

The National Coalition

for

Public Education

October 17, 2005

United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The National Coalition for Public Education (NCPE), a coalition of more than fifty education, civic, civil rights, and religious organizations, writes to urge that you consider options other than a voucher to assist the students, families, and schools impacted by the hurricanes that ravaged the gulf coast. Since 1978, members of NCPE have consistently supported public schools and opposed efforts to use public money to fund private and religious schools. NCPE encourages you to seek alternatives so as to avoid vouchers becoming law, even in these unprecedented circumstances.

We recognize that the devastation in the gulf requires an extraordinary response from the federal government. As you continue to debate how to provide appropriate and equitable relief, we would like to recommend you consider using systems currently in law, such as equitable participation. This would allow private school students to receive the benefit of federal hurricane relief funds through a range of valuable services, as well as books and equipment provided by local education agencies. Providing help through this established and constitutional mechanism would avoid creating a precedent-setting national voucher program.

Concerned members of the education, civic, civil rights, and religious communities will continue to monitor the relief proposals. We strongly request that any existing civil rights protections are not compromised in the relief effort. We also strongly believe methods should be established to target federal resources to families and students in the most financial need.

NCPE acknowledges your desire to provide relief to all those affected by these storms and appreciates all the work being done on their behalf. However, distributing public funds to unaccountable private schools through vouchers, or voucher-like methods, is not the appropriate way to provide such relief.

We welcome any opportunity to work with you to craft relief legislation to ensure public funds are distributed in a fair and equitable manner and that recognizes our public schools for what they have been and always will be, especially in times like these: a public safety net for all children.