

June 20, 2012

Members  
Committee on Appropriations  
House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515



*Working with and  
Through our State  
Associations, NSBA  
Advocates for Equity  
and Excellence in  
Public Education  
through School  
Board Leadership*

***Re: Opposition to funding DC Vouchers in FY 2013***

Dear Representative:

The National School Boards Association, which represents more than 95,000 local school board members throughout the nation, urges you to eliminate funding for the D.C. private school voucher program during the mark up of the FY2013 Financial Services Appropriations bill scheduled for June 20, 2012.

NSBA opposes continued funding for the pilot voucher program, which based on federally-mandated studies, has repeatedly failed to show effectiveness in improving student achievement over the years. At the time when Congress is considering cutting billions of dollars from the federal budget, it should not be spending \$20 million of taxpayer dollars, or a 35 percent increase from last year's funding level, for a small number of students to attend private schools.

When Congress created the voucher program in 2003, the goal was to raise student achievement with a priority for students who attend "schools in need of improvement" (SINI) under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). However, since it was put in place all four of the Congressionally-mandated Department of Education studies have concluded that the voucher program has had no significant effect on the overall academic achievement of these students.<sup>1</sup> In fact, a 2007 U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) report found that students from SINI were underrepresented in voucher schools.<sup>2</sup>

In all four years (2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010), the studies found no significant impact on math achievement of students who were in voucher schools compared to their peers in public schools. In years one and two, no significant impact was found on reading achievement. In years three and four, the study showed the reading achievement of some students improved, but it is noteworthy that students coming from SINI and those who enter the voucher program in the lower third of the test-score distribution—the very groups the program intended to help—showed no improvement in reading.<sup>3</sup> The two groups of students who showed the most improvement in reading were students for which federal government

**Office of Advocacy**

- *C. Ed Massey  
President*
- *Anne L. Bryant  
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<sup>1</sup> "Evaluation of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program: Final Report," Institute of Education Science, U.S. Department of Education, June 2010; "Evaluation of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impacts After Three Years," Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, April 2009; "Evaluation of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impact After Two Years," Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, June 2008; "Evaluation of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impact After One Year," Institute of Education Science, U.S. Department of Education, June 2007.

<sup>2</sup> "District of Columbia Opportunity Scholarship Program," U.S. Government Accountability Office, Nov. 2007.

<sup>3</sup> "Evaluation of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impacts After Three Years," Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, April 2009; "Evaluation of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program: Final Report," Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, June 2010.

intervention is the least justifiable: students who did not come from SINI and students who were already high performing when they entered the program.

In addition, all four studies found that participating in the voucher program had no impact on student safety, satisfaction, motivation or engagement.<sup>4</sup> Students attending voucher schools also have less access to key services such as English as a second language (ESL) programs, special education services, school nurses and counselors, child nutrition and after school programs and tutors.<sup>5</sup>

Not only does the experimental program lack academic evidence to support its continuation, the 2007 GAO report documented numerous accountability shortcomings, including federal taxpayer dollars paying tuition at private schools that do not even charge tuition, schools that lacked a legally-required city occupancy permit, and schools employing teachers without bachelor's degrees and/or certification.<sup>6</sup> It also noted that children with physical or learning disabilities were underrepresented compared to public schools.<sup>7</sup>

Now is not the time to divert funding from public education. Public schools continue to face funding cuts because state budgets have not fully rebounded from the recession. NSBA believes strongly that the objective evidence does not support continuation of the only federally-funded private school voucher program and urges you to eliminate funding for D.C. vouchers.

Thank you for considering our views and please contact Katherine Shek, legislative analyst, at (703) 535-1627 or by email at [kshek@nsba.org](mailto:kshek@nsba.org) if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Michael A. Resnick  
Associate Executive Director

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<sup>4</sup> 2010 U.S. Department of Education Report at xvi, xxii, xxiii; 2009 U.S. Department of Education Report at xxvi, xviii, 35, 44-45, 49-50; 2008 U.S. Department of Education Report at 42-43, 50, & 57; 2007 U.S. Department of Education Report at xix & 1-4.

<sup>5</sup> 2010 U.S. Department of Education Report at xxvii; 2009 U.S. Department of Education Report at xxii & 17-18; 2008 U.S. Department of Education Report at xvii §16; 2007 U.S. Department of Education Report at 21.

<sup>6</sup> 2007 GAO Report at 22, 33-35.

<sup>7</sup> 2007 GAO Report at 30.