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The Facts about Vouchers

Since its founding, National PTA has advocated for strong and effective public education for all children including fully funding education. At the National PTA Annual Convention in June, attendees kicked off the “Five Cents Makes Sense for Education” campaign to support doubling the federal investment toward K-12 and higher education, which is currently less than 2.8 cents of every federal dollar. Public funding of school vouchers is integral to this debate.

Vouchers divert money from public schools – where 90 percent of all school-age children are enrolled – to private school, where the public has no oversight into how those public dollars are spent. These voucher programs do nothing to improve public education. The only way to ensure that every child has an equal and valuable education is to invest in our public school system.

National PTA and the 54 state PTA congresses (50 states plus the District of Columbia, Europe, the Pacific, and U.S. Virgin Islands) help to lead the battle for public funds for public schools on the local, state, and federal levels. National PTA chairs the National Coalition for Public Education (NCPE), which is composed of more than 50 education, civic, civil rights, and religious organizations devoted to the support of public schools. Founded in 1978, NCPE opposes the funneling of public money to private and religious schools through such mechanisms as tuition tax credits and vouchers. PTA state congresses have lobbied their elected officials, participated in letter writing campaigns, and have even joined in lawsuits to bring an end to vouchers. The PTA message continues to be: public funds for public schools.

Vouchers Lack Accountability

State regulation

State regulation of private schools is minimal, resulting in almost complete autonomy with respect to admissions policies, how they handle finances and records, and what information they disclose to parents.

Only a handful of states require private school teachers to be licensed by the state.

No states require private schools to meet the same state curriculum standards as public schools, to administer state assessments, or to report test scores of students who do take the tests.

Private school board meetings and records are closed to the public.

Private schools are not required to admit students with special needs or offer special-education services.

Some states do not require private schools to conduct criminal background checks of employees or report suspected cases of child abuse.

Accountability by parents?

Voucher proponents claim that parents provide all the accountability that is needed; if schools fail to perform, parents can remove their children and re-enroll them elsewhere. Yet this threat has not prevented mismanagement and fraud. For example,

Schools participating in the McKay voucher program in Florida, which provides vouchers for students with disabilities, have failed to provide books and services, and have been accused of permitting verbal and physical abuse of the students.

In Cleveland, more than a quarter of a million dollars in taxpayer funds went to a voucher school that had no fire alarm or sprinkler system, flaking lead paint on the walls, and unlicensed teachers, including one who had been convicted of first-degree murder.

In Milwaukee, two voucher schools inflated their enrollment figures to overcharge taxpayers \$390,000, while other schools charged the city the full value of the voucher and charged lower tuition to non-voucher students.

Further, voucher proposals do not require participating private schools to abide by the same testing and accountability provisions in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), also known as the No Child Left Behind Act. Therefore, parents would not even be given adequate tools and information to make informed decisions about their child's education.

In the 35th annual *Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward Public Schools*, 60 percent of respondents reveal that they oppose "allowing students and parents to choose a private school to attend at public expense." Only 38 percent of respondents supported this notion.

Vouchers Do NOT Improve Student Achievement

Given the limited resources available for education reform, only proven programs should be funded. There is no scientifically valid research indicating that vouchers improve the academic achievement of all students who receive them. In fact, the official evaluation of Milwaukee's voucher program, *Fifth Year Report: Milwaukee Parental Choice Program*, published by the University of Wisconsin in 1995, found no increases in reading and math scores for those students enrolled in voucher programs. A reanalysis of students enrolled in voucher programs found no increases in reading scores, and only a small gain in math scores. Further, the official evaluation of the Cleveland voucher program – *A Comparative Evaluation of the Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Grant Program* by Indiana University in 1998 – found no increase in test scores for those students in the first year of the program. It found a slight increase in scores for science and language exams, but not in math, reading, and social studies exams, in the second year.

A study of non-publicly funded voucher programs in Dayton, Ohio, New York City, and Washington, DC, found large achievement gains by African-American voucher students, but not whites or Hispanics, in each city. The independent firm that conducted the research in New York, however, issued a statement that provided evidence that there were no significant achievement differences between the voucher students and the control group. Reanalysis of the results in all three cities contradicts the claims of the original study and found much more modest advantages for African-American students than claimed, and only in some grades.

Reform Without Vouchers

Rather than devote scarce resources to unproven schemes designed to assist, at best, only a few students; policy makers should instead fund proven reforms, such as class-size reduction, parent involvement, professional development, and extended learning opportunities.

Parent Involvement

Regardless of the economic, ethnic, or cultural background of the family, parent involvement in a child's education is a major factor in determining success in school. Parent involvement also contributes to the other positive outcomes, such as better school attendance, improved homework completion rates, decreased violence and substance abuse, and higher graduation rates. The earlier that parent involvement begins in a child's educational process, the more powerful the effects. Programs that facilitate and improve parents' involvement in their children's education will improve student achievement.

National PTA believes that strong parent involvement policies should be required in all appropriate programs, including ESEA and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and that states and schools should incorporate parent involvement into all aspects of the education program to improve student learning. Provisions should reflect PTA's National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs.

After-School Programs

Children and youth who regularly attend high-quality after-school programs have better grades and conduct in school; more academic and enrichment opportunities; better peer relations and emotional adjustment; and lower incidences of drug-use, violence, and pregnancy, according to the U.S. Department of Education's report *21st Century Community Learning Centers: Providing Quality After-school Learning Opportunities for America's Families*, published in 2000. The report also found that nearly eight in 10

teens (79 percent) who participated in after-school programs are “A” or “B” students. Teen who do not engage in after-school activities are five times more likely to be “D” students than teen who do, as report by the YMCA in *After School for America’s Teens, March 2001*.

National PTA supports federal and state incentives for high-quality child-care programs that are:

Affordable and accessible.

Coordinated between federal, state, and local governments permitting flexible services that reflect local needs.

Planned, implemented, and evaluated with parent involvement.

Offered with quality standards for caregiver and teacher training and for health and safety.

Professional development

Numerous studies corroborate the link between student achievement and teacher quality. A 1999 analysis, for example, found that full teacher certification with a major in the field of assignment was the strongest indicator of student achievement in reading and math on the National Assessment of Education Progress. Programs that increase the number of “highly qualified” teachers in America’s classrooms will improve student achievement.

National PTA believes that improving teacher quality is a key element of effective school reform. We support strong requirements for teacher quality, as well as adequately funded teacher preparation and staff development programs that should be designed to initiate and strengthen professional excellence in teaching techniques, academic knowledge, human understand, critical thing, technology, and parent and community involvement. National PTA believes that parent involvement needs to be strengthened to ensure that pre- and in-service teacher development programs provide instruction to help teachers work effectively with parent s and other family members to increase student learning.

What Can You Do?

We encourage you to take an active role in improving public education by participating in the “Five Cents Makes Sense for Education” campaign and advocating fur public schools. To support America’s children we need to ensure that our public schools are providing the best education possible. To learn more about the “Five Cents Makes Sense for Education Campaign”, school vouchers, or other issues affecting public education, please visit the Issues and Action section of the National PTA website at

http://www.pta.org/take_action.asp

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