

Taxpayer Funded School Vouchers & Tuition Tax Credits

AFT Pennsylvania opposes taxpayer-funded school vouchers, education scholarship tax credits (Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) and Opportunity Scholarship Tax Credit (OSTC) programs), which are back-door vouchers that use tax breaks to subsidize private and parochial schools. Vouchers represent a false hope for a few children in struggling public schools, while most scholarships are used by students already attending private schools. Vouchers do not deliver better outcomes for students and leave fewer resources for public school programs that are proven to work.

No guarantee of high-quality education. More than 25 years of research data shows that students using vouchers or scholarships supported by business tax credits to attend private or parochial school perform no better than comparable students in neighborhood public schools. Many of the students receiving scholarships were already attending private schools. Moreover, there is no evidence that competition from vouchers and scholarship tax credits improves neighborhood schools.

Diverts tax dollars from the general fund. Reduces commitment to public schools. Pennsylvania public schools serve 1.75 million students. Private and parochial schools serve 221,700. Tax credits, which give an almost dollar-for-dollar tax break to corporations and individuals, divert money from PA's deficit-plagued budget to help a few students at the expense of the majority. Vouchers and tax credits detract from serious public dialogue about adequate, fair and sustainable public funding for schools.

No public accountability. Schools receiving vouchers or tax credit scholarships do not have to meet state academic standards, adhere to open meetings and records laws, do not report student achievement or comply with federal accountability laws, including special education. Moreover, they are not required to meet School Code requirements for physical plant or file anything more than barebones, self-reported financial reports.

Private schools, not parents, choose. Voucher proponents have latched onto the word "choice," but it's the school receiving vouchers/scholarship students, not parents, that control student admissions. There is no public oversight or reporting of private school admission, suspension or expulsions policies or data, and studies have found that students with disabilities are "counseled out" of private schools. Unlike public schools, private schools select which students they admit and remove.

Undermine workers' right to join unions. Few private schools are unionized or pay prevailing wages, benefits or pensions. Because they can hire and fire employees without cause, educators who attempt to unionize are often fired or forced out. Tax credits and vouchers are supported by the same wealthy elites who want to make Pennsylvania a right-to-work (for less) state and favor defunding and privatizing public schools.

Voters oppose taxpayer-funded vouchers. In Pennsylvania, a series of polls have found that two-thirds of Pennsylvania voters oppose giving taxpayer-funded vouchers to parents to send their children to private or parochial schools. In addition, 76 percent favor requiring achievement tests of private schools that accept vouchers, 82 percent support requiring private schools accepting vouchers to report graduation and student achievement rates and 88 percent support requiring private and parochial schools accepting vouchers to report financial data.