

The National Coalition *for* Public Education

February 2, 2016

The Honorable John Kline
Chairman
Education and the Workforce Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Bobby Scott
Ranking Member
Education and the Workforce Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Re: NCPE Opposes Private School Vouchers

Dear Chairman Kline and Ranking Member Scott:

The 56 undersigned organizations submit this letter for the hearing "Expanding Educational Opportunity through 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. Vouchers place students in private schools that do not have to follow the same inclusionary practices as public schools, allowing students with disabilities to be isolated from their nondisabled peers. And, students are often unable to find the same level of service in private schools as they do in public schools. 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 Ed., *Evaluation of the D.C. Scholarship Program: Final Report 24-26* (June 2010) [hereinafter *Final Report*].

Vouchers also fail to improve academic opportunities. According to multiple studies of the D.C.,² Milwaukee,³ and Cleveland⁴ school voucher programs, 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, religious freedom protections provided under the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, and public accountability standards that all public schools must meet, including those in Title IX, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and ESEA.

Finally, vouchers violate religious liberty by funding primarily religious schools.⁵ 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,

AASA: The School Superintendents Association
African American Ministers In Action
American Association of University Women (AAUW)
American Atheists

²See, e.g., *Final Report* (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.).

³ 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.").

⁴ 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).

⁵ Indeed, approximately 80% of the students participating in the D.C. voucher program attend religious schools. *Final Report* at 17-18; Ind. Dept. of Ed., *Choice Scholarship Program Annual Report*, Jan. 27, 2014, <http://www.doe.in.gov/sites/default/files/choice/choice-scholarship-program-annual-report-012714.pdf>. Reports of other state programs are similar: in the Indiana voucher program, approximately 98% of the schools accepting voucher students were private religious schools, in Milwaukee's voucher program, 96% of all voucher schools were religious, and in Florida's tax credit program, 82% of students attended religious schools. U.S. Andrew D. Catt, *Exploring Indiana's Private Education Sector*, Friedman Foundation, <http://www.edchoice.org/CMSModules/EdChoice/FileLibrary/1074/Exploring-Indianas-Private-Education-Sector.pdf>; 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/2013/VoucherBrief-Clarified_1.pdf; Allie Bidwell, *School Vouchers: Legal, Depending on Where You Live*, U.S. News (Aug. 28, 2014), <http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2014/08/28/florida-teachers-parents-sue-state-over-school-voucher-tax-credit>.

American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)
AFL-CIO
American Federation of School Administrators (AFSA), AFL-CIO
American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)
American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO
American Humanist Association
Americans for Democratic Action
Americans for Religious Liberty
Americans United for Separation of Church and State
Anti-Defamation League
Association of Educational Service Agencies
Association of School Business Officials International
Association of University Centers on Disabilities
Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty
Center for Inquiry
Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)
Central Conference of American Rabbis
Clearinghouse on Women's Issues
Council for Exceptional Children
Council of the Great City Schools
Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund
Disciples Justice Action Network
Education Law Center - PA
Equal Partners in Faith
Feminist Majority Foundation
Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN)
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 Lesbian Rights
National Council of Jewish Women
National Education Association
National Organization for Women
National PTA
National Rural Education Advocacy Coalition
National Rural Education Association
People For the American Way
School Social Work Association of America

February 2, 2016

Page 4 of 4

Secular Coalition for America

Southern Poverty Law Center

TASH

Texas Faith Network

Texas Freedom Network

Union for Reform Judaism

Women of Reform Judaism