



School Vouchers Risk Child Safety

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By law, we require children to go to school where they spend hours and days and weeks with adults. Two important safeguards for children are background checks and staff training to recognize and report abuse. By law, public schools are required to check the backgrounds of staff and also train staff to recognize and report abuse—the training is free.

What about private schools that receive tax-funded vouchers? Surely with the money—the vouchers—goes a requirement for background checks and free staff training.

Not so. Yes: not so.

The private school gets the money with the voucher, but only one person in the private school—the one with the “highest decision-making responsibility” is required to submit to a background check, and there is no requirement regarding mandatory reporter training. This deficiency brings danger to our children and indicates a severe moral gap in our state laws.

Before North Carolina begins to disburse another half billion dollars of taxpayer money for the next academic year, we must insist that all staff must have a current background check and complete the free NC mandatory reporter training. Child safety is crucial to the health of children and our society.

It is a heartbreaking truth that religious institutions have a long and current history of being unsafe for children, and 9 in 10 NC schools that receive vouchers have a religious affiliation. There's a reason child abuse liability insurance exists for religious institutions. Similarly, a major contributing factor to the extensive abuse in the Boy Scouts of America was a national refusal to require background checks of volunteers.

To learn more about school vouchers, the governor's office has an excellent fact sheet. For now, please contact your state representative and senator (www.ncleg.gov/findyourlegislators) and insist that any private school that receives school vouchers must, like public schools, require background checks of all staff and proof of staff having completed the free NC mandatory reporter training. Our children deserve to be safe at school. Come on, y'all.

Clyde Edgerton is the author of ten novels, a book of advice, a memoir, short stories, and essays. He has been a Guggenheim Fellow and five of his novels have been New York Times Notable Books. He is a member of the Fellowship of Southern Writers and is the Thomas S. Kenan III Distinguished Professor of Creative Writing at UNC Wilmington.



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