

EDUCATION WATCH: SKIMPING ON SCHOOL THE WEAK CASE FOR SCHOOL VOUCHERS



Those who advocate for school vouchers will generally make three arguments in favor: vouchers save money, give parent's choice, and help improve educational outcomes. The problem is that none of these claims are true, and in many cases, the exact opposite is closer to reality.

The money trail

At their core, vouchers are about taking public money and giving it to private schools. The entire reason our state legislature has introduced a voucher program is to save money – the bill's author has said as much publically. Vouchers save the state money by allowing them to pay less per-pupil—more than \$3,000 less on average. The cost of that “savings” is passed on, or subtracted, from what we pay to educate our children, In a state that already ranks 48th in per pupil expenditures, don't our children deserve better than to be educated on the cheap?

Furthermore, since vouchers are used at private schools and private schools are allowed to do whatever they want when it comes to curriculum, teacher qualifications, discipline, and even expulsion these vouchers are used at private schools, we lose all accountability over how are tax dollars are spent. The absence of public accountability for voucher funds has contributed to rampant fraud, waste and abuse in voucher programs currently in place around the country, and there is no reason to believe these problems will not plague a voucher system in North Carolina.

The false hope

Imagine you receive a \$4,500 check to put toward your child's education. Sounds great, right? It does – until you realize that any private school in your area will cost more than \$6,000. This is the reality in North Carolina today, with the average cost of a private school exceeding \$6,000 a year after tuition, fees, and transportation to and from the school – and many schools cost much, much more.

This leaves low-income, and even many moderate-income, families being forced to make up the difference, when the state is supposed to provide a sound education to everyone, free of charge. And all of this additional cost is for an education that is unregulated and not guaranteed to be any better than the education they would have received at no cost in the public system.

Zero improvement

All of these additional costs and potential pitfalls might almost be worth it, if voucher programs showed significantly better educational outcomes for their students. Unfortunately, that is not the case. According to two separate studies by the U.S. Department of Education, there was zero impact on students' academic performance when they took advantage of a voucher versus those students who attended a traditional public school.

Action NC is a non-profit grassroots community organization that empowers low to moderate-income communities to take action and win victories on issues of concern to our members. For more information, visit us at www.actionnc.org.