



## NEWS from the National Council of Churches

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### NCC General Assembly Presses Churches to Redouble Efforts in Support of Public Education

Nov. 5, 2003, JACKSON, Miss. -- The National Council of Churches General Assembly today approved a resolution on "The Churches and Public School," urging member communions and their congregations to redouble their efforts in support of public education.

The resolution encourages work to bridge the achievement gap between rich and poor schools and to address the re-segregation of public schools over the past 12 years – especially by seeking to discern to what extent school district boundaries and busing patterns are contributing factors.

Churches also are called upon to initiate partnerships with local schools that help meet the needs of children and their families while respecting the principles of the separation between church and state, and to designate a Sunday to affirm the role of public education in our society and to pray for public school teachers and other workers.

The resolution reinforces and follows on the NCC's 1999 Policy Statement, [\*"The Churches and the Public Schools at the Close of the Twentieth Century."\*](#) Since then, the Council's Committee on Public Education and Literacy has created and widely distributed a brochure and bulletin insert on public education --titled [\*"Litany for Education and Schools"\*](#); convened annual roundtables on public education for denominational staff; endorsed a [\*"Students' Bill of Rights"\*](#); drafted a [\*Pastoral Letter on Public Education\*](#) for the NCC General Secretary (following the Cleveland voucher case), and met with the Islamic Society of North America to discuss concerns related to public education in the Muslim community.

The Rev. Dave Brown, who staffs the Committee, has made presentations on behalf of the Committee to the annual meeting of the National Association of Ecumenical and Interreligious Staff, the National Education Association's Conference on Women and Minorities, and an Episcopal Church conference on children.

The committee is planning to co-host an interfaith roundtable on public education in January (2004) with the National Education Association.

On a related item, consideration of "The Church and Children: Vision and Goals for the 21st Century," a policy statement that outlines how the Church should support and advocate for children, was postponed until the 2004 NCC General Assembly because supporting documentation of the statement were not submitted with the resolution. The NCC Committee on Justice for Children and Their Families proposed the statement to address growing concerns about the number of children living in poverty in the United States. Furthermore, the statement fills a void in NCC policy because there is currently no resolution that specifically addresses advocacy on behalf of children.

In the meantime, NCC delegates were encouraged to contact their Congressional representatives about key legislation that will improve the quality of life for children but is pending in Congress, including:

- Immigrant Children Health Insurance Act, introduced as an amendment in S.1 (Medicare Prescription Drug Bill).

- Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (S. 1545): Pending action on the floor; Student Adjustment Act (H.R. 1684): Pending in Sub-committee on Immigration
- Child Tax Credit: Expand the child tax credit to cover low and moderate income families
- Act to Leave No Child Behind, also known as the Dodd-Miller bill (S.448 and H.R. 936)

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**A Resolution of the  
National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA  
The Churches and Public School  
Adopted Nov. 5, 2003**

**Whereas**, the General Assembly of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA in 2000 committed to a decade-long mobilization to overcome poverty;

**Whereas**, the NCCC has affirmed that quality public education is the primary route for impoverished children to access full and meaningful participation in the life of our communities;

**Whereas**, quality public education for all children must be a component for the future welfare of our country, and we live in a time where grave concern about world affairs is overshadowing domestic issues such as public education;

**Whereas**, public education faces incredible economic challenges such as:

- A 'No Child Left Behind Act' that mandates holding schools accountable to high national standards without the Federal government demonstrating intention to adequately fund its required reforms.
- A budget crisis in all states and in federal domestic spending that shreds what is an already torn and tattered safety net for children in poverty by cutting into health care, child care, school-age after-school care and mental health supports, all of which were designed to assist children in America's public schools.
- Continued inequity in school funding that persists at a time when research demonstrates that, in order to close the achievement gap, increased funding is needed to advance reforms such as: 1) reduced class size, 2) incentives to attract excellent teachers to urban and remote rural schools, and 3) universal, accessible, affordable and enriched preschool programs.

**Whereas**, "at the beginning of the twenty-first century, American public schools are now twelve years into the process of continuous resegregation"; and

**Whereas**, our nation's teachers are asked to change lives and solve problems with resources nowhere near commensurate with the task while facing constant criticism by politicians, the public, and the press for their alleged failures and inadequacies;

**Therefore**, in light of these urgent and ongoing challenges, the National Council of Churches of Christ reaffirms and commends to our member communions for study and action the policy statement *The Churches and Public Schools at the End of the Twentieth Century* adopted by the General Assembly in 1999, and

**Furthermore**, we call upon our member communions to encourage their congregations to:

- 1) Engage in on-going efforts to reform public education funding as a way of bridging the achievement gap between rich and poor schools.
- 2) Initiate partnerships with local schools that focus on the needs of children and their families and are guided by the principles of the separation between church and state.
- 3) Designate a Sunday to affirm the role of public education in our society and to acknowledge and

pray for the women and men who teach and work in our public schools.

4) Discern if the school district boundaries and busing patterns in our communities contribute to the re-segregation of public schools and, if needed, devise strategies in response to these findings.

Submitted by: Committee on Public Education and Literacy with affirmation from the Committee on Justice for Children and Their Families (program ministries of the Education and Leadership Ministries Commission)

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