

One of the interim charges in the Texas Senate was to “study the approval, expansion and revocation of public charter schools in Texas.”

To that end, a [Senate Education Committee](#) hearing was recently held, and a couple of very interesting items came out of that hearing.

Senators heard — for the first time, I believe — that the often-stated phrase that charter schools in Texas have a 100,000-student waiting list is only partially true. [Texas Education Agency](#) staff reported that while the wait list exists, it applies only to specific charter schools.

Staff went on to say that when examining charter school capacity across the state, 108,000 seats are available over current enrollment.

Public tax dollars continue to expand charters even though 30 percent of the current capacity is unutilized.

This situation exists while we continue to allow the expansion of charter schools at a rapid pace. In fact, only about 250,000 students are enrolled in charter schools across the entire state of Texas — that’s about 5 percent of all public school students. That means that with a capacity of around 358,000, 108,000 seats are empty. That is more than 30 percent!

The other revelation was a new study on the funding of charter schools versus that of independent school districts. A well-respected educational consulting group released a report examining the various funding structures. Among its findings, according to a [Texas Association of School Boards](#) report, if ISDs of all sizes were funded like charters, total state support would increase by more than \$4.7 billion.

That \$4.7 billion would equate to about \$940 per public school student per year, or more than \$20,000 per elementary classroom. What a dramatic difference that could make to Texas public schools.

The playing field is built to give an advantage to charter schools. This is what we mean when we say funding for charter schools draws resources from independent school districts.

Even though the playing field is built to advantage charter schools, when comparisons are made between charters and ISDs, ISDs almost always perform better.

While we wait on a decision from the [Texas Supreme Court](#) in the funding lawsuit, one can only hope that the justices have access to this data.

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