

The Texas State Democratic Executive Committee unanimously passed a resolution on Saturday March 15, 2014 in opposition to SOPS (Save Our Public Schools):

WHEREAS Houston billionaire John Arnold, a hedge-fund manager and former Enron trader, is bankrolling an effort to transform all of the Dallas Independent School District into a so-called “home-rule charter district” that would not be subject to essential safeguards in state law for students, parents, teachers, and citizens of the district;

WHEREAS John Arnold is notorious for funding a nationwide attack on public employees’ pension funds, including state pension funds for school employees, and for funding various efforts to privatize the operation of public schools, including substantial financing of organizations that promote private-school vouchers;

WHEREAS the “home-rule charter district” idea that Arnold wants to impose on Dallas ISD is the brainchild of former Republican state Rep. Kent Grusendorf of Arlington, who managed to insert this option into state law in 1995 as a vehicle for nullifying many educational quality standards and safeguards in the Education Code and for facilitating private takeover of public schools;

WHEREAS a “home-rule district charter” in Dallas ISD would be a Trojan horse allowing John Arnold and his allies, in the name of local control, to kill state class-size limits for most K-4 classrooms, eliminate teachers’ professional contracts, wipe out parents’ and students’ and teachers’ rights to due process in student-discipline matters, nullify the entire parental-rights chapter in the Education Code, and eliminate accountability to the community through an elected school board;

WHEREAS the wholesale “charterization” of Dallas ISD through a “home-rule district charter” designed to suit the likes of John Arnold would actually be the very opposite of local control, transferring power from the parents and citizens in the neighborhoods of Dallas ISD—especially predominantly minority and economically disadvantaged neighborhoods—to special-interest elites and private operators likely to double down on top-down policies that already have disproportionately hurt those communities within Dallas ISD, like recent controversial school closures and layoffs of school personnel;

WHEREAS the “home-rule district charter” scheme in Dallas ISD would undermine genuinely democratic, grass-roots efforts to improve struggling schools, such as (1) community-initiated school turnarounds that provide wraparound community health and social services at school to students and their families, thereby building up rather than tearing down neighborhoods and (2) in-district “campus charters” initiated by teachers and parents at a campus working together with community partners to provide innovative educational programs while preserving important state safeguards such as class-size limits, due process in student discipline, and teachers’ contract rights;

WHEREAS the “home-rule district charter” initiative in Dallas is part of a national campaign by self-styled “education reformers” like John Arnold that is ultimately about profits, not about kids, employing a clear strategy to underfund our public schools, declare them a failure, contract out those schools to private operators, disenfranchise parents and community stakeholders, and deprofessionalize teaching;

WHEREAS the state Democratic Party has a duty to help ensure that all Texas Democrats and all supporters of public education see through the false rhetoric of “home rule” and “local control” that masks the real agenda described above;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Texas Democratic Party stands in opposition to the “home-rule district charter” proposal now being promoted in Dallas ISD and rejects its underlying agenda of privatization of control over public schools and destruction of democratic school governance.