

Texas Supreme Court Decision Assures Less Funding for Charter Schools Continues

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Orenda Charter Schools had joined in supporting 600 traditional independent school districts, the Texas Charter School Association, Texans for Real Efficiency and Equity, and other plaintiffs in the joint lawsuit against the State of Texas, claiming that the state funding for public education was unconstitutional on several grounds, including that sufficient funds are not provided to meet the states increasingly higher academic standards. The Texas Supreme Court, while admitting that the current funding system is “byzantine”, ruled on May 13 that it was adequate and met its minimum constitutional duties.

This recent decision not only denied that traditional schools need more funding, it also assures public charter schools will continue to receive far less money than traditional schools to meet the same academic requirements for many years to come. This makes our recently launched Gateway Legacy Capital Campaign, and existing Annual Gator Club Campaign at our Gateway College Preparatory School, all the more timely and justified

In spite of our financial challenges let’s not forget our charter school advantages, and some of the reasons you may have chosen one of our Orenda Charter School campuses. Unlike our traditional school rivals, public charter schools may cap enrollment, offer a specialized academic mission and innovative instructional methods, and we don’t have to enroll students with prior school discipline histories. This allows us to create a very unique school culture that can be a better fit for some students. For others, it may not be the right school. If this is the right school for your child, please consider your role in financially supporting the school to keep it viable and strong.

The Foundation School Program (FSP), set out in chapter 42 of the Education Code, is the primary source of funding for all public schools in Texas. The FSP functions to guarantee that each public school district (traditional and charter) has “adequate resources to provide eligible student a basic instructional program and facilities suitable to the student’s educational needs”. The total funding is based on the average daily attendance for each campus after filtering through an elaborate system of adjustments for that schools’ unique characteristics and specific student demographics. For Orenda Charter Schools it comes out to about \$6,800 per student in FSP funding per calendar year.

However, on top of FSP funding, traditional public school districts pull in even more money not available to public charter schools. Traditional ISD’s also have taxing authority and collect local

tax revenues from you and me that they supplement, on top of FSP funds, to cover the full costs for all the ISD's facility construction and on-going facility maintenance. When you add in this additional funding source, the local school districts near our charter campuses are bringing in approximately \$8,800 per student, or \$2,000 more per student than we have to work with. For a school district with 1,200 students, they will have about \$2.5 million dollars in additional revenues per year than our Gateway College Prep campus with the same number of students. ([click here for an independent funding study](#))

Since we are not magicians that can do more with less, we have established two important fund raising sources to make up this funding gap. Our Annual Gator Club Campaign helps to cover our annual operating expenses not covered by state FSP funds. The money you donate as a Gator Club Member allows us to keep our teacher compensation competitive with local ISD's, not transfer as much FSP revenue, intended for instruction, over to help cover our permanent construction debt service, offer quality UIL and other extracurricular programs, and thus better serve our charter school students. It would not be possible to offer competitive salaries, or our current academic and extracurricular programs without the generosity of these Gator Club families.

Our second fund raising source is the just launched Gateway Legacy Capital Campaign ([check out our student success stories here](#)). While the Annual Gator Club Campaign is to help pay for annual operating expenses not covered by FSP state funding, our Legacy Campaign is solely for new permanent construction that we can pay with cash, thus lowering our new construction debt service costs to an amount we can cover with our Annual Gator Club Campaign. We all know how overcrowded we are and what we don't have. Please remember, the reason we have these physical needs is because our first funding priority is always competitive compensation for the faculty, campus leaders, and support staff that educate and serve your children. Our second priority is funding the special programs we offer in academics, fine arts and athletics. We can only complete more permanent construction as more of our current families support our Annual Gator Club Campaign and new individuals step up to support our Legacy Capital Campaign.

To support the school that educates your children, or to increase your current tax-deductible charitable donations, please contact our Orenda Education office at 512-869-3020 or visit, www.orendaeducation.org and click on the "Giving" tab.