

The National Coalition

for

Public Education

June 10, 2013

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman
Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
Committee
731 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Ranking Member
Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
Committee
455 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Re: NCPE opposes any amendments or substitutes to S. 1094, "Strengthening America's Schools Act," that would permit federally funded private school vouchers.

Dear Chairman Harkin and Senator Lamar:

The undersigned members of the National Coalition for Public Education (NCPE) write to express our strong opposition to any amendments to or substitutes for S. 1094, the "Strengthening America's Schools Act," that would allow the expenditure of scarce federal funds on private school vouchers.

Vouchers run counter to the very purpose the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Instead of providing equal access to high quality education or setting high standards and accountability, voucher programs have proven ineffective, lack accountability to taxpayers, and deprive students of rights provided to public school students.

At a time when Congress is attempting to reduce spending, it is poor public policy to funnel taxpayer funds away from public schools and toward private schools. Vouchers divert desperately-needed resources away from the public school system to fund the education of a few, select voucher students, with limited, if any, real impact on student academic achievement. Congress better serves *all* children by using funds to make the public schools stronger and safer than by creating a new voucher program.

Vouchers support schools that are not bound by the open and non-discriminatory acceptance policies that are a unifying factor among the diverse range of ethnic and religious communities of our society and a strength of our public school system. Public schools serve any and all students that walk through the school house doors, regardless of race, religion, disability, or income.

Vouchers deprive students of rights and protections they are awarded in public schools. Despite receiving public money, private schools that participate in voucher programs are not subject to all federal civil rights laws and do not face the same public accountability standards that all public schools must meet—including those in Title IX, IDEA, and ESEA—contained in the very law the Committee seeks to reauthorize.

Vouchers do not improve student education. According to multiple studies of the District of Columbia, Milwaukee, and Cleveland school voucher programs, students offered vouchers do not perform better in reading and math than students in public schools. Vouchers do not receive proper oversight, accountability, or internal controls. Most voucher programs are plagued with accountability problems, as they do not have to adhere to the same standards set for public schools.

Voucher programs primarily fund private religious schools. To both protect the religious freedom of taxpayers and the autonomy of religious schools, many of our coalition members object to taxpayer money being used to fund religious education.

For these reasons and more, NCPE opposes any amendments or substitute bills that would permit a voucher program. ESEA should ensure that public dollars remain invested in public schools and that no ESEA funds may be used for private school vouchers.

Thank you for your consideration of our views.

Sincerely,

African American Ministers In Action
American Association of School Administrators
American Association of University Women (AAUW)
American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)
American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO)
American Federation of School Administrators (AFSA), AFL-CIO
American Federation of Teachers
American Humanist Association
American Jewish Committee
Americans for Democratic Action
Americans for Religious Liberty
Americans United for Separation of Church and State
Anti-Defamation League
ASPIRA Association, Inc.
Association of Educational Service Agencies
Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty
Center for Inquiry
Children and Adults with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
Clearinghouse on Women's Issues
Council for Exceptional Children
Council of the Great City Schools
Disciples Justice Action Network
Equal Partners in Faith
Family and Children's Ministries, Disciples Home Missions, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Feminist Majority
Freedom From Religion Foundation
Hindu American Foundation
Institute for Science and Human Values
Interfaith Alliance
International Reading Association
Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
NA'AMAT USA
National Alliance of Black School Educators
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)
National Association for Bilingual Education
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of Federally Impacted Schools
National Association of State Directors of Special Education
National Association of Secondary School Principals

National Center for Lesbian Rights
National Council of Jewish Women
National Education Association
National Organization for Women
National Parent Teacher Association
National Rural Education Advocacy Coalition
National Rural Education Association
National School Boards Association
People For the American Way
Public Education Network
Secular Coalition for America
School Social Work Association of America
Southern Poverty Law Center
Union for Reform Judaism
Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations
United Church of Christ Justice & Witness Ministries
Women of Reform Judaism

cc: Members of the Senate HELP Committee