

February 3, 2021

The Honorable Brian Kemp
206 Washington Street
Suite 203, State Capitol
Atlanta, GA 30334

Dear Governor Kemp:

As representatives of educators, parents and citizens committed to the success of Georgia's public school students, we are grateful for the support you have given public education, particularly during this challenging time. Your leadership and genuine interest in engaging in meaningful discussions on critical education issues has led to strategic progress, which we value. We write to share our concerns about another important topic: private school vouchers. We do not believe the creation of a new voucher program, as proposed in House Bill 60, or the expansion the Special Needs Scholarship program, outlined in Senate Bill 47, would benefit Georgia's students. An increase in private school vouchers would also undermine public education when our schools already face significant strains.

School vouchers are not a panacea for student learning and achievement. Recent evaluations of private school voucher programs in Washington D.C., Louisiana, Ohio and Indiana show declines in student learning in math and, in Ohio, reading as well. Earlier studies showed private school vouchers had, at best, an uneven impact on student learning. There is little reason to expect a different outcome in Georgia.

No matter the outcome, the lack of transparency and accountability requirements in the proposed voucher bills would shroud academic results and performance from families seeking to make informed educational decisions for their children—and the State of Georgia's attempts to steward taxpayer dollars. Unlike states with more robust voucher transparency and accountability measures, the program proposed by HB 60 would not require participating students to take state assessments, the Georgia Milestones. This deficiency leaves parents without critical information to understand and weigh the performance of their public schools and prospective private schools. Other basic information, such as student retention data, is not provided by the bill. HB 60 would also keep the names of participating private schools hidden, further hampering parents' ability to make informed decisions.

The lack of transparency extends to financial data, which should particularly trouble those charged with protecting Georgians' tax dollars. Participating private schools and other education service providers are not audited, and only "random audits" are required of student accounts. The absence of basic transparency and accountability metrics repeats the flaws of the Qualified Education Expense Tax Credit and Student Scholarship Program, which the [Department of Audits and Accounts recently concluded needs improvements](#) in both areas.

The greatest concern posed by private school vouchers is the threat to Georgia's most vulnerable students. Expanding vouchers will deny some special needs students vital services and legal protections. Students with Individualized Education Plans (IEP) who participate in voucher programs are required to waive their right to services under the federal Individuals with

Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). While some private schools may provide services specified in IEPs, others do not. Students and their families have no recourse in these circumstances. They may not even know prior to enrolling in a private school that the school does not offer those important special services.

Private school vouchers do not put Georgia's students first. Public school educators are driven—and legally required—to protect student rights and promote the achievement of every child. We saw this commitment as public schools innovated through the coronavirus pandemic, finding ways to deliver instruction virtually, in hybrid formats, and in person when community spread and precautions would allow. Yet, House Bill 60 twists this innovation and commitment to continued student learning into a criterium for accessing a voucher.

Governor Kemp, your commitment to investment in public education, even as recently as the Amended FY21 Budget, has been exceptional, and it has not gone unnoticed. Private school vouchers threaten this investment in Georgia's students and teachers. Not only will vouchers allow recipients to take more than their fair share of funding, they will leave tens of thousands of Georgia students in public schools that will be forced to do more with less. Every child in Georgia deserves access to a free, high-quality public education, and our public school educators are committed to delivering it. Your continued support of public schools, and opposition to private diversion of public education funds, will help safeguard this access.

We hope this information is helpful to you and welcome any questions you may have. We are also happy to meet with you or members of your staff to discuss this proposed legislation.

Again, thank you for your sustained support for public education in Georgia. Public schools are the cornerstone of our communities, and our students are Georgia's bright future. We look forward to continued communication and collaboration with you and your team.

Sincerely,

The Georgia Education Coalition

Professional Association of Georgia Educators

Georgia PTA

Attachment: Referenced Voucher Studies

Referenced Voucher Studies

Dynarski, M., & Nichols, A. (2017, July 13). More findings about school vouchers and test scores, and they are still negative. *Evidence Speaks Reports*, 2(18). Brookings Institute. Retrieved from https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/ccf_20170713_mdynarski_evidence_speaks1.pdf

Figlio, D. & Karbownik, K. (2016). *Evaluation of Ohio's EdChoice Scholarship Program: Selection, Competition and Performance Effects*. Thomas B. Fordham Institute. Retrieved from https://edex.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/publication/pdfs/FORDHAM%20Ed%20Choice%20Evaluation%20Report_online%20edition.pdf.

Waddington, R.J., & Berends, M. (2018). Impact of the Indiana Choice Scholarship Program: Achievement effects for students in upper elementary and middle school. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 37(4), 783-808.

Wolfe, P. J., Mills, J. N., Sude, Y., Erickson, H. H., & Lee, M. M. (2019). How has the Louisiana Scholarship Program Affected Students? A Comprehensive Summary of Effects after Four Years. Fayetteville: University of Arkansas, Department of Education Reform. Retrieved from <http://www.uaedreform.org/wp-content/uploads/LSP4-Policy-Brief-SCDP.pdf>