

stronger **TOGETHER**



**Annual Report 2020-21**

## STAFF

The TPCSA team is growing. This year, we added eight new staff members who are deeply invested in our mission of expanding educational opportunities for Texas students.

### Starlee Coleman

Chief Executive Officer

### Kara Belew

Senior Director of Regulatory Affairs

### Meredith Coolidge

Charter Schools Now Project Manager

### Katrina Corte

Special Events Manager

### Lauren Fleming

Director of Donor Relations

### Brandon Garcia

Senior Director of Community Engagement

### Laurel Garcia

Director of Continuing Education

### Rebecca Gieskes

Senior Director of Coalitions and Community Engagement

### Elizabeth Gunter

Development Project Manager

### Ariana Hauser

Executive Team Assistant

### Ryan Hecker

Managing Director, Charter Schools Now

### Natalie Kaharick

Chief Operating Officer

### Taylor Kerr

Communications Project Manager

### Ariele Kinney

Director of Community Engagement, North Texas

### Nadia D. Luna

Vice President of Member Engagement

### Timothy Mattison, Ph.D

Director of Research

### Shree Medlock

Vice President of Strategic Engagement

### Chelbi Mims

Director of Community Engagement, Southeast Texas

### Jessica Shopoff

Director of Policy

### Erin Tholen

Chief of Staff

### Brian Whitley

VP of Communications & Research

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Responsive Education Solutions

### Chris Barbic *Vice Chair*

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Austin Achieve Public Schools

### Fatih Ay

Harmony Public Schools

### Richard Baumgartner

Rise Academy

### Tom Castro

El Dorado Capital

### Eddie Conger

International Leadership of Texas

### Dr. Jennifer Goodman

Odyssey Academy

### Joe Hoffer

Schulman, Lopez, Hoffer & Adelstein, LLP

### Virginia Lannen

Pegasus School of Liberal Arts and Sciences

### Christopher Mayes

Beatrice Mayes Institute

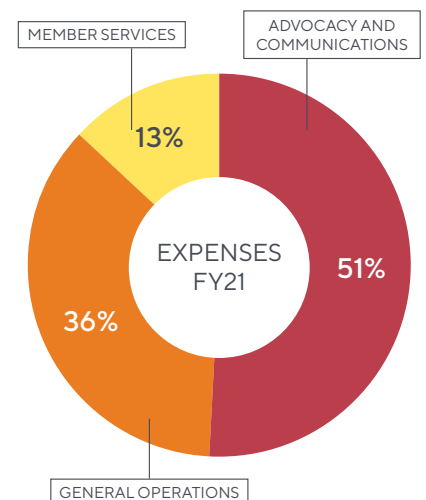
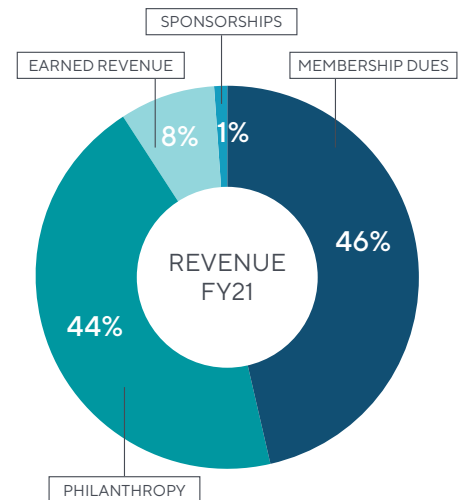
### Sehba Ali

KIPP Public Charter Schools

### Brent Wilson

Life School

## FINANCES



## COVER PHOTOS

Top Row, Left to Right: NYOS; Heritage Academy; Cedars International Academy; Cedars International Academy

Bottom Row, Left to Right: Beta Academy; KIPP Texas; Two Dimensions Academy; Heritage Academy

# Friends,

In so many ways, the past year tested us. We grappled with wrenching questions about criminal justice and democracy. We were punished by a winter storm. We endured all the complications of a lingering pandemic.

But Texas public charter schools never wavered in their commitment to families. Our community of 800 campuses and 365,000 students continued to raise the bar for what can be accomplished in public education.

It's my profound honor to help this community unleash its full potential. Throughout the past year, the Texas Public Charter Schools Association (TPCSA) has focused on making us stronger together—empowering our educators, emboldening our supporters, and eliminating our obstacles. The progress we've made fills me with energy and optimism.

Together, Texas public charter schools overcame political headwinds and pandemic-related chaos during the 87th Legislative Session. We defeated every last bill that would have singled out our schools with burdensome red tape. We prevented cuts to our funding. And we guided four out of five top policy priorities into law—successes that will prepare more students for enriching careers and keep millions of dollars in our classrooms.

To achieve those wins, we built a grassroots advocacy engine with unprecedented horsepower. More than 10,000 public charter school supporters from every corner of the state sent a total of 50,000 messages to lawmakers. The Teacher Advocacy Leadership Institute and inaugural Texas Charter Parent Council trained hundreds of advocates—many of whom courageously debunked myths and misinformation in the halls of power. All of these diverse voices struck a powerfully unified note: Texas deserves a public education system that works for every child.

Outside of advocacy, we invested in the growth of Texas' educational leaders and pioneers. The Association expanded and diversified its training for schools during this year of unique demands, including a robust and sophisticated learning platform. We were also thrilled to bring our community together for our first-ever virtual conference.

All of these milestones are beginnings, not endings. There is so much more to do when it comes to expanding support for your work, telling more of your stories, and dismantling the obstacles you face.

But TPCSA has never been more energized, or more prepared, to take this journey with you. As a state and a nation, we cannot get anything right—not the economy, not criminal justice, not health outcomes, not peace—without getting education right.

Texas public charter schools are getting it right for kids. Thank you for your support—and for everything you do to make us stronger together.

Sincerely,



**Starlee Coleman**  
CEO





# POWERFUL ADVOCACY

## THE 87TH LEGISLATIVE SESSION: WINNING FOR TEXAS STUDENTS

We make sure public charter schools have a seat at the policymaking table. Against a backdrop of budgetary uncertainty caused by the pandemic, as well as increasingly organized opposition, we knew the stakes would be high for the 2021 Texas Legislative Session.

Before the session, TPCSA helped member schools build more relationships with lawmakers, trained teachers and parents to be effective advocates, broadened our coalition of supporters, and built a robust legislative agenda. We also turbo-charged our grassroots communications so that elected officials would consistently hear from **thousands of supporters** about key bills.

These efforts secured charter school support from lawmakers—including committee chairs—on both sides of the aisle. Four sponsors of our highest-priority bills were Democrats and three were Republicans.

Together, the Texas public charter school community rallied to achieve important wins for students. With support from advocates across the state, we **passed four out of five policy priorities, blocked every bill** that proposed new charter-only red tape, and **protected** public charter school funding.

“Young people needed help, but the traditional public schools were not meeting their needs. The purpose of charter schools was to be that safety net, that other option in the public space to make sure we captured as many young people as we could. To make sure they stay in school... we started as a dropout recovery high school—and got a zero percent dropout rate. **Charter schools work.**”

**Representative Barbara Gervin-Hawkins**

(D-SAN ANTONIO)

“Charter schools wouldn’t exist if there weren’t a reason. Unlike a traditional public school, where people are required to go based on their ZIP code, no one is required to go to a charter school. They choose to go there.

There is a charter school in my district that requires students to speak three languages before they’re allowed to graduate: English, Spanish, and Chinese. They have a very high bar. They have a huge waiting list for those students who want more than they’re able to get in their [traditional] public school.

We have as much obligation to make available the best there is to students at the lower end, as we do those in the middle or at the high end—so they all have a choice.”

**Senator Bob Hall**

(R-GREENVILLE)

### POLICY WINS

With your help, we were able to pass important legislation that protects public charter school freedom. Here’s what we’re celebrating:

- **HB 3610:** Public charter schools may be **exempt from property tax on leased school buildings**. This fix may help keep school funds where they belong: in the classroom.
- **SB 346:** Public charter schools will now be allowed to apply for ‘JET’ program grants, which **fund career and technical training program equipment**. Our schools will now have access to the resources they need to prepare their students—the future workforce of Texas—to be successful and competitive in the job market.
- **SB 879:** A critical fix was made to the designation for Dropout Recovery Schools so they are **evaluated and funded fairly**. This will help the charter school campuses providing these specialized programs continue to serve some of our most vulnerable students.
- **HB 1525:** Eligibility for Teacher Incentive Allotment bonuses was expanded. Now our amazing public charter school teachers can **get the paychecks they deserve**.



More than

**10,000**

different charter school teachers, parents, board members, and supporters in 134 different counties sent emails or made calls to their lawmakers.



Teachers and parents in our signature training programs, the Teacher Advocate Leadership Institute and the Texas Charter Parent Council, made over

**400**

personal phone calls to their lawmakers.



In total, lawmakers received over

**50,000**

emails and calls from the community this session—and the results speak for themselves!

## LIFTING THE VOICES OF OUR COMMUNITY

Our community deserves to be heard. That's why we equip public charter school educators, parents, students, and board members to tell their stories in ways that resonate with lawmakers, the media, and the public.

### *Grassroots Advocacy*

We inform, inspire, and give advocates the opportunity to make a difference by connecting with elected officials.

Our grassroots base quadrupled in 2021. Their flood of passionate messages to lawmakers made a crucial difference during the Legislative Session.

*"I have one 13-year-old autistic daughter and my experience with charter schools is that my child did not fall through the cracks... [Charter schools] provide our children with hope and preparation for their futures. This is how our children compete on a global scale, with schools that see each child meet and exceed their potential. I implore you to reevaluate your views on charter schools."*

- Amber P., public charter school parent

"As the eldest of three and a product of Houston's East End, where many Latinos do not make it out of high school, graduating from college was not only a huge accomplishment for myself, but for my community.

After completing KIPP 3D Academy in eighth grade, I was awarded a full-scholarship to Sacred Heart School - Duchesne Academy in Houston. In 2014, I graduated from Baylor University. And I am happy to share that five years later, in 2019, my youngest sister graduated from the University of Houston.

This made us the only sibling set on both sides of my family to graduate from college. Three generations of KIPP made that happen... transforming our lives and generations of Lozanos until this day."

**Dolores Lozano**

BOARD MEMBER, KIPP TEXAS



## Meetings with Lawmakers

The Association organized **120 meetings** with state lawmakers and advocates before the legislative session to build momentum.

During the pandemic, we couldn't bring hundreds of our supporters to the Capitol—so we brought *even more* of them into offices across the state via Zoom during Lobby Week 2020.

During an action-packed 10 days in December, 100 members of the Legislature met with 500 charter school educators and supporters.



"This is great stage-setting for the upcoming session. Again, thanks for organizing – Bravo!"

**Mark Gregg**

FORMER YES PREP  
BOARD CHAIR



Lobby Week Meetings: 1. Senator Hancock 2. Representative Bowers 3. Senator Menendez 4. Representative Raney

## Building Schools' Capacity to Advocate

In 2020, TPCSA invested in statewide advocacy capacity by launching a multi-year grant program for our member schools. Twelve schools from across Texas hired or designated staff members to lead advocacy initiatives at their schools and help create a unified narrative about the positive impact of the statewide charter community.

Grant recipients appointed advocacy "captains" among parents, teachers, and board members and met regularly with us to coordinate strategic relationship building and storytelling. They hosted 50 meetings with state, local, and federal lawmakers and built new bridges with community leaders and coalition partners to amplify their work.

"Charter schools are helping students in low-income areas by closing achievement gaps."

**Representative  
Matt Shaheen**

(R-PLANO)





Judy Moore, TALI fellow and teacher at Austin Achieve Public Schools, celebrates graduation with Rep. Sheryl Cole (D-Austin)

## ELEVATING ADVOCACY LEADERS

In 2020–21, TPCSA expanded its flagship programs to recruit, train, and activate voices from our community. These programs are unlike any others in the country—they intensively develop the skills of advocates to create sustained momentum and deep relationships with elected officials.

### *Teacher Advocacy Leadership Institute*

TPCSA selected 27 teacher fellows from across Texas for the third class of our Teacher Advocacy Leadership Institute (TALI). For the first time, they were coached and mentored by five past fellows with experience advocating for public charter schools.

TALI fellows learned foundational skills—such as proper protocols and tips for meeting with lawmakers, writing op-eds, providing testimony, advocating on social media, and recruiting their peers—and heard from experts on the legislative process.

**In total, 160 educators took 812 actions on behalf of their students.**



### **Why I Advocate as a TEACHER**

“Charter schools hold the same belief and core value that I do: that every student deserves the opportunity and chance to succeed. I believe we should continue to fight for charter schools because their purpose aligns with my life’s purpose: to get students from communities like mine into college and for them to be fully prepared for higher education.”

#### **Joseph Frilot**

TALI FELLOW AND TEACHER AT IDEA  
MONTOPOLIS COLLEGE PREPARATORY



## Texas Charter Parent Council

No one can speak more passionately or authoritatively about the impact of a public charter school education than parents. That's why TPCSA launched the state's first-ever program dedicated to engaging mothers, fathers, grandparents, and guardians at a statewide scale.

The inaugural Texas Charter Parent Council empowered 556 parents who received monthly training sessions, special weekly updates about policy developments, and all the resources they need to join the front lines of charter school advocacy.

**Parents took 1,271 actions that built a lasting foundation for lawmaker relationships.**

### Why I Advocate as a PARENT

"I advocate for charter schools because each of my children have individual learning needs and we are glad we had a choice when we went into the public school system. We believe everyone should have the opportunity to choose what path is right for them and their children."

**Vicki Karban Adams**

PARENT, HARMONY PUBLIC SCHOOLS



## Education Advocates of the Year

In 2021, we announced our inaugural Education Advocates of the Year during National Charter Schools Week in May (after continuing our tradition of honoring a Teacher of the Year and Leader of the Year at our fall conference).

**All three awardees were recognized on the floor of the House or Senate with a formal resolution honoring their work.**



PARENT  
ADVOCATE OF THE YEAR

**Gregory Harrington**  
Harmony  
Science Academy

**Gregory Harrington** is a champion for the diverse needs of schools and families. He regularly meets with lawmakers on behalf of Central Texas parents, and he testified before the House Public Education Committee and the State Board of Education. His mission: inspire fellow parents to do the same.

*"One thing I've noticed is that the opposition is present and accounted for... and they are getting the attention of the policymakers. I also noticed that families who have lots to lose if charter schools are hindered or closed or stifled in success... are not 'making noise' to support the charter schools that our children and families are benefitting from."*



TEACHER  
ADVOCATE OF THE YEAR

**Judy Moore**  
Austin Achieve  
Public Schools

**Judy Moore** isn't just helping the students in her classroom excel. She's also helping other educators speak out for their students.

As a first-generation college graduate, Ms. Moore understands the power of public education in unlocking students' potential—and the power of teacher voices in leading communities forward.

*"One thing that sparks my passion is when things are unfair. I could not be content in my role as a teacher, looking my scholars in the face everyday, knowing that opportunities and access to high-quality education for them and 55,000 others is being withheld—and not just withheld, but threatened with policies that restrict the liberties we currently have."*



SCHOOL LEADER  
ADVOCATE OF THE YEAR

**Dr. Narciso Garcia**  
Vanguard Academy

**Dr. Narciso Garcia** is the superintendent of Vanguard Academy Charter Schools, a district with seven campuses near the US-Mexico border that are among the highest-performing in all of Texas.

This legislative session, Dr. Garcia spearheaded a bill — which was signed into law — that would give charter schools access to the Jobs & Education for Texans (JET) grant program, which funds equipment for career and technical education courses.

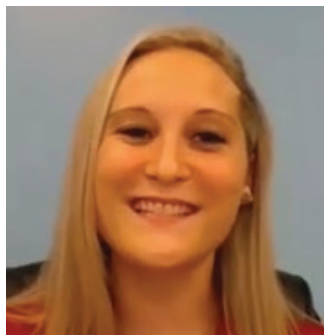
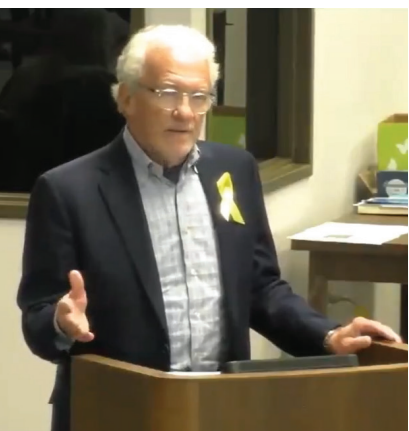
*"Charter schools like Vanguard Academy get to work collaboratively with parents to make sure ALL students and young people get out of poverty. We place children, young people, and families first."*

## ENGAGING THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

The 15 elected members of the State Board of Education (SBOE) vote on whether new public charter schools, recommended by the Commissioner of Education, will be allowed to open in Texas. Opponents often ask the SBOE to reject charter schools—and the will of families who need them—using wildly inaccurate information.

This year, we helped our advocates become a consistent presence at the SBOE's bimonthly meetings. Fourteen parents, teachers, and board members formally testified before the board, sharing their personal stories and setting the record straight.

In June, our advocates demonstrated strength in numbers. Community leaders, policy organizations, and **600 grassroots supporters** across the state delivered a letter to the board that powerfully summarized the need for more educational opportunities.



"We have almost 1,000 kids on our waitlist. There are 55,000 kids on charter school waitlists across Texas.

I heard the term 'saturation' today. It's hard for me to believe that charter schools in Austin or San Antonio are saturated when there are 55,000 kids on waitlists. It can't be.

Austin Achieve is not unique. Most charter schools in Texas produce results—measurably better, when comparing their peers in ISDs. This is what happens when you allow students and families to access the schools they need and deserve."

### Testimony of Andy Greenawalt

BOARD MEMBER, AUSTIN ACHIEVE PUBLIC SCHOOLS



# COMMUNICATIONS COMMAND CENTER



There are nearly **800** public charter school campuses in Texas, serving nearly **337,000** students.

**About Texas Students Rising Magazine**

TPCSA is committed to making sure every child in Texas has access to a high-quality public school that will set them on the path to future success. Public charter schools are an essential part of the public education system, and we are proud to support them. Our magazine is a quarterly publication of the Texas Public Charter Schools Association (TPCSA) and is distributed to policymakers, elected officials, and community and business leaders throughout Texas.

**2020 Public Charter School Teacher and Leader of the Year**

Michael Burke  
Honored with Harcus for Children Award

**2020 Award Recipients**

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ph: 512-584-8272

**TPCSA**  
TEXAS PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS  
TPCSA.ORG

**Beta Academy in Houston Ensures English Language Learners are Thriving**

English learners at Beta Academy in Houston are among the highest performing in the entire state. Their elementary-level students, for example, meet grade-level reading standards at the 95th highest rate out of nearly 550 school districts in Texas.

They're thriving thanks in large part to a literacy program that embraces and responds fully to their needs.

"When we wrote the charter application, we chose a research-based curriculum that was proven to benefit English learners," said Helen Abernathy, the school's Executive Director of Research & Development. "When I taught those students in a large district, the experience just wasn't designed to work."

At Beta Academy, an Austin public charter school, 22% of students are English learners. Most come from Spanish-speaking families, although other home languages, particularly Vietnamese, are also represented.

One key to their success: Students who are still learning English don't feel isolated or singled out. They use cooperative learning and read with partners and in groups alongside native English speakers. Everyone receives explicit direction to talk about words that challenge them, form a team consensus, and report back to the class together.

"It's amazing how even our youngest scholars have rich conversations with their teams about things that they're excited about," Abernathy says.

This spirit of collective learning also means students can easily apply the concepts and strategies they learn while reading to other subjects, such as social studies and science.

Students learn easily well from other kids," Abernathy says.

Similarly, all students at Beta Academy are encouraged to support English learners in their instruction. English is a second language for many teachers and staff, too. "I push it to classrooms, rather than pulling English learners out of class. This prevents anyone from losing instructional time and builds a culture of high expectations – a belief that all students can, and will, learn at a high level."

Beta Academy's approach also incorporates flexibility and responsiveness. The school organizes in-class reading groups based on student reading level, as tracked by regular assessments, and moves students based on their progress. In the future, it's easier for teachers to tailor their guidance to specific students. That's especially helpful with such a large population of English learners.

School leaders also place a premium on fostering close relationships between teachers and students. English learners feel connected to the community in a deeply personal way. Esther Martin, the school's ESL director, recalls one seventh grader who didn't feel completely confident with her language skills. But her teacher worked so closely with her, and inspired her so much, that she scored at the advanced high level on writing.

That kind of success isn't uncommon. In 2019, all of Beta Academy's middle school English learners (9th through eighth grade) were at least "approaching grade level" on the Reading STAAR exam. So were 75% of third graders and 85% of fourth graders.

"It's all about how much our teachers care," Martin says.

## COMMUNICATING IN FRESH WAYS

While TPCSA's community engagement team engaged lawmakers and community leaders on the ground, the communications team provided support through the air—delivering information and stories that reinforce strategic messages. New projects in 2021 include:

- The launch of a quarterly magazine, ***Texas Students Rising***, which is mailed to thousands of community leaders across the state. Each issue features long-form profiles of parents, educators, and board members and includes summaries of our research findings.
- A 2021 resource webpage for lawmakers. In just a few clicks, elected officials can download profiles of their district to learn about the public charter schools they represent; read one-pagers about our highest-priority bills; and see our latest research findings.
- An informative months-long digital campaign for members of the Texas House, Senate, and State Board of Education. These regular messages packaged research findings and shared engaging content containing what we know Capitol goesers needed to hear as they made important decisions about public education.
- Live coverage of the action that unfolded during the 87th Legislative Session to allow our advocates to follow along in real time as supporters testified, debates heated up, and votes were counted.

**Texas 2020 Public Charter School Teacher and Leader of the Year are Fierce Advocates for Students**

The Texas public charter school community is comprised of dedicated and fearless advocates for students and their families. Last fall, the Texas Public Charter Schools Association was proud to honor Christine Corrales, from IDEA College Preparatory in San Juan as Teacher of the Year, and Edward Conger, Superintendent of International Leadership of Texas as Leader of the Year. Here are their stories:

**Christine Corrales** is a Latinx, single mom and a veteran art teacher. When accepting the award, Corrales shared that her son, Josiah, is a 12-year-old student with a learning disability. She said, "The opportunity to receive this award is a huge honor for me. It's a recognition of the hard work and dedication of our students and teachers. It's a recognition of the hard work and dedication of our students and teachers. It's a recognition of the hard work and dedication of our students and teachers."

**Edward Conger** is the Superintendent of International Leadership of Texas (ILT), a public charter school. He has been in the role for over 10 years. He said, "I'm honored to be named Leader of the Year. It's a recognition of the hard work and dedication of our students and teachers. It's a recognition of the hard work and dedication of our students and teachers. It's a recognition of the hard work and dedication of our students and teachers."

**2020 award recipients urge their colleagues to be a voice for all public school students.**

There can be no doubt that Ms. Corrales loves teaching. In fact, she cannot imagine doing anything else. During the pandemic, she has played her role as a teacher and leader by collaborating on articles and presentations about effective remote teaching. She also did not want her students to miss out on learning at home so she designed a series of prompts to encourage her students to improve all aspects from common math and science they could find at home.

Her colleagues recognize Ms. Corrales as a fierce advocate for students, parents, and the broader charter school community. She has a clear message to her fellow educators: "To understand 'their why' for teaching at a Texas public charter school, to stand up and speak up, and to be the loudest voice in the room on behalf of all public school students."

After serving 22 years as a United States Marine Corps infantry officer, Conger understands the importance of ensuring that all children have access to high-quality education. Although Ed has given his the most job because of his understanding of teaching, principals, and education, as Founder CEO and Superintendent of International Leadership of Texas (ILT), Ed is laser-focused on providing that high-quality education to the more than 20,000 students attending ILT Texas schools. The idea is to say that there are only two kinds of adults at ILT Texas: those people who teach and those people who support the people who teach.

As a successful middle school and high school principal, Conger knows that when students are held to high expectations for both academic excellence and appropriate behavior, they will be the most successful. As a result, all ILT Texas schools provide students with character education, which is a core component of the ILT Texas curriculum. ILT Texas provides a safe, secure, and nurturing learning environment where all students are held to the same high standards and that they will be prepared for the highly competitive, international world.

The pandemic has not slowed Ed down on his commitment to his school communities. He skillfully guided his schools through this challenging time by creating frameworks for both in-person and remote learning that

**TEXAS PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS ARE PROVIDING CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES WITH THE TOOLS THEY NEED TO REACH THEIR HIGHEST POTENTIAL. SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS ENROLLED IN TEXAS PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS HAVE HIGHER READING PROFICIENCY GROWTH, MORE INCLUSION IN GENERAL EDUCATION CLASSROOMS, AND A GREATER LIKELIHOOD OF ATTENDING COLLEGE. HERE ARE A FEW EXAMPLES OF HOW PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS ARE EDUCATING CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES, BOTH PRIOR TO AND DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC.**

**EL PASO: IDEA Public Schools**

IDEA Public Schools is a public charter school in El Paso, Texas, that provides a vision of college for all children and ensuring every child succeeds. As schools closed for in-person learning as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, special education teachers not only provided materials tailored to each scholar and implemented flexible schedules by partnering with parents, they also identified learning materials frequently found in homes and developed how students could use them all from home so that their learning continued.

**Lubbock: The Betty Mc Combs School of Education Innovation**

The Betty Mc Combs School of Education Innovation is focused on helping students achieve their potential by ensuring readiness to graduate and employment. This is done with highly specialized and individualized instruction. While this approach is beneficial to all students, it is particularly helpful for students with dyslexia and/or ADHD.

**AUSTIN: Austin Achieve Public Schools**

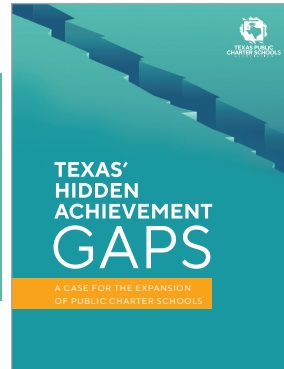
Post-school outcomes for scholars with disabilities are an essential component of Austin Achieve Public Schools' whole-child approach to education. Despite a global pandemic, the district launched an IB program this school year to provide continued services to scholars after graduation to prepare them for sustainable employment and independence. Led by Brooke Hilborn, the district's director of special education, the program has already experienced success, including one scholar achieving the status of working professionally with animals. The district is proud to have a scholar from the program, Benjamin Peltz, focusing on their passion: computer science and cybersecurity. Austin Achieve Public Schools is committed to ensuring the bar continues to be set high for all, regardless of any barriers a scholar may face.

# DATA-DRIVEN STORYTELLING

Texas public charter schools are achieving extraordinary outcomes for students. But for too long, the data behind that story remained buried in government spreadsheets or saved on unseen hard drives.

The TPCSA research team has changed the game—unearthing, analyzing, and giving life to the hard evidence that public charter schools are delivering on their promise.

**Texas' Hidden Achievement Gaps**, a study that found public charter schools are dramatically reducing racial and economic disparities in academic outcomes—in contrast to even the state's top-rated ISDs



Research Brief No. 4  
APRIL 2021

**English Language Learners Fly Higher in Texas Public Charter Schools**

BY TIMOTHY MATTISON, Ph.D.

**More EL Students Attain Charter Schools**

**Texas Public Charter Schools Have Higher Rates of ELLs**

Over the past two years, English language learners (ELLs) have been the fastest-growing group in Texas public schools. In 2019, there were over 1.5 million ELL students in Texas public schools. This growth is driven by a combination of factors, including immigration, birthright citizenship, and the increasing number of ELL students in Texas public schools.

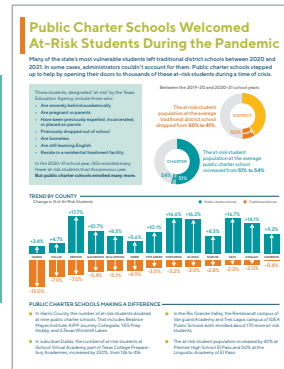
Public charter schools have a higher percentage of ELL students than traditional district schools. In 2019, public charter schools had a 10% ELL enrollment rate, compared to a 7% rate for traditional district schools.

Public charter schools also have a higher percentage of ELL students who are high-achieving. In 2019, public charter schools had a 15% ELL enrollment rate for students who scored in the top 25% of the state on the STAAR test, compared to a 10% rate for traditional district schools.

Public charter schools also have a higher percentage of ELL students who are low-achieving. In 2019, public charter schools had a 15% ELL enrollment rate for students who scored in the bottom 25% of the state on the STAAR test, compared to a 10% rate for traditional district schools.

**English Language Learners Fly Higher in Texas Public Charter Schools**, which found that public charter schools are helping English learners learn the language quickly and translate their progress into academic success

**Public Charter Schools Welcomed At-Risk Students During the Pandemic**, an analysis of how many of the state's most vulnerable students turned to charter schools during a time of crisis



**Serving Vulnerable Students: Public Charter School Success Stories**

**Texans Can Academics**

When Eddie grew up with his mother, brother, and sister, a single family mom was working with 10th grade. Eddie was a high-achieving student, but his mother was struggling to keep up with his needs. Eddie was a high-achieving student, but his mother was struggling to keep up with his needs. Eddie was a high-achieving student, but his mother was struggling to keep up with his needs.

**Raul Yaguelino Schools for Success**

Raul Yaguelino is a high-achieving student who is currently in 10th grade. He is a high-achieving student who is currently in 10th grade. He is a high-achieving student who is currently in 10th grade. He is a high-achieving student who is currently in 10th grade.

**How Public Charter Schools Are Funded**

We are often asked about the funding for public charter schools in Texas. The confusion is understandable, since a special interest group continually circulate incomplete and misleading information as they seek to exploit economic uncertainty caused by the pandemic.

As the public conversation about education funding continues, it's important to be clear on the facts. Below, you will find a short and easy-to-understand explanation of how public charter school funding actually works.

**Key Takeaways**

- Public charter schools do not receive more funding than ISDs. Overall, charter schools receive less funding than ISDs, averaging 10% less.
- Charter schools receive no local revenue, which accounts for most of their funding. Most of their funding comes from the state, which is why they are not subject to local property taxes.
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**1. Where the Money Comes From: State vs. Local Sources**

Charter schools do not receive more funding than ISDs. Overall, charter schools receive less funding than ISDs, averaging 10% less.

**How Public Charter Schools are Funded**, which refutes the common myth that public charter schools are "more expensive" than traditional district schools—and actually receive less per-student funding

Once TPCSA has crunched the numbers, we make sure the findings get into the hands of elected officials by directly sharing them and equipping our advocates to do the same. We pitch the research to journalists, author op-eds, create social media campaigns, and produce infographics for our coalition of advocates to use and share.

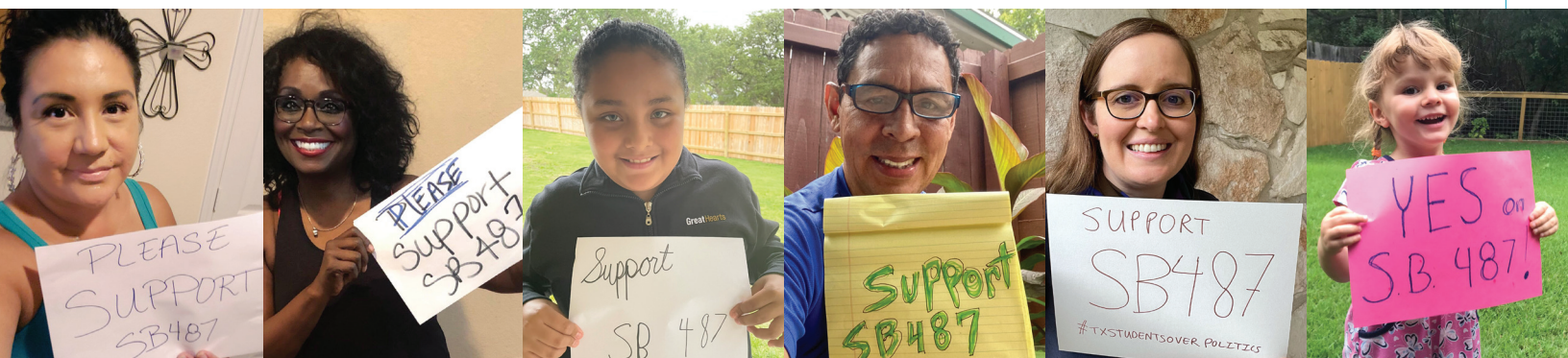


## STRATEGIC SOCIAL MEDIA

Our community leverages social media to tell our stories and reach lawmakers—who increasingly turn to Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to gauge public sentiment and decide what issues to prioritize.

TPCSA ran 22 strategic campaigns on social media to share key messages and stories. We coordinated with our community to create a sustained and unified drumbeat of content.

- Lawmaker “Thank Yous” after Lobby Week
- Black History Month Celebration
- National Charter Schools Week and National School Choice Week
- Welcome, Freshmen Lawmakers!
- A Did You Know? campaign at the Capitol, which was viewed 15,000 times
- A “virtual march” ahead of a key bill hitting the House floor
- Live coverage of four hearings, with social media posts being viewed and shared more than 22,000 times.





# RESPONSIVE MEMBER SUPPORT

TPCSA continually finds new ways to support, train, and advise our member schools so they can focus on the hard work of educating the state's leaders of tomorrow.

### **Our First-Ever Virtual Conference**

We originally planned on gathering our community of schools and sponsors in San Antonio for the largest statewide charter school-specific annual conference. The pandemic prevented that from happening—so we brought the festivities to them.

This year's conference convened 600 champions for change in a highly-collaborative virtual event. Spanning more than 60 breakout sessions, the conference provided a platform for brainstorming, training, and sharing.

Attendees made choices to suit their needs, heard directly from experts, and were inspired by keynote speakers such as Shawn Hardnett, CEO of Statesmen Academy for Boys DC Public Charter School, and Keri Rodrigues, founding president of the National Parents Union.

During the conference, we honored our 2020 Teacher of the Year and Leader of Year for their work as fearless innovators during a challenging time.



TEACHER OF THE YEAR  
**Cristina Correa**  
IDEA Public Schools

Cristina Correa is a Latina, single mom, and veteran art teacher. During the pandemic, she shared her insights and ideas with other educators by collaborating on articles and presentations about effective remote art teaching. She also created lessons that encouraged her students to improvise art supplies from common materials they could find at home.

*"It was school choice that led me to IDEA Public Schools 12 years ago. It was an opportunity to innovate, create and develop solutions that help ensure all of our students, 100% of them, have access to high-quality, rigorous education.*

*Choice calls us to awaken every morning and do the work ... it calls us to listen and really hear with intention so that bridges can be built and communities can remain intact."*



LEADER OF THE YEAR  
**Eddie Conger**  
International  
Leadership of Texas

Eddie Conger, a 20-year Marine Corps veteran and former principal, leads his district of 21,000 students with creativity and drive—including the implementation of a unique curriculum that creates trilingual graduates with strong character.

*"At IL Texas, our true secret sauce is our 120 grade-level administrators who make everything work. They teach a full class load and they ensure that all the teachers on their team have the support to lead their students.*

*And it is the 1,300 teachers themselves who are the most important. At IL Texas, there are only two kinds of people: those who teach and those who support those who teach. And at this time of pandemic it is the teachers who are now on the front line and are our first responders."*

### **What Attendees Said About TPCSA's 2020 Conference**

*"I actually LOVED that it was virtual!!!! We were able to 'see' one another, learn, and still be at our schools! Thank you!"*

*"I loved the ability to choose whatever session I wanted and view it virtually on my own time. The self care and equity sessions were extremely powerful."*

*"This is my favorite conference to attend. I am your #1 fan. As a leader this allows me time to connect, learn, grow and network with other leaders. It opens my toolbox to explore innovative practices and supports to take back to my campus."*

## Reviews of TPCSA's Training

"(I liked) the side by side for IEP and 504; excellent resources provided."  
- KIPP Texas teacher

"Extremely relevant for supporting achievement as students return to the building."  
- KIPP Texas teacher

## DID YOU KNOW?

More than **100** teachers attended our "Teacher Institute for STAAR," an all-day experience designed for charter school teachers.

"I felt that the mock interview was outstanding and I would absolutely recommend that service to other applicants."

**Dr. Ann Ziker**  
*Thrive with Autism*

## Best-in-Class Training & Guidance

TPCSA expanded its guidance opportunities for school leaders and board members this year—including by hiring two new staff, developing a library of 40 on demand sessions, and providing formal guidance on Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) II funds. In 2020, education leaders completed **more than 5,000 hours of training**.



Now, with Charter CEntal, public charter school staff and board members can access every course in one convenient location, as well as view the training progress for everyone in their charter school district to help with required state reporting.

## Preparing Charter School Applicants

Each year, the State Board of Education considers Commissioner-recommended applications to open new public charter schools. Applicant teams go through a rigorous vetting process before standing in front of the SBOE. Only four out of five applicants go on to open their doors to students seeking more educational opportunities.

To ensure strong teams with excellent educational models make it through the process, TPCSA developed an immersive experience that prepares applicants to stand before the SBOE. Our staff carefully reviewed applications, set up a mock interview, and provided detailed feedback to applicant teams.

## Giving Schools a Seat at the Regulatory Table

Public charter schools face a gauntlet of regulatory obstacles and red tape that impedes them from doing what they do best—unleashing innovation and flexibility so that students receive the highest-quality education.

TPCSA works directly with the Texas Education Agency (TEA), the State Board of Education (SBOE), coalition partners, and our member schools to remove these hurdles. Through feedback from our community, TPCSA developed a high-impact regulatory agenda and will advocate for more fair and consistent application of statutes and regulations for public charter schools.

### Our recent wins include:



Stopping proposed regulations that would have forced public charter schools to follow ISD rules in order to receive science lab equipment grants.



Ensuring TEA provides a timeline and framework for renewal and expansion amendments so that schools that are successfully serving students can grow—and meet the needs of more families.



Successfully advocating for improvements to the Generation 27 New Charter School Application, including many more resources for support.



Protecting staffing flexibility for public charter schools as it relates to teacher certification requirements under HB 4545 (87th Legislative Session), ensuring that public charter school staff can meet students where they're at after pandemic learning.



Successfully advocating for the SBOE to significantly expand the Permanent School Fund (PSF) Bond Guarantee dollar amount, which lowers interest rates for all public charter schools using the program.



Gateway College Preparatory School



Heritage Academy



Richard Milburn Academy—Houston



School of Science and Technology—Northwest

"Like many of our charter school peers, Austin Achieve is providing a high-quality public school education in neighborhoods where the traditional ISD schools aren't at the level that the community deserves. The vast majority of kids we serve come from low-income backgrounds and will be the first in their families to go to college.

As I see this impact at Austin Achieve, it brings me pride to serve on the TPCSA board of directors as we work together to grow the impact of public charter schools in Texas so that we can provide more public school options in communities that need them the most."

JOHN ARMBRUST

*TPCSA Board Member*

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