



# National Coalition for PUBLIC EDUCATION

December 12, 2024

Speaker Mike Johnson  
568 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Leader Hakeem Jeffries  
2433 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Leader John Thune  
322 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Leader Chuck Schumer  
317 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Johnson, Leader Jeffries, Leader Thune, and Leader Schumer:

The 57 undersigned members of the National Coalition for Public Education (NCPE) write to express our strong opposition to the inclusion of funding for private school vouchers in any budget reconciliation package in the 119th Congress.

In particular, we oppose the Educational Choice for Children Act,<sup>1</sup> a proposal to create a national voucher program that would divert \$21.5 billion<sup>2</sup> in tax dollars to private schools and families who homeschool. This legislation is fiscally irresponsible, enables discrimination against students, undermines local control of education, and would severely damage public schools that educate 90% of American children.

Tuition tax credit voucher schemes may have a different name and structure, but they are simply another private school voucher: they divert taxpayer funds away from public education and into private schools. For example, H.R. 9462 provides individuals a dollar-for-dollar tax credit for donating money to a “scholarship granting organization” that pays the tuition for students who attend private schools or reimburses families who homeschool. This operates less like a tax incentive and more like a direct transfer of taxpayer funds away from public education and into private schools. In fact, taxpayers donating corporate stock to these private school voucher programs would receive more back in tax cuts than the amount they donated.<sup>3</sup>

The government should not redirect up to \$5 billion dollars per year of taxpayer dollars to pay for ineffective, discriminatory, and unaccountable vouchers. Private school vouchers fail to improve students’ academic achievement. Indeed, they often cause students to perform worse

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<sup>1</sup> In the 118th Congress these bill numbers were H.R. 9462, H.R. 531, and S.120.

<sup>2</sup> The cost of H.R. 9462 is \$21.5 billion whereas the cost for HR. 531 and S. 120 are \$100 billion.

<sup>3</sup> Voucher boondoggle: house advances plan to give the wealthy \$1.20 for every \$1 They steer to private K-12 schools. (n.d.). ITEP. <https://itep.org/school-vouchers-educational-choice-for-children-act-of-2024/>

than their peers who aren't in the voucher program: large-scale studies of the Louisiana<sup>4</sup>, Indiana<sup>5</sup>, Ohio<sup>6</sup>, and Washington, DC<sup>7</sup> programs show that voucher students experienced significant declines in their academic performance. The impact of accepting a voucher on academic achievement in these programs is on par with or worse than the learning loss caused by Hurricane Katrina and the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>8</sup>

Although promoted as “educational freedom,” private school vouchers do not provide real freedom of choice to students and parents. The “choice” in voucher programs actually lies with the private schools, which often reject students for a variety of reasons including disability, sexual orientation and gender identity, religion, academic achievement, and economic status.<sup>9</sup> Like other voucher legislation in states, this bill would fund private schools that are permitted to discriminate against students and families. In contrast, public schools are open to all and are a cornerstone of our communities particularly in rural areas of America. Private school voucher programs undermine our nation's public schools by funneling desperately needed resources away from public schools to fund the education of a few, select students in private, often religious, schools.

Indeed, private school voucher programs have a sordid history. Rooted in attempts to evade desegregation orders in the wake of *Brown v. Board of Education*, they still fund discrimination today. Despite receiving public funds, voucher schools do not have to abide by the same civil rights requirements as public schools, including many of those in Title VI and Title IX of the Civil Rights Act, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act, and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Students who attend private schools with vouchers are also stripped of other protections for their civil rights and liberties, including First Amendment, due process, and other constitutional and statutory rights.

Students with disabilities are especially underserved by vouchers. Voucher schools do not provide the same quantity and quality of services available to students with disabilities in public schools, including those mandated under each student's individualized education program (IEP). If admitted to a private school that accepts a voucher through a tax credit program, students and their families are responsible for complying with their selected private schools' code of conduct in order to maintain enrollment at the school. Disability and behavior are linked, as unmet needs can sometimes result in challenging behaviors. Voucher schools often deny

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<sup>4</sup> Jonathan N. Mills & Patrick J. Wolf, Univ. of Ark., The Effects of the Louisiana Scholarship Program on Student Achievement After Four Years, EDRE Working Paper No. 2019-10 (Apr. 2019).

<sup>5</sup> Megan Austin et al., Voucher Pathways and Student Achievement in Indiana's Choice Scholarship Program, Russell Sage Foundation J. of the Social Sciences (2019).

<sup>6</sup> David Figlio & Krzysztof Karbownik, Fordham Inst., Evaluation of Ohio's EdChoice Scholarship Program: Selection, Competition, & Performance Effects (July 2016).

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Gov't Accountability Office, GAO-13-805, District of Columbia Opportunity Scholarship Program: Actions Needed to Address Weaknesses in Administration and Oversight, 19 (2013).

<sup>8</sup> Cowen, J.. (2024, November 8). *OPINION: After two decades of studying voucher programs, I'm now firmly opposed to them*. The Hechinger Report.

<https://hechingerreport.org/opinion-after-two-decades-of-studying-voucher-programs-im-now-firmly-opposed-to-them/>

<sup>9</sup> Polson, Diana, Rachel Tabachnick, and Stephen Herzenberg. "Pennsylvania's Track Record on Private School Vouchers: Still No Accountability." *Keystone Research Center* (2024).

students with disabilities admission or subject them to inappropriate or excessive suspensions or expulsions. This discrimination should not be supported by taxpayer funds.

In addition, private schools are not required to meet state-determined accountability requirements under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act currently known as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). They frequently do not have to meet any baseline standard for teacher qualification, student testing, financial accountability, or even safe facilities. Further, example after example demonstrates that the lack of oversight requirements results in waste, fraud, and abuse. In Arizona, vouchers were used to pay for Amazon gift cards, ski trips, pizza ovens, and trampolines,<sup>10</sup> while in Florida families used these funds to pay for paddle boards, big-screen televisions, foosball tables, and trips to Disney World.<sup>11</sup>

Finally, vouchers are unpopular with the general public. Just this year, voters in Nebraska, Kentucky, and Colorado resoundingly rejected vouchers or measures to allow for vouchers. This is no surprise given that for decades, voters across the country have rejected the creation or expansion of private school vouchers fourteen previous times.<sup>12</sup>

For all of the above reasons, we urge you to reject any efforts to include private school vouchers in any reconciliation package. Vouchers are bad public policy. Congress would better serve our children by using our limited taxpayer funds to ensure every child has access to strong public schools.

Thank you for your consideration of our views.

AASA, The School Superintendents Association  
Advancement Project  
AESA  
AFT  
AFL-CIO  
Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools  
American Atheists  
American Civil Liberties Union  
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)  
American Humanist Association  
American Music Therapy Association  
Americans for Democratic Action (ADA)  
Americans United for Separation of Church and State

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<sup>10</sup> Blasius, Melissa, and Garrett Archer. "ABC15 Arizona in Phoenix (KNXV)." *ABC15 Arizona in Phoenix (KNXV)* 3 Oct. 2023. Web.

<sup>11</sup> Dillon, Lucy. "Megacon Orlando Announces Its 2025 Return with Four Days of Fandom Madness." *Orlando Weekly*, 31 Oct. 2024, [www.orlandoweekly.com/arts/megacon-orlando-announces-its-2025-return-with-four-days-of-fandom-madness-38118474](https://www.orlandoweekly.com/arts/megacon-orlando-announces-its-2025-return-with-four-days-of-fandom-madness-38118474), <https://doi.org/1025139/74700>. Accessed 9 Nov. 2024.

<sup>12</sup><https://static1.squarespace.com/static/582f7c15f7e0ab3a3c7fb141/t/63d162c3ae7bc31595b41397/1674666706305/2023+-+NCPE+Voucher+Toolkit+FINAL.pdf>

Association of School Business Officials International (ASBO)  
Autistic Self Advocacy Network  
Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty  
Center for American Progress (CAP)  
Center for Inquiry (CFI)  
Clearinghouse on Women's Issues  
Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF)  
Council for Exceptional Children  
Council of Administrators of Special Education  
Council of the Great City Schools  
Economic Policy Institute  
Families for Strong Public Schools  
Feminist Majority Foundation  
FFRF Action Fund  
First Focus Campaign for Children  
GLSEN  
In the Public Interest  
Interfaith Alliance  
Learning Disabilities Association of America  
National Association of Counties (NACo)  
National Association of Elementary School Principals  
National Association of Federally Impacted Schools  
National Association of School Psychologists  
National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP)  
National Center for Learning Disabilities  
National Center for Parent Leadership, Advocacy, and Community Empowerment (National PLACE)  
National Council of Jewish Women  
National Disability Rights Network (NDRN)  
National Education Association  
National PTA  
National Rural Education Association  
National School Boards Association  
Network for Public Education  
People For the American Way  
Public Advocacy for Kids (PAK)  
Public Funds Public Schools  
ResearchEd  
Southern Education Foundation  
The Arc of the United States  
The Education Trust  
The Secular Coalition for America  
Union for Reform Judaism  
United Church of Christ