

Opt out of vaccines? It's Texas' cop-out

Personal choice is fine, but not at public's expense

Here's what Gov. Greg Abbott is really saying when he, or his office, endorses allowing opt-outs for vaccines: He's OK with your personal choice to endanger an infant with the measles. He's comfortable with a resurgence of whooping cough, or the occasional outbreak of preventable diseases and viruses.

It's all just another brick in the rhetorical wall of personal freedom.

As Abbott's spokeswoman recently noted, when it comes to this issue, Texas strikes "the right balance of requiring vaccinations while still allowing parents to opt out under certain circumstances."

More like any circumstances. To opt out of vaccines "for reasons of conscience," all parents need is a signed and notarized affidavit. That's it, thanks to a 2003 law that created this



JOSH BRODESKY

outbreak of conscientious exemptions.

In the 2003-04 school year, 2,314 students enrolled in private and public schools without their shots for reasons of conscience. By last school year, more than 38,000 students had done so.

That's a startling growth rate that stands out as a public health fail.

"Our code no longer serves the needs of public safety and public health," said Dr. Ruth Berggren, director of the Center

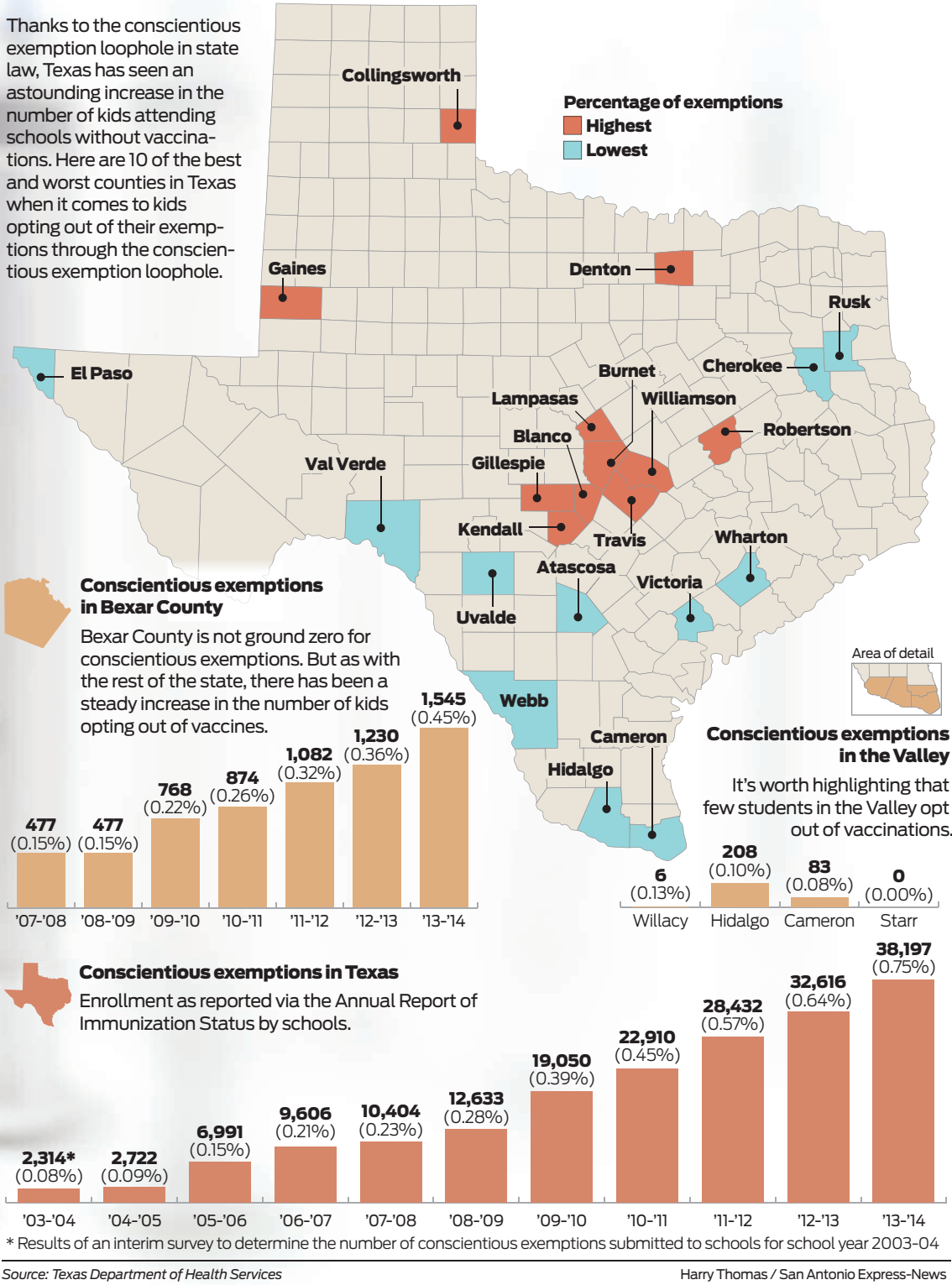
for Medical Humanities & Ethics at the University of Texas Health Science Center San Antonio. "When people exercise what they believe is their right to not be vaccinated, they are in fact putting other people in their community at risk."

Now, you could argue that 38,000 kids is a tiny number for a state as big as Texas. Plenty of officials have done so. And this is true, except when it isn't. There are pockets and places where opt-out levels are pushing the edges of public health, safety and, yes, common sense.

Consider Denton County, where 4,906 students, more than 4 percent of those in schools, weren't vaccinated for reasons of conscience last school year. That's up from 401 students in 07-08, by the way.

Or consider Travis County where 95 percent of kindergar-

Vaccines continues on F6



Readers offer their 'most influential' lists

We asked readers to respond to our choices for our list of the 20 most influential San Antonians since 1865. We published this on Jan. 25, as part of the newspaper's commemoration of its 150 years in business. There was agreement, disagreement and additions. We've excerpted some of their comments because of space considerations but here's what they said.

The Editorial Board

A champion

I was surprised to see that Gordon Hartman was not included in the "20 most influential" or even in the expanded "50 influential San Antonians." No one has done more for the disabled in this community. Morgan's Wonderland is the only facility of its kind in the world.

Gordon Hartman has championed not only the disabled but

all kids with his soccer team and stadium.

Thirdly, he is one of our most valuable philanthropists.

He needs to be recognized for this.

Patricia A. Ireland

Cockrell's wins

Your listing of Mayor Lila Cockrell's achievements left out her two most significant ones: taking on Oscar Wyatt and Coastal States Gas, breaking his natural gas monopoly, and leading to the creation of Valero.

Second was her taking on Union Pacific's monopoly of coal shipments from Wyoming, introducing rail competition from Burlington Northern, and controlling transportation charges.

Joe Schaefer, Universal City

Medical school

As a lifelong resident of San Antonio, I was quite interested in a Sunday Opinion edition dealing with some of the historical occurrences in our community over the last 150 years. While the piece provided numerous vignettes ... the most important event of the last 50 years in San Antonio went unmentioned and those primarily responsible for it also unmentioned.

San Antonio in 1950 was the largest city in the United States without a medical school ... With the visions of several very notable individuals and organizations such as the Bexar County Medical Society and the Chamber of Commerce, the San Antonio Medical Foundation

Readers continues on F6



Express-News file photo

A reader suggests that Gordon Hartman, owner of the San Antonio Scorpions soccer team, should have made the Editorial Board's list of the 20 most influential San Antonians since 1865.