



OPPOSE SCHOOL VOUCHERS

THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD NOT SPEND TAXPAYER MONEY ON PRIVATE SCHOOLS

Open and non-discriminatory in their acceptance of all students, American public schools are a unifying factor among the diverse range of ethnic and religious communities in our society. Public schools are the only schools that must meet the needs of all students. They do not turn children or families away. They serve children with physical, emotional, and mental disabilities, those who are extremely gifted and those who are learning challenged. Vouchers undermine these goals by taking taxpayer money out of the public school system and funneling it to private schools.

✓ Vouchers Do Not Improve Academic Achievement

According to multiple studies of the District of Columbia,¹ Milwaukee,² and Cleveland³ school voucher programs, students offered vouchers do not perform better in reading and math than students in public schools. In fact, a 2016 study of the Louisiana voucher program revealed that students with vouchers actually performed worse on standardized tests – as much 50% worse in math scores in particular – than their peers not in the voucher program.⁴ And voucher programs also fail to offer participating students greater educational resources. In fact, the Department of Education (DOE) studies of the D.C. voucher program show that students participating in the program are actually less likely to have access to ESL programs, learning support and special needs programs, tutors, counselors, cafeterias, and nurse's offices than students not in the program.

✓ Vouchers Do Not Improve Opportunities for Kids from Low Income Families

Voucher payments often do not cover the entire cost of tuition or other mandatory fees for private schools. Thus, only families with the money to cover the cost of the rest of the tuition, uniforms, transportation, books, and other supplies can use the vouchers. A 2014 DOE study of the D.C. voucher program found that 68% of high schools and 62% of K-8 schools charged tuition rates above those of the cap on each student's voucher.⁵ In the end, the families most likely to use a voucher are the ones who could already afford to send their kids to private schools. And in some states, this is what is already happening. In Wisconsin, the State Department of Public Instruction found that 67% of voucher applicants were already enrolled in private schools.⁶

Under most voucher programs, a private school can take taxpayer money and also deny admission to any student it chooses. Private voucher schools may discriminate against a student for many reasons, including based on his or her gender, disability, economic background, or disciplinary history. Also, voucher schools are not required to give parents the information necessary to determine that the school would meet the needs of their child, such as standardized test scores (which the schools may not even administer to all their students), curriculum used by the schools, or teacher qualifications. According to a 2013 U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) study, the D.C. voucher program provided inaccurate and misleading information to parents about the program, failing to publish the directory of participating schools until 9 months after the previous school year had begun and failing to provide even basic information on schools' fees and accreditation statuses.⁷

¹ See, e.g., U.S. Dep't of Ed., Evaluation of the D.C. Scholarship Program: Final Report (June 2010) (Though the 2009 study showed a marginal gain for some students in reading (but notably, not for the program's targeted group, students from schools in need of improvement), the 2010 Final Report said "[t]here is no conclusive evidence that the [program] affected student achievement" and earlier findings of modest gains "could be due to chance" and were no longer statistically significant.).

² See, e.g., Witte, Wolf, et al., MPCP Longitudinal Educational Growth Study Third Year Report (Apr. 2010); Legislative Audit Bureau, Test Score Data for Pupils in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (Report 4 of 5), 17 (Aug. 2011) ("The project's five-year longitudinal study shows no significant difference in the performance of Choice and similar MPS pupils after four years of participation.").

³ See, e.g., Plucker, et al., Evaluation of the Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program, Summary Report 1998-2004 (Feb. 2006); Evaluation of the Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program, Executive Report 1998-2002 (Feb. 2006).

⁴ Morgan Winsor, Louisiana's Controversial Voucher Program Harms Poor Students, Lowers Grades, New Study Finds (Jan. 10, 2016), INT'L BUS. TIMES, <http://www.ibtimes.com/louisianas-controversial-voucher-program-harms-poor-students-lowers-grades-new-study-2258417>.

⁵ U.S. Dep't of Ed., Evaluation of the D.C. Scholarship Program: An Early Look at Applicants and Participating Schools Under the SOAR Act, 9 (2014).

⁶ Molly Beck, State Paid \$139 Million to Schools Terminated from Voucher Program Since 2004, WISC. STATE J. (Oct. 12, 2014), http://host.madison.com/news/opinion/column/dave_zweifel/plain-talk-wisconsin-s-school-vouchers-are-a-scram/article_63516c51-eefc-5fbc-a9c4-1948dfdc1195.html.

⁷ U.S. Gov't Accountability Office, Publication No. GAO-13-805 (Nov. 2013), District of Columbia Opportunity Scholarship Program: Actions Needed to Address Weaknesses in Administration and Oversight, (Nov. 2013).

Students Who Accept Vouchers Lose Important Rights and Protections

Vouchers deprive students of the rights and protections they are awarded at public schools. Despite receiving public money, private schools that participate in voucher programs do not abide by all the federal civil rights laws or face the same public accountability standards that all public schools must meet, including those in Title VI, Title IX, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Private voucher schools usually do not have to comply with the same teacher standards, curriculum, and testing requirements as the public schools. And, students who attend private schools with vouchers are stripped of their First Amendment, due process, and other constitutional and statutory rights offered to them in public schools.

Vouchers Fail Students with Special Needs

Programs tailored specifically to students with disabilities also do not work. A 2008 study of the Ohio Autism Scholarship concluded that its vouchers were “a poor model” that “should not be emulated in other states” and explained that the voucher program actually “exacerbates inequality.”⁸ Likewise, a 2007 study of Florida’s McKay Scholarships for Students with Disabilities found that the program created “[m]ore [p]roblems [t]han [s]olutions.”⁹ Students with special needs often cannot even find a private school that can serve them. In D.C., a significant number of students had to reject their vouchers because they were unable to find a participating school that offered services for their learning or physical disability or other special needs.¹⁰ In Milwaukee, researchers conducting site visits to voucher schools confirmed that “most private schools lack the incentives, personnel, protocols, and organizational culture that lead public school systems to label students with disabilities as requiring special education services.”¹¹

Vouchers Harm Religious Liberty

One of the most dearly held principles of religious liberty is that government should not compel any citizen to furnish funds in support of a religion with which he or she disagrees, or even a religion with which he or she does agree. Voucher programs, however, violate that central tenet: they use taxpayer money to fund primarily religious education. Indeed, approximately 80% of the students participating in the D.C. voucher program attend religious schools.¹² Parents certainly may choose such an education for their children, but no taxpayer should be required to pay for another’s religious education.

Vouchers Cost, Rather than Save, Taxpayer Money

Vouchers do not decrease education costs. Generally the public schools from which students leave for private voucher schools are spread throughout the district. While, the reduction in students is negligible at the individual schools, the public school districts lose state funding to pay for vouchers without being able to cut overall operating costs. “Because of this, schools are given less money for programs, leading to a decline in available resources.”¹³ In Indiana, the state recently announced that it was forced to spend \$16 million to fund the program.¹⁴ In Milwaukee, which has been disproportionately burdened in a statewide voucher funding scheme, the city has had to raise property taxes several times in order to ensure adequate funding for the city’s schools.¹⁵

⁸ Policy Matters Ohio, Analyzing Autism Vouchers in Ohio (Mar. 2008).

⁹ Sara Mead, Information Underload: Florida’s Flawed Special-Ed Voucher Program, Education Sector 1 (June 2007).

¹⁰ U.S. Dep’t of Ed., Evaluation of the D.C. Scholarship Program: Final Report (June 2010).

¹¹ Wolf, et. al., Special Education and the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (Report #35) (2012).

¹² U.S. Dep’t of Ed., Evaluation of the D.C. Scholarship Program: Final Report at 17-18.

¹³ Public Policy Forum, Research Brief: Choice Schools Have Much In Common with MPS, Including School Performance Vol. 101 No. 1 Feb 2013 available at http://publicpolicyforum.org/sites/default/files/2013VoucherBrief-Clarified_1.pdf.

¹⁴ Choice Scholarship Program Annual Report, supra note 16 (this was contrary to claims that the voucher program actually saved the state money)

¹⁵ Richards, “MPS blames voucher program for tax levy increase,” Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, October 31, 2012.

