

SCHOOL VOUCHERS

NSBA POSITION

NSBA opposes private school vouchers and urges Congress to reject using any federal funds for a national voucher program, including any special education vouchers for military children and/or specific subgroups of students. NSBA believes that public funds should be used within public schools to advance curricula and choice, including charter schools authorized by local school boards. NSBA also opposes the use of education savings accounts and tuition tax credits as these are simply alternative versions of voucher programs.

Many of our nation's public school districts currently provide educational choices that promote success in student achievement and school performance, thereby preparing our students for college and careers. From local magnet schools and charter schools authorized by local school boards to public specialty schools, such as military academies and those offering specialized curricula for science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), many of our public school districts provide multiple choice options for the success of our students.

TALKING POINTS

- **Vouchers abandon public schools and drain away critical dollars** – Vouchers divert attention, commitment and dollars from public schools to pay private school tuition for a few students, including many who already are in private school.
- **Vouchers impact public accountability** – In stark contrast to the strong requirements faced by public school, private voucher schools do not have to meet ESSA and IDEA standards and they are not required to accept all students.
- **Vouchers leave behind many students, including the most vulnerable** – Vouchers leave behind many disadvantaged students because private schools may not accept them or do not offer the special services they need. Students with disabilities and English language learners are underserved in voucher schools.
- **Vouchers often are not able to accommodate special education students** – Students with disabilities attending a private school with a voucher would not necessarily receive all the Individualized Education Plan services they would otherwise receive in a public school. Not all private schools are bound to follow the same inclusion practices and parents are not entitled to the same procedural safeguards as they are under IDEA. A number of parents re considering the placement of their children in private settings are returning them to public schools.

- **Vouchers do not raise student achievement for all** – Research and evaluations have found little or no difference in voucher and public school students’ performance.

BACKGROUND

For years, lawmakers in Congress have sought to allow tax dollars to be used for private school vouchers. NSBA and other coalition groups have successfully blocked these attempts. However, under the leadership of U.S. Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, there is renewed interest in broadening voucher programs across the country. In May 2017, the Trump Administration released its FY2018 budget request. The request included \$1 billion to promote the administration’s school choice initiative and represented a “down payment” on the President’s goal of investing \$20 billion annually in public and private school choice. While vouchers were not specifically mentioned in the request, schools are encouraged to participate in the proposed FOCUS grant program. FOCUS grants would provide supplemental awards to school districts that agree to adopt weighted student funding combined with open enrollment systems that allow Federal, State and local funds to follow students to the public school of their choice -potentially diverting public school dollars to private schools. In addition, the following bills have been introduced in Congress this year aimed at expanding voucher programs:

- The Educational Opportunities Act (S. 148), Sen. Marco Rubio (R-FL)
- The Creating Hope and Opportunity for Individuals and Communities through Education (CHOICE) Act, (S.235, H.R. 691), Sen. Tim Scott (R-SC), Rep. Todd Rokita (R-IN)
- The Enhancing Educational Opportunities for All Students Act, (H.R. 716), Rep. Luke Messer (R-IN)
- The Choices in Education Act of 2017 (H.R. 610), Rep. Steve King (R-IA)

NSBA is actively engaging Members of Congress and the administration on the harmful impacts these proposals will have on public schools and is instead encouraging policies that level the playing field so all public schools may benefit from the flexibilities offered to non-public schools, allowing performance to be adequately and appropriately compared.

WASHINGTON, D.C. VOUCHERS

Currently, the “D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program” is the only federally-funded voucher program in the country. While the program has been plagued with many of the accountability shortcomings found in other voucher programs, it continues to receive federal funding.

In April 2017, the Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences released a report¹ on the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program and found largely negative results for students who

¹ Mark Dynarksi, Ning Rui, Ann Webber, Babette Gutmann and Meredith Bachman (27, April 17). Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impacts After One Year.

<https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20174022/pdf/20174022.pdf>

participated. The report suggests that many of the voucher program's participants would have had better test scores had they not attended private school.

Further, in 2013, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a scathing report that revealed numerous accountability problems in the program's management. GAO found that "the execution of the voucher program has been rocky, with inadequate safeguards over the millions of dollars in federal funds, insufficient information for parents and a student database that is riddled with incomplete information," the Washington Post reported². Another GAO report, released in 2007, also found serious accountability flaws in the program. Congress last reauthorized this program in 2011.

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² Lyndsey Layton (2013, November 15). D.C. school voucher program lack oversight, GAO says. *The Washington Post*. www.washingtonpost.com.