

Support North Carolina's Children:

OPPOSE PRIVATE SCHOOL VOUCHERS

In 2013, the North Carolina legislature created a school voucher program, diverting millions of taxpayer dollars from public schools to unaccountable private schools. **Join together to oppose vouchers and support our public school students.**

- **Vouchers Will Drain Funding from Underfunded Public Schools**
 - North Carolina's public school system is one of the most underfunded in the nation, ranking 48th among states in per pupil spending.
 - North Carolina's school voucher program will take over \$11 million dollars out of the public school system in 2014-15. In states that have enacted similar programs, the size of the voucher program has grown exponentially each year.
- **Student Achievement Will Not Improve**
 - None of the highest performing education systems in the United States or the rest of the world have achieved success by creating voucher programs – all have done so by making a strong commitment to public education.
 - In the school systems that have had voucher programs in place the longest, Milwaukee and Cleveland, traditional public school students outperform voucher students on available proficiency measures.
- **Private Schools are Unaccountable for Public Funding**
 - Private schools that participate in the voucher program do not require students to take state proficiency exams, teachers to be licensed, or schools to issue report cards. Many participating private schools will not have to provide any information to the state about student achievement.
 - Dozens of schools eligible for participation in the voucher program serve less than five students and several enroll just one child. These schools operate with virtually no standards.
- **Middle and Low Income Families Will Only be Able to Attend Low Quality Private Schools**
 - The amount of the voucher (\$4,200) is far less than the cost of tuition at a high quality North Carolina private school, which can cost upwards of \$20,000.
 - The quality of private schools is closely tied to the amount of tuition they charge, so the majority of voucher participants will only be able to attend the most inexpensive and lowest quality private schools.
- **The Voucher Program Violates the North Carolina Constitution**
 - The new voucher law violates Article IX, Section 6 of the North Carolina Constitution, which provides that public funds for education "shall be faithfully appropriated and used exclusively for establishing and maintaining a uniform system of free public schools." By funneling taxpayer funds to unaccountable private schools, the voucher program also violates Article V, Section 2(1) of the Constitution, which requires that "the power of taxation shall be exercised ... for public purposes only."



How Will North Carolina's Voucher Program Operate?

The new voucher program will be administered by the State Education Assistance Authority (SEAA) starting in the 2014-15 school year.

The Voucher

The SEAA will award vouchers of up to \$4,200 for eligible North Carolina school children to use at private schools. Traditional public schools and public charter schools are not eligible to receive vouchers under the program.

Student Eligibility

For the 2014-15 school year, students will be eligible for private school vouchers if they (1) attended a public school for the 2013-14 school year; and (2) their family income does not exceed the amount required to qualify for the federal free or reduced-price lunch program – currently \$43,568 for a family of four.

- Starting in the 2015-16 school year, students will be eligible for private school vouchers if their family income does not exceed 133% of the amount required to qualify for the federal free or reduced-price lunch program. This income ceiling is currently \$57,945 for a family of four.
- The General Assembly appropriated \$10 million for the new voucher program for fiscal year 2014-15 and made a corresponding reduction in funding for public schools in the amount of \$11,797,941.

Students with Disabilities

Schools participating in the voucher program are not obligated to admit or accommodate students with disabilities. Private schools are not obligated to comply with the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or to provide disabled students with an individualized, appropriate education.

Discrimination in School Admission and Enrollment


Private schools receiving vouchers are permitted to discriminate in the admission of students on the basis of race, gender, family income or wealth, disability, and religion. Segregated institutions that bar the admission of minority students or students from poor families can receive vouchers.

Application, Student Selection, and Disbursement of the Voucher

By February 1, 2014, the SEAA will make applications available for private school vouchers for the 2014-15 school year. The SEAA will begin selecting students for vouchers by March 1, 2014. The Authority will transfer voucher funds to a particular private school through payments that are endorsed by a student's parent or guardian.

Standards, Accreditation, Transparency, and Accountability

Private schools that can receive vouchers are subject to very few restrictions. They can be unaccredited, can hire unqualified and unsafe teachers and employees, can teach using unproven methods, can fail to improve student knowledge and performance in any measurable way, and can discriminate in admission and treatment of students on the basis of race, religion, socioeconomic status, or physical or mental disability.



Voucher-eligible schools are not required to be accredited by the State Board of Education or any other state or national institution. Individuals, institutions, or companies that own or operate private schools do not need to have any experience or expertise in education. Owners and operators of private schools are not subject to open meeting laws or any other requirements to ensure that important decisions are explained and held accountable to parents and the public.

Standards for Teachers and Staff

Private schools eligible to receive vouchers are not required to employ teachers who are licensed by the State Board of Education. Private school teachers are not required to have any particular credentials, degrees, experience, or expertise in education. Private schools are not required to monitor, evaluate, or measure the performance of their teachers in any way.

Schools that receive vouchers are required to conduct a criminal background check only for the staff member with the highest decision-making authority. No criminal background check is required for any other teacher or employee. Private schools are not required to determine whether their teachers and employees have criminal records..

Curriculum, Assessment, and Proficiency

Voucher-eligible schools will not be subject to any requirements regarding the curriculum. Private schools are not obligated to meet the requirements of the Common Core curriculum or any other recognized standard for educating children.

Private schools that receive vouchers are not subject to any requirements for student achievement. Private schools must administer a “nationally standardized test” of their choosing, but there is no requirement that this test measure any particular level of educational achievement. The “nationally standardized test” must measure students in the areas of English and mathematics, but is not required to measure student proficiency in science, history, social studies, or any other subject. Voucher-eligible schools are not obligated to demonstrate any increase in student proficiency as measured by their chosen test.

Vouchers Will Harm North Carolina’s Children

No Educational Improvement for Students in Existing Programs

The results from the nation’s longest-running and most heavily evaluated voucher programs show that vouchers do not improve academic outcomes for students. In fact, public school students are regularly outperforming voucher recipients in these school districts. Districts that have implemented voucher schemes have failed to improve their status as some of the lowest-performing districts in the nation.

- **Established in 1990, the Milwaukee Parental Choice (MPC) Program is the longest-running voucher scheme in the United States.**
 - The majority of studies done on MPC find that students in Milwaukee Public Schools perform either the same or better than students in the choice program.
 - The most recent study of this program concluded that Milwaukee students participating in MPC performed significantly worse in both reading and

math than students in Milwaukee Public Schools. 41% of MPC students scored proficient in math compared to 50% for Milwaukee Public School students, and Milwaukee Public School students outscored their MPC counterparts 60% to 57% in reading.

- Across subject areas and grades, Milwaukee Public School students outperformed MPC students on 13 of 14 available measures
- The voucher program has failed to improve Milwaukee's standing as one of the lowest-performing large districts in the nation on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), ranking ahead of only the decimated Detroit Public Schools.
- **The next longest-running voucher program in the nation is the Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program.**
 - The most comprehensive evaluations of the program show public school students made greater learning gains in comparison to voucher recipients, even though voucher recipients were less likely to be low-income.
 - According to the most recent comparisons, voucher recipients in Cleveland trail public school students on 10 out of 14 available proficiency measures (see Table 2). Unfortunately, the voucher program has failed to improve Cleveland's schools, as it is also one of the lowest-performing large districts on the NAEP.

Diverting Resources from Underfunded Public Schools

North Carolina's voucher program will drain over \$11 million from the public school system in its first year of operation, and similar programs in other states have grown exponentially in each successive year. This loss of funding would come at a critical juncture when traditional public schools are already systematically underfunded.

- North Carolina currently ranks 48th in nation in terms of per pupil expenditures.
- The state currently spends half a billion dollars less on public schools than it did in 2008 even though the student population has risen by over 50,000 over the same period.
- According to the fiscal note that accompanied the voucher legislation, North Carolina's school voucher program will cost the state up to \$13 million each year even though the program was proposed as a way to save the state money.

Low and Middle-Income Families Will Lack Access to High Quality Private Schools

Proponents of vouchers claim that they expand educational options for low-income students. However, voucher programs in other states have failed to effectively target these student populations. Instead, these programs have provided a taxpayer-funded windfall to families that would have sent their children to private schools even without a voucher program.

The amount of the voucher (\$4,200) is much smaller than the cost of private schooling, particularly at prestigious schools, and low and middle-income families are unable to make up the difference. By contrast, higher-income families advantage of vouchers as a taxpayer-funded subsidy to help pay for private school tuition, which they otherwise would have had to pay in full.

- The two most comprehensively evaluated voucher schemes in Cleveland and Milwaukee show that these programs have not been effectively limited to low-income students. Both programs serve a population of students that is less impoverished than the population of students remaining in the traditional public schools.

Private Schools are Unaccountable for Public Funding

Since the advent of No Child Left Behind in 2001, policymakers have pushed to make public schools accountable for the academic success or failure of their students and transparent to the public about how schools are doing. These goals have been accomplished primarily through the use of standardized test scores, school report cards, graduation rates, turnaround models for failing schools, and the recent introduction of the Common Core State Standards Initiative, which sets out common language arts and math curricula for public schools across the nation. The overarching purpose of these measures is to make schools accountable for the way they use state and federal funds to educate children and to cause them to make changes if they are failing to meet accountability measures.

- Vouchers remove accountability and transparency to taxpayers and their representatives by encouraging students to exit the public school system and attend unaccountable private schools.
- Private schools are not subject to the testing, teacher licensure, accreditation, or curricular requirements that create higher standards for public schools.
 - Taxpayers and elected officials no way of knowing if public funds are being spent wisely in private schools because private schools are not held accountable.
- This lack of accountability has led to serious abuses in jurisdictions that have implemented voucher programs:
 - In Milwaukee, voucher funds have paid for luxury cars, gold necklaces, personal real estate, and in many cases have gone directly into the pockets of school operators who were later found guilty of embezzlement.
 - In Florida, 25 cases of fraud have been substantiated regarding the McKay Opportunity Scholarship, including one school that defrauded the state out of over \$200,000 by claiming to serve students with disabilities who had never enrolled.

Public Schools Outperform Private Schools

Lacking evidence that vouchers improve educational outcomes for students, policymakers who created the voucher legislation simply assumed that private schools do a better job of educating students than public schools. However, the results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress show that public schools actually do a better job of educating students when results are adjusted for student characteristics like socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, gender, disability, limited English proficiency, and school location.

Additionally, the performance of private schools is heavily tied to the amount that these schools charge in tuition. In North Carolina, the amount of the voucher does not come close to covering the cost of education at the most expensive and elite college



preparatory private schools that will remain out of reach for the overwhelming majority of families.

North Carolina's voucher program will not improve student achievement or create meaningful opportunities for families, but it will take money away from North Carolina's public school students without any meaningful accountability or oversight on how that money is spent.

North Carolina's Voucher Program in the News

SCHOOL VOUCHERS: A Pathway toward Fraud and Abuse of Taxpayer Dollars

www.ncpolicywatch.com/2013/09/04/school-vouchers-come-to-north-carolina/

Posted By Lindsay Wagner 4/24/2013

School vouchers and related efforts like tax credits, scholarship grants, and education savings accounts, have become popular tools of the education reform movement's agenda during the past few decades. Touted as a way to provide school choice to parents, vouchers are promoted as an exit strategy for low-income students who are faced with poor educational offerings in the public school system.

North Carolina is in the thick of the school voucher debate, with two bills moving through the General Assembly now that would siphon at least \$90 million out of the public school system and into voucher programs intended for low-income and disabled students.

Lawmakers are promoting these bills as opportunities for underserved students to gain access to high quality educational offerings, but the bills have sparked a huge outcry by public school advocates who say that the programs would devastate public schools and fail to serve the students for whom they are intended.

Today, The NC Justice Center's Matt Ellinwood and Cedric Johnson released [a policy brief](#) [2] explaining how traditional vouchers and their look-alike counterparts work and the lack of student achievement gains associated with them.

NC Policy Watch is shining a light on when school voucher systems have gone very wrong elsewhere across the United States.

Fraud and Abuse in Milwaukee

Milwaukee is known for having the oldest school voucher program in the United States. As Ellinwood and Johnson describe in their brief, a recent study concluded that Milwaukee students participating in the voucher program performed significantly worse in both reading and math than students in Milwaukee public school system.

These poor outcomes might have something to do with the fact that abuses of the voucher system in Milwaukee are rampant. At Milwaukee's Mandella School of Science and Math, Principal David Seppah—who also founded the school—[used proceeds from state voucher payments to buy two Mercedes-Benz automobiles](#) [3] at a cost of \$65,000. Seppah also owed the state almost \$330,000 for more than 200 checks officials acknowledged they “inappropriately,, cashed. Many of those checks, worth about \$1,500 a piece, were made out to families whose children never attended Mandella.

Seppah explained to Milwaukee's *Journal Sentinel*, “I don't think anyone tells me I cannot buy a car after my wife and I put 2 1/2 years of our labor into this,, referring to his efforts to get the school off the ground.

The head of another former Milwaukee voucher school, Henry Tyler, was [indicted by a federal grand jury on counts of mail fraud and money laundering](#) [4]. State officials said the school owed nearly \$500,000 for improperly cashed checks, improperly claimed summer school payments, past payroll payments and other debts. The indictment says

Tyler defrauded federal food programs out of \$196,000 between January 1, 2006 and May 5, 2006. Tyler also billed for 372 students, nowhere near the number of students attending the school. Tyler was suspected of using a school credit card to buy an \$865 gold necklace from a Las Vegas pawnshop in May 2006.

The list goes on in Milwaukee. Former chief financial officer of Harambee Community School, Cleveland Lee Sr., also known as a “voucher school,” was convicted in state court of embezzling \$642,000 from school coffers. He was sentenced to seven years in prison.

The *Journal Sentinel* also reported that Rosella Tucker, founder and director of the now closed Milwaukee’s New Hope Institute of Science and Technology charter school, was convicted in federal court of embezzling \$300,000 in public money. She was sentenced to two years in prison.

This year, Milwaukee’s voucher program will cost approximately \$155 million and will account for roughly 30 percent of the school district’s size, according to an [editorial in the *Janesville Gazette*](#).^[5] For a taxpayer-funded program that is so large, how has been allowed to repeatedly fail?

In most instances, a school voucher system is not regulated. North Carolina state Rep. Marcus Brandon has said repeatedly that parents are the best form of oversight—that they are the people in the best position to judge educational quality.

Lawmakers continue to rely on parents to regulate the voucher/charter industry while evidence points to the fact that parents possess imperfect information about the private and charter school market at the outset. As a result, millions of dollars of taxpayer money and hundreds of hours of instructional time all are allowed to go to waste as some private schools and those who head them run a scam.

Florida is not spared

The Florida Department of Education conducted an investigation of 38 schools suspected of defrauding the John M. McKay Scholarship for Students With Disabilities program. In 25 cases, allegations of fraud have been substantiated. These schools received McKay money totaling 49.3 million public dollars.

In 2011, Journalist Gus Garcia-Roberts chronicled much of the fraudulent activity [6] associated with the McKay scholarship program. His investigation revealed that at one institution, South Florida Prep, large numbers of students were crammed into rotating classroom locations in dingy strip malls, church foyers and public parks; open use of corporal punishment methods to tame students; 17-year-old drivers with learner’s permits transporting other students to field trips, which resulted in an accident and deaths in one instance; and other sad stories of neglect and abuse.

How did this go on? In Florida, like in many other states, private schools go unregulated. The Department of Education never inquired about South Florida Prep’s curriculum (there was none) and allowed McKay students to attend the school. DOE also gave them at least \$236,000 from a state-run tax-credit scholarship for low-income kids.

[According to the *Palm Beach Post*](#)^[7], officials at Faith Christian Academy defrauded the McKay scholarship program and the federal free lunch program by reporting more students than were actually attending the school. Betty Mitchell, head of the school, and five of her relatives and one other woman accepted more than \$200,000 in state voucher

money, textbook publishers and even landscapers – all money intended for disabled children who didn't even attend the school.

Those arrested pocketed the money and used it to pay for real estate, personal automobiles, restaurant meals, airfare and cell phone bills, according to the State Attorney's Office investigation. Taxpayers also paid for rent, utilities, tickets to a comedy show, clothing, satellite television, and trips to beauty shops and nail salons for those arrested, investigators said.

Florida also has a tax-credit program that finances schools teaching a fundamentalist dogma that holds that the world was created in six days. Some of those schools use textbooks produced by Bob Jones University Press and [A Beka Book](#) ^[8], a Christian publisher in Pensacola, Florida.

A Beka Book published one high school science text that concludes that "much variety within the human race has developed from the eight people who left the Ark., Another text, intended for use in the sixth grade, makes repeated references to Noah and the flood, which it calls the reason for both the world's petroleum reserves and the development of fossils.

Courtesy of a 2012 [Mother Jones' article](#) ^[9] outlining what Louisianans can also expect in their voucher schools, which use these texts, some other conclusions drawn in other books include:

- "Dinosaurs and humans were definitely on the earth at the same time and may have even lived side by side within the past few thousand years.,, [Life Science](#) [10], 3rd ed., Bob Jones University Press, 2007
- "A few slave holders were undeniably cruel. Examples of slaves beaten to death were not common, neither were they unknown. The majority of slave holders treated their slaves well.,,—[United States History for Christian Schools](#) [11], 2nd ed., Bob Jones University Press, 1991
- Gay people "have no more claims to special rights than child molesters or rapists.,,—Teacher's Resource Guide to Current Events for Christian Schools, 1998-1999, Bob Jones University Press, 1998
- "Global environmentalists have said and written enough to leave no doubt that their goal is to destroy the prosperous economies of the world's richest nations.,,—Economics: Work and Prosperity in Christian Perspective, 2nd ed., A Beka Book, 1999

The Road Ahead for North Carolina

State Superintendent of North Carolina Public Schools Dr. June Atkinson has gone on record to express her concerns about vouchers in NC. In an interview with NC Policy Watch, Atkinson said last fall that "we are in a difficult economic place and to give vouchers or credits would continue a spiral down of money for public education. I do not believe that vouchers or tax credits would be in the best interest of our 1.5 million children that we have in our state.,,

Nevertheless, Rep. Paul Stam has introduced a [school voucher bill](#) ^[12] that would move \$90 million out of the public school system and into private institutions by offering eligible students \$4,200 tuition reimbursements per year. Critics point to the fact that this amount of money doesn't cover the cost of private school tuition and those who take

advantage of it will be already economically positioned to attend private school, with our without the voucher.

[Stam is also sponsoring a bill](#) ^[13] with Rep. Marcus Brandon that would replace a 2011 tax credit program for families of disabled students who send their children to private schools. Instead receiving up to \$3,000 per semester in tax credits, families would get straight tuition reimbursements of up to the same amount per semester. While there was considerable debate in the House Education Committee about the ramifications of this bill, including parents being pushed into loans to cover the full cost of tuition, the bill passed through committee.

North Carolina has a long road ahead. Not only could unregulated school voucher systems fail to serve the students for whom they are intended, North Carolina could be looking forward to dealing with the kind of fraud and abuse of taxpayer dollars that Milwaukee, Florida, and countless other locales have faced should these bills pass with little regulatory provisions.

How 'choice' and vouchers mean condemning NC public schools

By *Micah Khater* 10-23-13

Since the passage of the Opportunity Scholarship Act in May, conversations have focused on the separation of church and state, costs of education and parental choice without any mention of the not-so-far-off history of school vouchers in North Carolina. Without incorporating our history into the debate, we lose out on important lessons from the past.

In 1955, the Supreme Court handed down the second part of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, which addressed the actual implementation of desegregation in public schools. The Supreme Court mandated that desegregation occur with "all deliberate speed." This shift in the legal attitude toward segregation did not reflect the attitude of white administrators and families in Southern school systems.

In order to severely delay desegregation, Gov. Luther Hodges (1954-1960) appointed the Pearsall Committee, which proposed giving white families vouchers to attend private schools so they could avoid soon-to-be integrated public schools. The Pearsall Plan, enacted in 1956, "assured that no child will be forced to attend a school with children of another race in order to get an education."

The plan emphasized choice – the choice for whites to avoid integration. Even though the statutes declared that these vouchers would be available for "any child of any race," they were explicitly meant for white families whose local schools would be integrated in response to federal pressure.

Hodges and the Pearsall Committee planned for public, white schools to voluntarily dissolve themselves. Vouchers would provide the funds for white children to attend private, segregated schools. According to their plan, which never fully came to fruition, the public school system would be gutted to make way for privatized education – education that gave parents a "choice."

The language of choice used in the 1950s has found its way back to North Carolina in 2013.

While the Opportunity Scholarship Act provides vouchers only for low-income students in its first year, the trajectory of the program is clear. Each year, the income of households that qualify will steadily increase until vouchers become available to families that can actually afford the average private school in North Carolina.

While yesterday's school vouchers were about race, today's vouchers are about economic class. Rather than fund public schools that serve the general population, money will continue to be funneled into private schools that serve primarily the upper-income households. The General Assembly already plans to increase the appropriations by \$10 million in the 2015-2016 fiscal year. Much like in the 1950s, school vouchers are a symbol of giving up on the public school system.

In 1955, choice meant the ability to avoid integration. Choice meant turning away from public education when it threatened the status quo. Today, giving parents the "choice," to avoid the public school system is inadvertently condemning it. Public education has been and continues to be contested terrain. Yet, for all the difficulties the system has and continues to face, public education in North Carolina has had its incredible strengths.

We need to be clear about the real choice we are extending with school vouchers. And what the consequences of these choices will be.

Micah Khater of Raleigh is a junior at N.C. State University studying history and French.

Key supporter of private school vouchers says schools barring gays should not receive one taxpayer dollar

<http://pulse.ncpolicywatch.org/2013/11/21/key-supporter-of-private-school-vouchers-says-schools-barring-gays-should-not-receive-one-taxpayer-dollar/>

Posted by [Lindsay Wagner](#) 11-21-13

Rep. Marcus Brandon, a key proponent of private school voucher legislation that made it through the General Assembly last summer, told NC Policy Watch that private Christian schools adopting policies that discriminate against gay students should not receive any taxpayer funds.

"I don't believe they should get one dollar of taxpayer money,,," said Brandon, a democratic lawmaker from Guilford County, in reaction to [the news](#) that Myrtle Grove Christian School in Wilmington just adopted a policy that excludes gay students and students from gay families from enrolling or continuing to attend their school.

Myrtle Grove Christian School is listed in the Division of Non-Public Education's [directory of conventional private schools](#), making the school eligible to receive private school vouchers worth up to \$4,200 per student annually beginning next fall.

Brandon said he still believes in school choice and the school voucher program, which will siphon \$10 million out of public schools next year so that parents can send their kids to private schools with taxpayer money. That amount is expected to rise per annum if the program continues on in the future.

"We need to make a policy that says you [the private school] cannot discriminate based on sexual orientation,,," said Brandon. "We should make a policy and I will be the first person to introduce that,,,"

Private schools in North Carolina are held to few standards in order to be recognized by the state. They must keep attendance and immunization records, administer a standardized test, maintain fire and sanitation inspection records and abide by a handful of other requirements listed [here](#).

Public schools are required to accommodate all children, regardless of gender, race, or sexual orientation. Private schools are not bound by that standard, accepting — or excluding — whomever they want.

The head of Myrtle Grove Christian School [told parents](#) he plans to hold meetings at some point later this week to address their concerns, some of which include:

"Why did we adopt this policy and why now?,,,"

"Are you asking parents to alienate their friends or family members who might be living an immoral lifestyle?,,,"

"Shouldn't a Christian school want to include anyone who wants to be there?,,," and

"Why single out or emphasize certain sins?,,,"

Why NC tax money shouldn't pay for school vouchers

<http://www.newsobserver.com/2013/10/02/3248005/why-nc-tax-money-shouldnt-pay.html>

By Kenneth Teitelbaum 10-2-13

The "Opportunity Scholarships," legislated by the General Assembly and approved by the governor are a mistake for several reasons. I support the right of parents to send their children to private schools that are "recognized," by the state, as well as to homeschool their children, but the argument against these vouchers for private school attendance has nothing to do with allowing parents to make alternative arrangements for their children.

The question is whether taxpayer money should be used to support such efforts. The answer is no for several reasons:

There is already evidence from Milwaukee, Cleveland and Washington that public voucher systems are not successful. The educational results have been disappointing, and there have been a number of cases of outright fraud and abuse by private school entrepreneurs who took advantage of the public coffers, much to the detriment of children and their families. We should avoid such unfortunate outcomes in North Carolina.


The use of public funds would (should) necessitate closer scrutiny of private schools in ways that these schools might not want. There should be full disclosure similar to the case for other publicly supported schools of who is enrolled, the qualifications of teachers, the curriculum being adopted, scores on standardized tests, how monies are being used and the like. Whether such monitoring will actually be implemented is questionable, but like other taxpayers I would insist that it should be.

Despite arguments to the contrary, the amount of money provided by these vouchers is rarely enough to support a poor child to attend a private school. It will primarily make a difference to those who already can afford attendance or those who need a little extra help to make attendance possible. The Opportunity Scholarships provide a maximum of \$4,200. However, the average tuition and fees are \$5,000 for a private elementary school and \$9,000 for a private secondary school in North Carolina. Some elite private schools charge more than \$20,000 per year.

Private schools are not obligated to take all students, as is basically the case for public schools. These scholarships will intensify the extent to which we already have a two-tiered system of education, one for the well-off (in terms of finances, cultural capital and learning skills) and one for the not well-off. It will serve to widen not narrow the achievement gap about which so many express concern. For those who have seen the movie "Elysium," you can perhaps picture what kind of world we could be headed for.

Since many private schools that stand to gain from the vouchers are religious-based, such use of public funds seems in direct conflict with our country's basic principles regarding the separation of church and state. While public monies are sometimes used to benefit children attending private schools, with regard to bus travel, curriculum materials and the like, they are not typically used to directly help pay for the cost of attendance.

Most importantly, since the mid-19th century, there has been a consensus that there needs to be a high-quality public education system to provide the understanding, skills and dispositions that are needed for a vibrant democracy as well as a world-class economy.



Public monies spent on vouchers exacerbate the economic and other difficulties that our public schools are facing. We need more financial and other support for our public schools, not less.

The intentions of some proponents may be good, but these vouchers will in fact contribute to the devaluing of the public schools that so many of our least advantaged children attend. And then there are others, motivated primarily by ideology and greed, who view "Opportunity Scholarships," as part of an overall effort to undermine the public sphere and marketize all aspects of our lives. Such efforts are intended to weaken a sense of the common good and elevate an extreme form of possessive individualism. Indeed, one might want to "follow the money," of who is financing the campaign for such vouchers to better understand who stands to benefit the most.

"A system of general instruction, which shall reach every description of our citizens from the richest to the poorest, as it was the earliest, so will it be the latest, of all the public concerns in which I shall permit myself to take an interest., – Thomas Jefferson, 1818

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