

February 1, 2017

The Honorable Todd Rokita
Chairman, Subcommittee on Early
Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary
Education
Education and Workforce Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Jared Polis
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Early
Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary
Education
Education and Workforce Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Re: NCPE Opposes Private School Vouchers

Dear Chairman Rokita and Ranking Member Polis:

The 50 undersigned organizations submit this letter for the hearing "Helping Students Succeed through the Power of School Choice" to express our strong opposition to private school vouchers. Vouchers divert desperately-needed resources away from the public school system to fund the education of a few, select students, with limited, if any, real impact on student academic achievement. Instead of providing equal access to high quality education or setting high standards for accountability, voucher programs have proven ineffective, lack accountability to taxpayers, and deprive students of rights provided to public school students. Congress would better serve *all* children by using funds to make public schools stronger and safer than by creating a new voucher program.

Although promoted as "school choice," private school vouchers do not provide real choice for students and parents. The "choice" in voucher programs actually lies with private schools, which may turn students away for a variety of reasons. In contrast, public schools are open to all.

Students with disabilities are particularly underserved by voucher programs. Private voucher schools do not adequately serve students with disabilities, often denying them admission or subjecting them to inappropriate or excessive suspensions or expulsions. They also generally do not provide them the same quality and quantity of services available to students in public schools, including those mandated under each student's individualized education plan (IEP). For example, in D.C., a significant number of students who received a voucher 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.¹

¹ U.S. Dep't of Educ., [Evaluation of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program: Final Report](#), 24-26 (June 2010) (The report found that 21.6% of parents who rejected a voucher that was offered to their child did so because the school lacked the special services that their child needed,¹ and 12.3% of the parents who accepted a voucher for their child but then left the program cited a lack of special needs services at the school they had chosen.).

Vouchers also fail to improve academic opportunities. Recent studies of both the Louisiana² and Ohio³ voucher programs revealed that students who used vouchers actually performed worse on standardized tests than their peers who are not in the voucher programs. Multiple studies of the D.C.,⁴ Milwaukee,⁵ and Cleveland⁶ school voucher programs revealed similar findings: students offered vouchers do not perform better in reading and math than students in public schools. In fact, the Department of Education 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.

Moreover, voucher programs offer little accountability to taxpayers. Private school voucher programs usually do not require participating private schools to comply with the same teacher standards, curriculum, reporting, and testing requirements as public schools. And, private schools that receive voucher students do not adhere to all federal civil rights laws including those in Title IX, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and ESSA, religious freedom protections provided under the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, and public accountability standards that all public schools must meet.

Finally, vouchers violate religious liberty by funding primarily religious schools.⁷ 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. Parents certainly may choose such an education for their children, but no taxpayer should be required to pay for another's religious education.

For these reasons and more, we oppose private school vouchers. Congress should ensure that public dollars remain invested in public schools for the benefit of all students.

Thank you for your consideration of our concerns.

Sincerely,

² Morgan Winsor, [Louisiana's Controversial Voucher Program Harms Poor Students, Lowers Grades, New Study Finds](#), Int'l Bus. Times (Jan. 10, 2016).

³ David Figlio & Krzysztof Karbownik, Fordham Institute, [Evaluation of Ohio's EdChoice Scholarship Program: Selection, Competition, and Performance Effects](#) 32 (July 2016).

⁴ E.g., U.S. Dep't of Educ., [Evaluation of the D.C. Scholarship Program: Final Report](#) (June 2010) (Although 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.).

⁵ E.g., Patrick J. Wolf, School Choice Demonstration Project, Univ. of Ark., [The Comprehensive Longitudinal Evaluation of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program: Summary of Final Reports](#) (Apr. 2010). (Overall, there are no significant achievement gains of voucher students compared to public school students. "When similar MPCP and MPS students are matched and tracked over four years, the achievement growth of MPCP students compared to MPS students is higher in reading but similar in math. The MPCP achievement advantage in reading is only conclusive in 2010-11, the year a high-stakes testing policy was added to the MPCP.")

⁶ E.g., Jonathan Plucker et al., Center for Evaluation & Education Policy, Univ. of Ind., [Evaluation of the Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program, Technical Report 1998-2004](#) 166 (Feb. 2006).

⁷ See, e.g., U.S. Dep't of Educ., [Evaluation of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program: Final Report](#), 17-18 (June 2010) (finding that approximately 80% of the students participating in the D.C. voucher program attend religious schools).



The **National Coalition for Public Education** comprises more than 50 education, civic, civil rights, and religious organizations devoted to the support of public schools. Founded in 1978, NCPE opposes the funnelling of public money to private and religious schools through such mechanisms as tuition tax credits and vouchers.

AASA: The School Superintendents Association
African American Ministers In Action
American Association of University Women (AAUW)
American Atheists
American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)
American Federation of Labor-Congress of industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO)
American Federation of School Administrators
American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)
American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO
American Humanist Association
Americans for Democratic Action (ADA)
Americans for Religious Liberty
Americans United for Separation of Church and State
Anti-Defamation League
Association of Education Service Agencies
Association of School Business Officials International (ASBO)
Association of University Centers on Disabilities
Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty
Center for Inquiry
Clearinghouse on Women's Issues
Council of Administrators of Special Education
Council for Exceptional Children
Council of the Great City Schools
Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund
Disciples Justice Action Network
Equal Partners in Faith
Freedom From Religion Foundation
Institute for Science and Human Values
Interfaith Alliance
League of United Latin American Citizens
National Alliance of Black School Educators
NAACP
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of Federally Impacted Schools
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Association of State Directors of Special Education
National Black Justice Coalition
National Center for Learning Disabilities
National Council of Jewish Women
National Disability Rights Network
National Education Association
National Organization for Women
National PTA
National Rural Education Advocacy Collaborative



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National Rural Education Association
People For the American Way
School Social Work Association of America
Secular Coalition for America
Texas Freedom Network
Union for Reform Judaism



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www.NCPEcoalition.org