



Why I Oppose Vouchers

By Ann McLean, retired North Carolina teacher and principal

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My opposition to the school voucher program is two-fold: it hurts students particularly, and it hurts traditional public schools (TPS) in general. In the very rural districts in which I spent the majority of my career, vouchers are becoming even more damaging to our schools.

Not all private schools accept vouchers, so there are students who are still not given access to the particular schools they want.

Schools participating in the voucher program often don't provide transportation. Some don't even have cafeterias. Those schools discriminate against the poor or families who can't provide transportation or personal meals for school every day. Should tax dollars support discrimination?

Some schools that participate in the voucher program exclude certain students (students with learning disabilities, students of certain religions, students who identify non cisgender or nonbinary gender, etc). Again, this goes against the very tenets of providing access to a high-quality education for ALL students. Tax dollars, in the form of vouchers, should not be used to encourage discrimination.

Traditional public schools offer the diversity that I believe is necessary to help students learn to live in the real world. TPS offer an environment that is often a microcosm of the world in which students live or will live after graduation. For example, students in TPS are surrounded by a diverse population of students (and staff, we hope) in terms of race and ethnicity, socio-economics, religion, learning abilities, etc.; they are given access to diverse course offerings (often due to the number of students enrolled); and they are provided diverse experiences such as athletics, arts, field trips, and after-school activities that many private/charter schools do not offer.

By allowing families to use vouchers for their students to attend private schools, we are reducing membership numbers in traditional public schools, often lowering diversity and negatively impacting course offerings, staffing, and extra-curricular options. I believe we are doing a disservice to all students by even offering vouchers for schools that cannot offer that diversity. The voucher program hurts the students who choose to attend private schools, AND it hurts the students who choose to stay in TPS.

That leads us to the painful effects on rural schools because those are the schools that I believe are most negatively impacted by vouchers. Many rural schools have already been hurt by the refusal of our state legislature to abide by the Leandro ruling. By encouraging even more students to withdraw from rural schools to attend private schools with vouchers, the state is giving approval to reduce funding to rural schools even more.

Our TPS, particularly our rural ones, are being drained of the students whose socioeconomics and high level learning abilities allow them to make the change (private schools are often very selective). Our rural schools have a harder time attracting the most highly-qualified teachers as well, and when we pair that already-difficult challenge with the challenge to attract and retain teachers in the schools that are being drained of students, we are facing almost-impossible situations.

Much research over the years has shown that the most direct influence on a student's academic progress is a qualified teacher in the classroom. When we continue to lose those teachers in our rural schools, and then encourage families to move their students to private schools with vouchers, then we're sending the message that TPS, especially rural ones, aren't priorities at all.

Vouchers are not the answer. Yes, I believe parents should have the freedom to send their children to schools of their choice, but if they choose something other than traditional public schools, they also have the responsibility of paying for it.

Public dollars should be used for public schools only. If I don't find what I want to read in a public library, the state isn't going to buy the books I want from a retail bookstore. I hope the state is going to help the library improve its collection. And if not, eventually people will stop visiting the public library. What happens then? Does it close its doors? .

Is that what our legislature wants to happen to public schools, particularly rural ones? It won't happen overnight for sure, but I foresee major problems if vouchers continue to be used and expanded.



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