

Vouchers

Teachers, parents, and the general public have long opposed private school tuition vouchers — especially when funds for vouchers compete with funds for overall improvements in America's public schools.

NEA and its affiliates have been leaders in the fight to improve public schools — and oppose alternatives that divert attention, energy, and resources from efforts to reduce class size, enhance teacher quality, and provide every student with books, computers, and safe and orderly schools.

The Educational Case Against Vouchers

- Student achievement ought to be the driving force behind any education reform initiative. See what research says about the relationship between vouchers and student achievement.
- Americans want consistent standards for students. Where vouchers are in place -- Milwaukee, Cleveland, and Florida -- a two-tiered system has been set up that holds students in public and private schools to different standards.
- NEA and its affiliates support direct efforts to improve public schools. There is no need to set up new threats to schools for not performing. What is needed is help for the students, teachers, and schools who are struggling.

The Social Case Against Vouchers

- A voucher lottery is a terrible way to determine access to an education. True equity means the ability for every child to attend a good school in the neighborhood.
- Vouchers were not designed to help low-income children. Milton Friedman, the "grandfather" of vouchers, dismissed the notion that vouchers could help low-income families, saying "it is essential that no conditions be attached to the acceptance of vouchers that interfere with the freedom of private enterprises to experiment."
- A pure voucher system would only encourage economic, racial, ethnic, and religious stratification in our society. America's success has been built on our ability to unify our diverse populations.

The Legal Case Against Vouchers

- About 85 percent of private schools are religious. Vouchers tend to be a means of circumventing the Constitutional prohibitions against subsidizing religious practice and instruction.

The Political Landscape

- Each year, about \$65 million dollars is spent by foundations and individuals to promote vouchers. In election years, voucher advocates spend even more on ballot measures and in support of pro-voucher candidates.
- In the words of political strategist, Grover Norquist, "We win just by debating school choice, because the alternative is to discuss the need to spend more money..."
- Despite desperate efforts to make the voucher debate about "school choice" and improving opportunities for low-income students, vouchers remain an elitist strategy. From Milton Friedman's first proposals, through the tuition tax credit proposals of Ronald Reagan, through the voucher proposals on ballots in California, Colorado, and elsewhere, privatization strategies are about subsidizing tuition for students in private schools, not expanding opportunities for low-income children.

Five Talking Points on Vouchers

"What have you got against private school vouchers?" your brother-in-law demands over Sunday dinner. Ah, if he only knew the facts. Next time someone puts you on the spot, use these talking points to debunk the most popular voucher claims.

- **Fact: There's no link between vouchers and gains in student achievement.** There's [no conclusive evidence](#) that vouchers improve the achievement of students who use them to attend private school. Nor is there any validity to claims that, by creating a "competitive marketplace" for students, vouchers force public schools to improve. In fact, the most dramatic improvements in student achievement have occurred in places where vouchers do not exist — such as Texas, North Carolina, Connecticut and Chicago. Instead, those states and communities focused on teacher quality and extra help for students who need it.
- **Fact: Vouchers undermine accountability for public funds.** Private schools have almost complete autonomy with regard to how they operate: who they teach, what they teach, how they teach, how — if at all — they measure student achievement, how they manage their finances, and what they are required to disclose to parents and the public. The absence of public accountability for voucher funds has contributed to rampant fraud, waste and abuse in current voucher programs.

- **Fact: Vouchers do not reduce public education costs.** Actually, they increase costs, by requiring taxpayers to fund two school systems, one public and one private.
- **Fact: Vouchers do not give parents real educational choice.** Participating private schools may limit enrollment, and in many cases may maintain exclusive admissions policies and charge tuition and fees far above the amount provided by the voucher. Unlike public schools, private and religious schools can — and do — discriminate in admissions on the basis of prior academic achievement, standardized test scores, interviews with applicants and parents, gender, religion, income, special needs, and behavioral history.
- **Fact: The public disapproves of vouchers.** By overwhelming margins, [Americans prefer improving their public schools to spending scarce tax dollars on voucher programs](#). Since 1966, vouchers or voucher-related measures have been placed before voters in 13 states and the District of Columbia 22 times. With the lone exception of South Dakota — which approved the provision of textbooks to parochial schools in 1986 — voters have rejected public aid to private and religious schools every time. In those 22 elections, nearly two out of three voters cast "no" votes.