



Private School Vouchers

With the Democrats in the majority in both the House and the Senate and controlling the White House, it has led the Republicans to push on a lot of issues that appeal to their base. One of these issues is private school vouchers. Already, this year there have been 2 floor votes in the Senate and 2 hearings on vouchers, more than we saw over the past 6 years in Congress.

Funding private school tuition and fees with public dollar has been debated over the past four decades. Since 1970, vouchers have been rejected by an overwhelming margin every time the issue was on a statewide ballot (12 times in nine states).

<i>1970 Nebraska</i>	<i>Rejected 57%-43%</i>
<i>1972 Maryland</i>	<i>Rejected 55%-45%</i>
<i>1978 Michigan</i>	<i>Rejected 74%-26%</i>
<i>1981 Washington, DC</i>	<i>Rejected 89%-11%</i>
<i>1988 Utah</i>	<i>Rejected 67%-33%</i>
<i>1990 Oregon</i>	<i>Rejected 67%-33%</i>
<i>1992 Colorado</i>	<i>Rejected 67%-33%</i>
<i>1993 California</i>	<i>Rejected 70%-30%</i>
<i>1996 Washington</i>	<i>Rejected 65%-35%</i>
<i>2000 Michigan</i>	<i>Rejected 69%-31%</i>
<i>2000 California</i>	<i>Rejected 71%-29%</i>
<i>2006 Utah</i>	<i>Rejected 61%-39%</i>

Vouchers have been introduced in several cities using both public and private funds and statewide in Florida, where the State Supreme Court recently ruled them unconstitutional. In the evaluations performed in the cities with private school vouchers such as Milwaukee, Cleveland, Dayton, Raleigh, and the District of Columbia, the vouchers have not resulted in achievement different from the public schools.

At issue is the planned expiration of the DC private school voucher program. This five year pilot program is set to expire this year despite an organized campaign to continue the program and expand the voucher amount. President Obama has weighed in urging the ending of the program but requesting that the students who are currently receiving vouchers should be allowed to stay in their schools through senior year of high school.

A recent evaluation of the private school vouchers in the District of Columbia found no academic difference for the target population of students in English or math, students who transferred from schools failing to make AYP. Additionally there was no difference for boys in either English or math regardless of the AYP status of their original public school. The only demonstrated result was a 3 month difference in achievement in English, not math, for one subset of students, girls who were in the top two-thirds of all test takers and transferred from public schools that were making AYP.

Beyond not making a difference in student achievement the vouchers are not viable politically because of the enormous tax increase required to fund the 10 percent of students now enrolled in private schools with public dollars. Current national per pupil expenditure (\$9,337) times the 6,049,000 students in private schools P-12 would add **\$56.5 billion** to the cost of public education, not including the cost of bringing private school facilities up to the public school standards where states permit different standards. The additional \$56 billion plus would increase both state and local taxes which would be very unpopular in any time, but particularly when the nation is in a deep recession.

Private schools are not held to the same accountability standards as public schools. They are not required to have the same level of transparency and reporting to the public. In addition, private schools are not subject to the requirements of No Child Left Behind or the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Vouchers are poor public policy because they are inherently disequalizing permitting the inequalities found in the private markets, lack public oversight, and leave the choice of which students are admitted to the schools not parents.

Beyond being poor public policy, the lack of political viability demonstrated in 12 elections over a 36 year period, and the unsustainable increase required in federal, state and local taxes, vouchers have been found unconstitutional when challenged, in state courts, most recently Arizona and Florida, and by the US Supreme court in the *Nyquist v. Committee for Public Education and Religious Liberty*.

With limited federal dollars we cannot defend poor practice or lack of political will to provide adequate public schools. Poor practice in public schools is not a reason to substitute a policy that fails on all counts to provide even the possibility of an equal educational opportunity for all students.

Talking Points:

1. Ask your members of Congress to oppose the use of federal funds to support vouchers for private school tuition and fees.
2. Encourage your Representative and Senators to support permitting the expiration of District of Columbia private school voucher experiment because it has failed to make a difference for the target audience, low-income students from public schools that failed to make AYP.