



Say No to School Vouchers



To the point: The opportunity to access a high-quality public education is foundational to the American promise of liberty and opportunity for all—a promise protected by the constitution of every state to educate young learners. School vouchers, in practice, mainly subsidize private school tuition for affluent families in or near urban areas. Private schools that accept school vouchers often restrict access to students based on ability status, religion, or personal characteristics such as style of hair. When used for school privatization, public funds primarily function as an unregulated benefit for wealthy families on the taxpayer's dime. Instead of spending valuable time and resources on voucher programs, states should invest in strengthening the public education system with research-based strategies that improve students' content mastery and whole-child outcomes.

FACT: Vouchers disproportionately harm rural families and communities. Private schools are scarce in many rural areas, which means many rural families often cannot access them.¹ Vouchers can incentivize wealthy families to send their children long distances for private schools.² Vouchers can also diminish the resources available for students who remain in public schools, because schools have fixed costs that remain the same even when enrollment declines.³ This can further strain the resources of rural schools that already face inequitable state and local funding and have lower student-teacher ratios compared to urban and suburban schools.⁴

FACT: Vouchers have no clear academic benefit. Research shows no clear benefit on a wide scale in academic achievement for students using vouchers to attend private schools over public schools.⁵ Recent research even suggests that students who use school vouchers have lower academic attainment rates than comparable students educated in the public school system.^{6 7 8 9}

FACT: Private schools are unaccountable and unregulated. Private schools are not required to follow

state standards for public reporting, teacher certification, or even fire and safety codes in some places.¹⁰ Furthermore, private schools are not required to adhere to the same academic and curricular standards as public schools, including the universal publication of school report cards.¹¹ And since 22 states, including eight states in the South, do not make data on students' access to specific academic programs or academic outcomes publicly available, there's no way for taxpayers to know if these programs meet academic goals or show fiduciary responsibility for public funds.¹² Finally, public schools are directly accountable to an elected school board and other levels of oversight, unlike private schools whose governance structures operate outside the public view.

FACT: Vouchers do not protect the rights of students with disabilities. Unlike public schools, private schools do not have to follow laws protecting vulnerable students on the basis of disability, religious belief, and sexual orientation.¹⁴ As a result, some voucher programs require students with disabilities and their families to waive their civil rights¹⁵ — while public schools must provide services for students with disabilities for free.

The bottom line:

Taxpayer dollars should only support public education open to all students, not voucher programs that divert public dollars to inequitable and unaccountable private schools.

Sources and Additional Resources

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