A Union of Professionals

Private School Vouchers Don't Help Kids

Americans believe deeply in the promise and purpose of public education. Instead of strengthening the public schools that 90 percent of America's children attend, President Donald Trump and Education Secretary Betsy DeVos continue to promote private school vouchers and backdoor vouchers in the form of tax credits. These market-based education policies are fueled by ideology instead of what is best for kids.

Private school vouchers take money away from neighborhood public schools, and research shows that voucher programs either fail to increase student performance or actually hurt student achievement. Private school voucher programs lack accountability, fail to protect kids from discrimination and increase segregation. Voters have soundly rejected efforts to push these programs, including in Michigan, where DeVos spent more than $5 million bankrolling a private voucher ballot measure that voters ultimately rejected by more than a 2-to-1 margin.

PRIVATE SCHOOL VOUCHERS OFFER FALSE CHOICES

- In Indiana,[1] students in private school voucher programs experienced significant losses in achievement in math and saw no improvement in reading. According to a Brookings Institution report, "a student who had entered a private school with a math score at the 50th percentile declined to the 44th percentile after one year."
- In Louisiana,[2] students who started in public schools and transferred to private voucher schools dropped from the 50th percentile in math to the 26th percentile in a single year. Harvard professor Martin West called the negative effects on students in Louisiana the largest he's seen in the history of American education research.[3]
- In Ohio, a study[4] by the Fordham Institute, a conservative think tank, found that "students who use vouchers to attend private schools have fared worse academically" compared with those in public schools.
- In Milwaukee, where private school vouchers have been in place since the 1990s, African-American students rank second-to-last for eighth-grade math scores and last for reading scores.[5] And a study[6] of 110 Milwaukee voucher schools found that 39 had no art, music, physical education, library or technology specialist teachers.

PRIVATE SCHOOL VOUCHERS LACK ACCOUNTABILITY

- Most private schools, even those receiving taxpayer-funded voucher money, do not have to meet standards for curriculum, testing, teacher qualifications or school quality. In states like Louisiana, students using vouchers are being taught creationis[7] in science classes.
- In Pennsylvania,[8] private schools that enroll students under a state tax-credit voucher program are not required to provide information on student achievement, testing or demographics.
- Voucher schools in Florida[9] took taxpayer money for kids not even attending those schools.
- The taxpayer-funded voucher program in Wisconsin paid $139 million[10] to schools that failed to meet the state's requirements for operation.

PRIVATE SCHOOL VOUCHERS DON'T PROTECT CHILDREN FROM DISCRIMINATION

- Private voucher schools do not have to provide the same rights and protections to students as public schools,[11] including protections in key provisions of the Civil Rights Act, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Every Student Succeeds Act. Students who attend these schools are stripped of the First Amendment, due process, and other constitutional and statutory rights guaranteed to them in public schools.

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- Most voucher programs also permit schools to discriminate in their admission policies and do not have to accept students with disabilities. Most private schools in the Milwaukee voucher program[12] "lack the full complement of educational programs that students with disabilities are entitled to if they receive their education in the public sector."
- A U.S. Department of Education report on the Washington, D.C., voucher program[13] showed that a main reason why students didn't use a voucher offered to them was that they were unable to find a participating school with services for their learning or physical disability or other special needs.
- Only four voucher programs in the country require private schools to accept all students with vouchers, space permitting, according to a Government Accountability Office study.[14]
- A 2013 study of a Georgia tuition tax credit program[15] found that many schools have explicit anti-gay policies or belong to associations that condemn homosexuality. And in North Carolina,[16] voucher programs also fund schools with anti-LGBT policies.

PRIVATE SCHOOL VOUCHERS INCREASE SEGREGATION

- As Nikole Hannah-Jones noted[17] in the *New York Times Magazine*: "The very voucher movement that is at the heart of DeVos's educational ideas was born of white opposition to school desegregation as state and local governments offered white children vouchers to pay for private schools—known as segregation academies—that sprouted across the South after the Supreme Court struck down school segregation in 1954."
- In Milwaukee,[18] more than 85 percent of African-American students in in the voucher program attend "intensely segregated" schools.
- The Department of Justice had to sue the state of Louisiana[19] because its voucher program may have violated desegregation orders.
- In Arizona,[20] the wealthiest students received most of the money in the tuition tax credit program, leading to increased economic segregation.
- A study by the *Columbus Dispatch*[21] showed that, in Ohio, "white students appear to get into private schools using taxpayer-funded vouchers at a higher rate than black students."

VOUCHERS TAKE MONEY AWAY FROM NEIGHBORHOOD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

- One study estimates that costs associated with vouchers "could raise public education costs by 25% or more."[22]
- Milwaukee[23] had to raise property taxes several times in order to ensure adequate funding for the city's schools, and Indiana's voucher program ran a $53 million deficit.[24]
- Alabama[25] put aside $40 million to cover losses from the state's tax credits.

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