

D.C. Voucher Promises: More Myth than Reality

Myth: Vouchers let parents choose their child's school

Reality: Private schools, not parents, decide whether to admit a student. They can decide how many students they will take, and can discriminate based on a child's academic or disciplinary record.

(*"Obstacle Course," Education Week, June 9, 1999; "Questions About the School Voucher System," USA Today, June 28, 2002.*)

Myth: Vouchers help children escape failing schools

Reality: Most of the students in Cleveland's voucher program never even attended public schools – many already went to private schools before having their tuition subsidized by taxpayers. The wealthy individuals and foundations that bankroll the voucher movement want vouchers for students regardless of income – promising help to low-income children is a smokescreen. (*"Cleveland School Vouchers: Where the Students Come From," Policy Matters Ohio, 2001.*)

Myth: African-Americans strongly support vouchers

Reality: African-Americans have overwhelmingly voted against voucher proposals and polls show they strongly prefer other education reforms – like smaller class sizes. In California, 68% of African-Americans rejected a voucher proposal in 2000. The same day, 78% of African-Americans in Michigan rejected a voucher plan. (*Exit Polls, CNN.com, Nov. 7, 2000; "The Voucher Vote," Palm Beach Post, Nov. 13, 2000.*)

Myth: Vouchers improve students' academic achievement

Reality: Credible evidence proves this is false, and in some cases, the opposite is true. The official studies on the Milwaukee and Cleveland voucher programs "found little or no difference in voucher and public school students' performance." The Cleveland study also found that students who went to private schools that opened in response to vouchers scored lower than public school students in all subjects.

(*"School Vouchers: Publicly Funded Programs in Cleveland and Milwaukee," U.S. GAO, Aug. 2001; "Vouchers and Student Achievement: A Review of the Evidence," National School Boards Association, 2000.*)

Myth: Vouchers will help children with the greatest needs

Reality: Voucher programs disproportionately exclude children with disabilities. Such children were "actively counseled out of the (Cleveland) program," an Ohio education official admitted.

(*"Study Finds Skimpy Evidence on Vouchers," USA Today, Dec. 6, 2001; "Whose Choice?" series, Akron Beacon-Journal, Dec. 13-15, 1999*)

Myth: Vouchers will save taxpayers money

Reality: Vouchers are likely to do just the opposite by requiring taxpayers to pay for two school systems – one public and one private. The voucher plan that California voters rejected in 2000 would have cost taxpayers \$3.2 billion to pay for vouchers for students *already* attending private schools.

(*"Are Vouchers the Way to Improve California's Schools?" California Budget Project, Aug. 2000*)

Myth: Voucher schools are accountable

Reality: Voucher programs eliminate public accountability because voucher schools do not answer to the public; do not reveal how they spend tax dollars; do not have to hire highly qualified teachers (as public schools now must do); and do not have to make students' academic results public.

Myth: Vouchers will improve the public schools by creating competition

Reality: This claim is based more on speculation than evidence as a recent study confirmed. Vouchers do take away millions of public dollars from public schools and give them to private schools that play by different rules than the public schools. For example, private schools select their students; public schools accept every child. (*"Rhetoric Versus Reality," RAND Education, 2001*)