. For example, charter schools are not required to hire certified teachers - despite research showing that certified teachers improve student outcomes. Nearly half of all charter school teachers were uncertified in 2023-2024, compared to just 7% in our public school districts.

Our work: Our Schools Our Democracy worked with lawmakers to level the playing field and ensure that charter schools are held to the same high standards as our neighborhood public schools. We worked with Representative Ryan Guillen (R-Rio Grande City) to add charter schools to House Bill 210, which prohibits related-party contracts with vendors that personally enrich school board members. We also worked with Senator Lois Kolkhorst (R-Brenham) to add charter schools to Senate Bill 843, which creates a database of school bonds, taxes, and bond-related projects across the state. Senate Bill 843 adds needed transparency because unelected charter school boards can incur billions in bond debt without voter approval - even though charter bonds may be repaid with public funds if charter schools default. Both laws will go into effect on September 1. Finally, our rapid data analysis educated lawmakers about the inequities contained in the school funding bill House Bill 2. Our team raised awareness about the fact that the bill created hiring advantages for charter schools while still allowing charters to hire staggeringly high rates of uncertified teachers.

Next steps: Our Schools Our Democracy will continue to track and report on different rules for different schools and develop research-driven recommendations for future legislative sessions. In particular, we will work with lawmakers during the interim to address concerns raised during the legislative session about the high percentage of uncertified teachers in charter schools. Even more importantly, we will partner with school districts and community leaders to ensure that Texas families have the information they need to make decisions about where to send their children to school.