

EDUCATION

School choice does not serve students

Education savings accounts detrimentally impact public schooling

EDITORIAL

From glitchy laptops to overcrowded classes to unreliable air conditioning or heating, public school students and teachers experience numerous challenges on a daily basis due to a lack of funding. Meanwhile, Texas lawmakers are pushing to allocate more taxpayer dollars to private schools rather than addressing the significant funding barriers that are currently impacting the public education system.

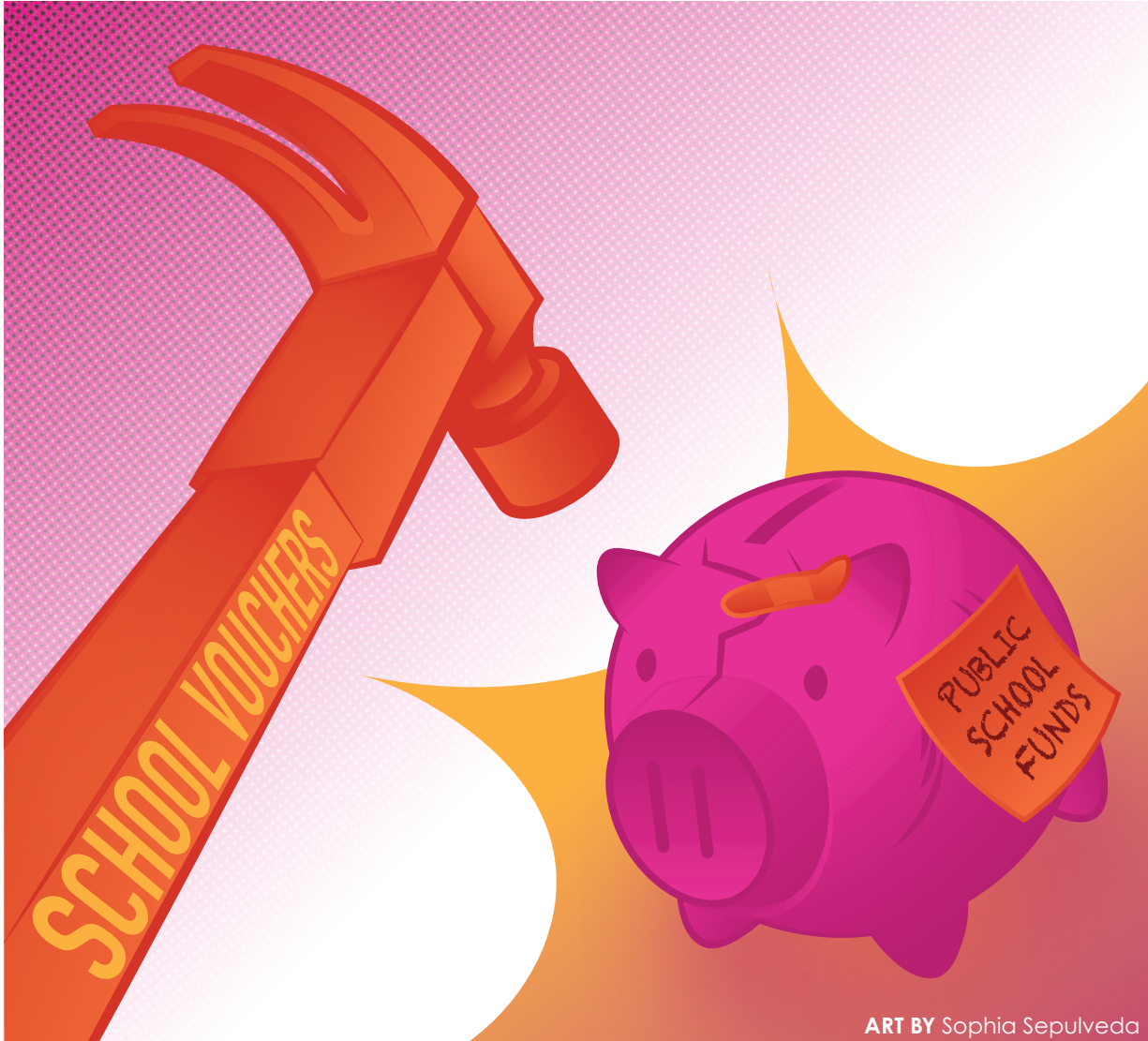
On February 5, 2025, Senate Bill 2 was passed, with the goal of implementing an Education Savings Account (ESA) program (also known as school vouchers). School vouchers use tax-payer dollars to fund subsidies which help families pay for private school tuition.

So, what's the catch? The funds used to subsidize school vouchers are often diverted from public school funding. With approximately 73% of Texas schools already being underfunded, according to the Rice University Kinder Institute, these are resources that public schools cannot afford to lose. Therefore, the Dispatch Editorial Board believes that the implementation of a school voucher program would come at the expense of Texas public schools and students.

Public school budgets are already stretched thin. For example, on March 1, 2025, the Austin Independent School District announced a hiring and spending freeze resulting from growing financial troubles.

If students are incentivized to switch to private schools, public schools will suffer from additional strains on funding as more students make the switch from a public to a private education. This would make it more difficult to address staffing shortages, impacting students' ability to receive a quality education and possibly forcing some campuses to close.

Furthermore, the school voucher system would not serve all Texas students equally.



ART BY Sophia Sepulveda

According to the Texas Tribune, Senate Bill 2 has established a low-income threshold of roughly \$156,000, meaning that families whose income is anywhere between the federal poverty level and this threshold will receive the same level of assistance (about \$10,000 a year). The problem with this is that, for families making significantly less than \$156,000 per year, a \$10,000 stipend would be insufficient, especially given the fact that private school tuition in Texas can range from around \$11,000 to over \$40,000 a year.

Finally, school vouchers and private schools often lack accountability and oversight which is a major concern given that ESAs are funded by taxpayer dollars. Private schools essentially have complete control over the material they teach,

who they choose to admit, and methods of instruction. Parents shouldn't have to worry about their taxes going towards unregulated schools rather than their own child's education.

Although some argue that ESAs provide parents with a choice of where to send their kids to school, families often relinquish numerous protections in opting for the voucher system. Private schools are not required to adhere to numerous civil rights provisions such as protections established under the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Americans with Disabilities Act. As a result, choice and autonomy ultimately fall into the hands of private schools rather than families.

Instead of debating over the controversial issue of school vouchers, Texas lawmakers

should focus their energy on ensuring that all public schools have adequate funding and access to resources. Lawmakers should allocate more taxpayer dollars to public education which could be used to improve campus facilities, hire more teachers, and guarantee a quality education to all students, reducing the appeal of switching to private schools.

A hopeful future is only possible if younger generations are able to receive a well-rounded education that prepares them to make positive contributions in their communities. Public schools provide students with the opportunity to engage in meaningful conversations with peers of diverse backgrounds; a critical experience in a world that constantly tries to tear us apart. ■

HEALTH

Caffeine addiction poses serious health risks



Kate Alexander
Dispatch Reporter

Questions? Concerns? Email:
bowie.journalism@gmail.com

Caffeine energizes the body, and can provide the pick-me-up needed to make it through the day after studying all night. It's no shock that many teens consume some sort of caffeine on a daily basis, whether it's in the form of energy drinks, coffee, or soda. Today, 73% of teens drink caffeine on a daily basis. While caffeine does come with its perks, many of its negative effects are overlooked.

Caffeine can cause health issues, leading to decline in performance at school and work, and caffeine addiction. Teens should stop consuming caffeine to prevent the negative impacts and effects it may have on them in the future.

With a combination of both short and

long term effects, caffeine can be harmful to someone's health. According to research done by the National Library of Medicine, excessive caffeine intake can result in heart palpitations, headaches, and nausea. Research also revealed that there have been deaths linked to the excessive consumption of energy drinks.

Energy drinks contain an average of 200 milligrams of caffeine in a single can, and doctors recommend that teens and adults limit their caffeine intake to 100 milligrams a day. Putting one's health and life at risk for a drink that only provides energy for half a day, doesn't seem like a fair trade-off in the long run.

Consuming excessive amounts of caffeine can also lead to Caffeine Use Disorder, or a severe caffeine addiction. Many people who consume caffeine become dependent on it to keep them awake or alert. Excessive caffeine users tend to struggle reducing their caffeine intake once the consumption of

caffeine becomes a routine. Studies by the National Library of Medicine state that caffeine has side-effects similar to drugs. Both cause a person's brain to believe that they need to consume these substances because their body or health depend on it. Cutting off a drug addiction can lead to many struggles, similar to those caffeine addicts may experience. While there are treatments to help combat a caffeine addiction, there are very few, and they are difficult to access.

Caffeine can also lead to performance issues, whether school-related, at work, or while playing a sport. Some effects of caffeine can include behavioral problems and trouble focusing. These are factors that play into many people's everyday lives. Having trouble focusing can lead to a rapid decline in performance during school or work which can lead to problems like falling behind, failing, or even getting fired.

The effect caffeine has on behavior can also negatively impact day-to-day life and social activities. Caffeine can cause mood swings and behavior issues like bursts of anger, stress, or irritation. All of these issues tie into teen's social lives, creating conflicts in their everyday activities, and possibly continuing throughout their lives.

Although caffeine has many negative effects, it can help individuals stay awake, alert, and active. Whether it's an energy drink or a cup of coffee, consuming caffeine is a fast and easy way many people get energy for the day.

That said, the negative effects of caffeine outweigh the benefits, and there are many alternatives to caffeine. Simply starting by adjusting sleep habits can make a world of difference. Having a balanced and healthy diet and staying hydrated also helps people stay energized throughout the day.

While occasionally using caffeine to get through the day won't have extreme effects, depending on it as a source of energy, continuously, is dangerous. Relying on caffeine is not worth the potential health risks of a drink that can't even provide energy for a full day. People need to be aware of the dangers caffeine can bring regarding their safety and well being. ■

ART BY Layne Foxcroft



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4103 W. Slaughter Lane
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