

Letter for the Record
National Parent Teacher Association (National PTA)

U.S House of Representatives
Committee on Education & The Workforce
Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education

Hearing:
"Education Without Limits: Exploring the Benefits of School Choice"
March 11, 2025

On behalf of the National Parent Teacher Association (National PTA), we thank you for holding the hearing on Tuesday, March 11, 2025 "Education Without Limits: Exploring the Benefits of School Choice" and appreciate the opportunity to submit this letter for the record.

As the nation's oldest and largest child advocacy organization, National PTA has been working with school communities and decision makers to solve the toughest problems in our nation's history for over 125 years. With a presence in every state and 18,000 local units across the country and abroad, we represent millions of families, students, teachers, administrators and business and community leaders.

At PTA, our mission is to make every child's potential a reality by engaging and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children. Our association strongly supports educational choices within public schools to meet the needs of all students and believes parents and families should be involved in all aspects of public-school choice plans. However, there is a difference between public school choice programs and the use of taxpayer dollars for private school voucher programs.

Although marketed as "choice" for parents, these types of proposals are harmful to families, children, and schools. Time and time again, voucher programs have proven ineffective in improving student achievement, lack accountability, deprive students of the rights and protections they would receive in public schools, and fail in providing adequate services for students most in need, including students with disabilities, low-income students and students who are English learners.

Why Are Private School Voucher Proposals Harmful?

(1) Voucher programs divert taxpayer dollars (sometimes billions of dollars) away from public schools which educate the vast majority (80%) of children in this country. Diverting funds away from public schools directly undermines their ability to educate and care for our children, narrowing the opportunities available to the millions of students in public

schools. Right now, public schools need more, not less, investment to meet the needs of our students and ensure a high-quality education for every child to reach their potential and thrive. Voucher programs can look different—from traditional vouchers to Education Savings Accounts (ESAs) to Scholarship Tax Credits—but all function the same way: to divert taxpayer dollars and funding away from public schools.

(2) Voucher programs do not offer real choice to families. Although promoted as providing “school choice” for parents, the “choice” inherent in private school voucher programs in reality lies not with families, but rather with the institutions themselves who often deny enrollment. Private schools funded through vouchers are usually allowed to reject students with disabilities—or any other students those private schools wish to avoid, including based on a student’s academic ability, race/ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation or gender identity. Families who do not sign appropriate “statements of faith” or who do not have family compositions that align with the schools’ preferences may also find their child rejected. In some communities, such as rural areas, there is no “choice” at all for parents when non-public options are hundreds of miles away. For example, in states like Alaska and Maine, rural families and communities rely upon public schools.

(3) The reality is that even well-intentioned voucher programs have proven ineffective in improving students’ academic achievement. Repeated studies of voucher programs across the country show that vouchers do not improve students’ academic achievement and can result in worse test scores for students. For example, studies of the voucher programs in Louisiana, Indiana and Ohio have demonstrated that students who used vouchers perform worse academically than their public-school peers. [Learn more here.](#)

(4) Voucher programs lack accountability. Most voucher programs lack accountability measures, and many also lack proper oversight to ensure they meet even the minimal standards that do exist. For example, many private schools that receive vouchers do not implement any requirements for teacher qualifications, testing or achievement. Unfortunately, there are usually very few guardrails on how voucher money could be spent, making it ripe for waste, fraud and abuse. [Learn more here.](#)

(5) Voucher programs deprive students, including students with disabilities, of the rights and protections they would receive in public schools. Private schools receiving vouchers are not required to abide by the same civil rights requirements as public schools. This includes many of the rights in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA); Title VI and Title IX of the Civil Rights Act; the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA); and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Students who attend private schools with vouchers are also stripped of other protections for their civil rights and liberties, including First Amendment, due process and other constitutional and statutory rights. [Learn more here.](#)

(6) Voucher programs fail in providing adequate services for students most in need, including students with disabilities, low-income students and students who are English learners.

Students with disabilities are especially underserved by vouchers. Private schools receiving vouchers often deny students with disabilities admission or, if admitted, do not provide the same quantity and quality of services available to students with disabilities in public schools, including those mandated under each student's individualized education program (IEP). Families who choose to use the vouchers must relinquish their child's rights under IDEA, including a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment and due process rights. [Learn more here.](#)

(7) Voucher programs are often inaccessible to low-income families. The cost of tuition and fees at schools that accept vouchers usually exceeds the amount of the voucher, making voucher schools unaffordable for most low-income families. In the end, the families most likely to use a voucher are the families who could already afford to send their kids to private schools. Research has found that in states with voucher programs, 70% of the students receiving vouchers are those already attending private schools, thus diverting funding from public schools without actually expanding choice for families. [Learn more here.](#)

(8) Voucher programs are especially harmful in rural areas. Twenty percent of students in the U.S. attend rural schools, and in rural communities, schools are frequently the largest employer and a community hub for resources and programs. Because the margins for operating a public school in rural communities are incredibly small, the departure of a few students can leave rural schools with fewer resources to provide education and community needs. [Learn more here.](#)

It is for these reasons that our association opposes any private school choice proposal and/or voucher system that diverts public funds to private or sectarian schools. This includes proposals like the Educational Choice for Children Act (H.R. 833, S. 292) which would hurt our nation's public schools and the millions of families served by them. Although marketed as "choice" for parents, the bill would be an unprecedented federal overreach in creating the first ever nationalized voucher system, redirecting billions of taxpayer dollars away from our public schools towards private and religious institutions and homeschooling. Today, the vast majority (over 80%) of children and families are served by public schools, and this proposal would dramatically undercut their education and academic success by diverting funding away from already under-resourced public schools. The reality is that even well-intentioned voucher programs have proven ineffective in improving students' academic achievement. Such systems usually lack accountability, they deprive students of the rights and protections they would receive in public schools, and they fail in providing adequate services for students most in need, including students with disabilities, low-income students, and students who are English learners. Moreover, the "choice" inherent in such systems lies not with the families but rather with the institutions themselves who often deny enrollment and reject students for reasons including religion, disability, sexual orientation, and academic performance. And in some communities, especially in rural areas, there is no "choice" at all when non-public options are hundreds of miles away.

National PTA recognizes that changes must be made within the public schools to provide an equitable and excellent educational opportunity for every child. However, vouchers, tax credits,

deductions and other such funding sources do not provide the means for bringing about improvements in our schools.

We urge the Subcommittee and all members of Congress to reject efforts, like the Educational Choice for Children Act (H.R. 833, S. 292), that would undermine our public schools and the millions of families served by them. It is during this challenging time that our nation's public education system must be strengthened, and public dollars must remain invested in public schools for the benefit of all students and for the future of our nation.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide this letter for the record in response to the hearing on Tuesday, March 11, 2025 "Education Without Limits: Exploring the Benefits of School Choice" within the House Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education, and we look forward to working with your offices and members of the Subcommittee to improve public education for all children in our nation. If you have any questions or would like additional information, please feel free to contact Kate Clabaugh, National PTA Director of Government Affairs, at kclabaugh@pta.org.

Sincerely,



Yvonne Johnson
President
National PTA



Nathan R. Monell, CAE
Executive Director
National PTA