



Voice Your Opposition to Vouchers!

The Opportunity Scholarship Act (aka the voucher bill) is back again in the 215th Legislative Session and we can expect a full court press to get this done by the summer!

In fact, this session's version includes the Assembly Majority Leader Louis Greenwald (D-Camden) as a co-prime with Assemblyman Angel Fuentes (D-Camden).

We need your voice in OPPOSITION!

We were able to stop it last year but without your voice TODAY the bill has a good chance of gaining easy momentum.

While NJPSA has been supportive of school choice options within our public schools, we believe this legislation, if enacted, would undermine our high quality public education system.

There are folks speaking out, it's one reason that the bill came to a grinding halt last year, in spite of the ever changing number of districts and amount of state funding meant to keep legislators appeased. In fact, this year's Assembly version (A-2830 (Fuentes) includes only half (7) of the districts that were originally included (Newark, Camden, Passaic, Elizabeth, Lakewood, Asbury Park and Orange). The Senate version, S-1779 (Kean) also includes Perth Amboy.

Other changes include a new mechanism for accepting students who are currently enrolled in private schools by limiting it to those who would be changing schools anyway. Both bills would also cut back on the administrative costs of the program.

Only a mobilized public can prevent New Jersey from becoming the first state in the country to adopt such a wide-ranging and destructive voucher system.

There is a growing vocal opposition from Legislators, parents, newspapers and folks just like you. See just a handful below:

Governor Florio

Senator Buono

Assemblywoman Jasey

Former Senator & Assistant Education
Commissioner Gordon MacInnes

Parents Across America

Save Our Schools NJ

NJ NAACP

Bob Braun

Philadelphia Inquirer Editorial Board

YOU need to add your voice to the roar against vouchers!

Join NJPSA and these advocates by reaching out to your legislative offices!

We Can Stop This Bill!

- **Call or email** your legislator today! Take Action via our Legislative Action Center, enter your zip code and provide your identifying information. You can then customize your talking points, or email what you want to send to your individual legislator!
- **Write letters to local and state-wide newspapers** to let others know why you oppose this legislation.
- **Forward this information to your friends and family members** and encourage them to come to contact their Senators and Assembly members.

This legislation is not designed to help poor children who are attending failing schools. It is meant to be a state-wide voucher program intended to privatize public education in New Jersey. If it passes the legislature, this will be by far the most extreme and far reaching voucher program in the country.

Talking Points

- Although New Jersey's economy is improving, New Jersey's schools are still in crisis having lost over \$3.8 billion dollars from 2010 through the present. Diverting almost \$1 billion dollars for this ill advised program at such a critical time.
- The legislation raids the public treasury to divert funds to private schools at the expense of public schools. If there is not enough money to fund public schools, how can the state spend millions on a private school voucher program?
- Corporations contributing to the program would receive a dollar-for-dollar tax credit - costing them nothing while sticking New Jersey taxpayers with the tab, and draining the public schools of students and resources.
- The vouchers would decimate struggling public schools by removing both funding (\$8,000 for grades K to 8 and \$11,000 for grades 9 to 12) and the easiest-to-educate students. In addition, there is no cap on the aid a district could lose, and the negative impact on affected districts could be substantial, especially in high needs districts dependent on state aid. Since private schools do not have to accept any children who require extra cost or effort, the students able to use the voucher are likely to be the easiest and least expensive to educate, whose marginal cost to their districts is much lower than the amount the districts would lose if these children receive a voucher for private and religious schools. As a result, the public schools will be left with a concentration of special needs, very poor, and non-English speaking students, and fewer resources with which to educate them.
- And, public schools remain responsible for paying to transport children to the private and religious schools, adding hundreds of thousands in additional costs that struggling districts must fund.
- The program's qualifications are drawn so broadly that almost half of all New Jersey families would qualify for the vouchers. For a family with three children, the income cut off is \$64,475, which is just under the state's median household income. And, students from all the districts in the state would be eligible for the vouchers, including those attending excellent schools in high-performing school districts
- But, the bill does not require private and religious schools to accept any student who wishes to go, enabling them to pick and choose the least expensive and easiest to educate or simply those of a particular religion, gender, or sexual orientation. In fact, the bill sends a clear "do not apply" message to parents of special needs students since parents of special needs students can only get a voucher under the bill if they sign away their child's legal right to federally mandated special education services. And, the entire \$1 billion plus could go to subsidize students already attending private and religious schools.
- The bill also lacks accountability. This legislation does not apply any educational standards or accountability measures to the private and religious schools that would receive the public dollars. Not only is this in sharp contrast to the intense state scrutiny that public schools undergo, it also could lead to public dollars being used to pay for programs that are harmful to children and violate the moral and ethical standards of taxpayers, such as those that might teach intolerance and bigotry.
- Further, scholarships would be distributed by "nonprofit scholarship organizations" overseen by a three-member Opportunity Scholarship Board, appointed by the governor. All must be representatives of corporations which are eligible for A2810/S1872's tax credits - meaning they will have no educational experience.
- Finally, the bill may conflict with federal law. Federal guidelines require states to maintain state school funding at levels mandated by their funding formulas. The voucher bill reduces the tax revenues needed to fund NJ's school funding formula and cuts aid to districts and schools in need of improvement.
- This legislation uses a gimmick to get around the separation of church and state required in our country's Constitution. Our tax dollars should not support religious education.
- The program won't help students learn. Even New Jersey's new Commissioner of Education admitted that research consistently shows vouchers do not improve student performance.
- New Jersey already has a public school choice program that provide options for students in low-performing schools. The goal of this program is not to help those students, it is to de-fund the state's excellent public schools.
- I urge you to oppose the Opportunity Scholarship Act!