

The COALITION for PUBLIC SCHOOLS



Private School Vouchers: An Experiment Tax Payers Can't Afford

The Case Against Private School Vouchers

More than 50 years have passed since Milton Friedman first proposed private school vouchers as a public policy. During that time, proponents have spent hundreds of millions of dollars attempting to convince a skeptical public and lawmakers of the concept's efficacy, and yet, five decades later, vouchers still remain controversial, unproven and unpopular. Opposition to vouchers emanates from constitutional and democratic concerns, as well as from practical and policy-related flaws, including many of those listed below.

- **Either you're for accountability or you're not** —Vouchers eliminate public accountability. Vouchers channel tax dollars into private schools that do not face state-approved academic standards, do not make budgets public, do not adhere to open meetings and records laws, do not publicly report on student achievement, and do not face the public accountability requirements contained in state and federal laws, including special education laws. They also do not have to accept all students.
- **Vouchers divert critical dollars and commitment from public schools**—Vouchers divert attention, commitment and dollars from public schools to pay private school tuition for a few students, including many who already attend private school. A dollar spent on a tuition voucher is a dollar drained from public education. Even proposals that purportedly create a “new” funding stream to pay for vouchers miss the mark: if new public money is available for education it should be invested in strengthening the schools that educate the vast majority of our students and are accountable to all taxpayers – our *public* schools.
- **Vouchers are no way to raise student achievement for all**—Despite built-in screening advantages for private schools, a GAO report to Congress on the Cleveland and Milwaukee voucher programs noted that the most credible research found “*little or no difference in voucher and public school students' performance.*” The federal evaluation of the Washington, D.C. voucher experiment discovered the same two years running.
- **Vouchers waste taxpayer money**—Vouchers force taxpayers to support two school systems: one public and one private, the latter of which is not accountable to all the taxpayers supporting it. Existing private school students usually are eligible to receive vouchers, creating a new cost to taxpayers.

- **Vouchers leave behind many students, including those with the greatest needs—** Vouchers leave behind many disadvantaged students because private schools may not accept them or do not offer the special services they need.
- **Vouchers give choices to private schools, not parents—**Private schools decide if *they* want to accept vouchers, and then how many students *they* want to admit. And even if a voucher student does gain acceptance into a private school, the school can later reject him or her for numerous reasons.
- **Vouchers remain publicly unpopular—**Utah voters, in 2007, overwhelmingly voted to repeal a state voucher program by a margin of 62 percent to 38 percent. This marked the 11th time in 11 referenda over the past 30 years that *voters* have decisively rejected specific voucher or tuition tax credit proposals.

The Voters' Choice:

A History of State Referenda on Vouchers and Tuition Tax Credits

State <i>(including Washington, D.C.)</i>	Year	Proposal	Result
Maryland	1972	Vouchers	Rejected 55% to 45%
Michigan	1978	Vouchers	Rejected 75% to 26%
Washington, D.C.	1981	Tuition tax credits	Rejected 89% to 11%
Oregon	1990	Tuition tax credits	Rejected 67% to 33%
Colorado	1992	Vouchers	Rejected 67% to 33%
California	1993	Vouchers	Rejected 70% to 30%
Washington	1996	Vouchers	Rejected 64% to 36%
Colorado	1998	Tuition tax credits	Rejected 60% to 40%
Michigan	2000	Vouchers	Rejected 69% to 31%
California	2000	Vouchers	Rejected 71% to 20%
Utah*	2007	Vouchers	Rejected 68% to 32%

*Voters in Utah repealed a program already created by the state Legislature, as opposed to voting on a proposed program.