

OPINION COMMENTARY

Charter schools are getting shortchanged in Texas Legislature

Scaling back proposal would not help schools that are actually delivering results.

By Yasmin Bhatia

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Ivan Rico, 17, left, and Alex Torres, 18, both 12th graders, work on laptops during a language and literature class at Uplift Luna Preparatory school, Thursday, Feb. 8, 2024, in Dallas. (Chitose Suzuki / Staff Photographer)

Texas has a choice to make — right now. Will we fund the public schools that are delivering results for underserved students, or will we let outdated policies hold them back?

This session, the Legislature has a chance to finally address one of the biggest inequities in Texas public education: facilities funding for public charter schools.

Sen. Angela Paxton's Senate [Bill 1750](#) would close half of the \$1,600 per-student gap between charters and traditional ISDs, a bold, necessary fix to a broken system put in place nearly 30 years ago to protect traditional ISDs from additional competition. But current drafts in the House and Senate scaled back the funding levels in SB 1750 significantly, closing just a quarter of the gap.

That's not enough. Not even close.

Public charter schools receive very little dedicated funding for facilities — pennies on the dollar to build classrooms, maintain buildings, or pay off construction debt. Everything comes from their general operating budgets, the same pool that pays for teachers, supplies and student supports.

At Uplift Education, we spent \$40 million on facilities last year across 45 schools, which accounts for 12% of our entire budget. The state provided just \$3.2 million in facilities funding. If we were funded like ISDs, we would receive \$35 million, a game-changer for our students and staff

As good stewards of public dollars, we've addressed this gap by making the right, but hard, choices that no school wants to make:

- Increased class sizes in primary grades to 28–32 students, with limited teaching assistants.
- Starting teacher salaries are \$3,000 below ISDs, hurting our ability to compete for talent.
- Teaching assistants and interventionists have been reduced, just as student needs are increasing.

This isn't just unsustainable. It's unjust.

We hear a lot about school choice. But charter schools, public schools serving mostly low-income, first-generation students, are being shortchanged. Parents and students are being penalized by making a choice within their public-school ecosystem.

Budgets reflect values. If Texas values student achievement, college and career readiness, and innovation in education, then it's time to fund the schools that deliver those outcomes.

Charters were once a pilot. That was 30 years ago. Today, they serve over 400,000 Texas students, nearly 23,000 at Uplift alone. The system has scaled, but the funding model hasn't. It's time to fix that.

Uplift students consistently outperform the state and local averages. Our alumni earn \$20,000 more annually than their Dallas County peers. Everything lawmakers say they want — career pathways, personalized learning, data-driven instruction — is already happening.

Yet we're being asked to do more with less. Every single year.

There's still time to fix this. Lawmakers must restore the original language in SB 1750 and close at least half the facilities funding gap. Anything less continues a pattern of inequity that hurts the very students Texas says it wants to support. There is already precedent to draw on this session to address funding formulas that no longer work. For example, Senate Bill 568, which has widespread support, amends the way the special education allotment was historically calculated. If the state can revise funding formulas in some areas, why can't it do the same for facilities funding for public charter schools?

This isn't about politics. It's about priorities.

Texas doesn't have a "budget" problem—it has a "will" problem. The question isn't whether we can afford to invest in public charter schools like Uplift.

The question is: Will we?

Yasmin Bhatia is CEO for Uplift Education, North Texas' largest charter school system.

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