

October 24, 2023

U.S. House of Representatives  
Committee on Ways and Means  
Washington, DC 20015

Dear Representative:

On behalf of our 3 million members and the 50 million students they serve, we would like offer the following comments in conjunction with the committee's Oct. 25 hearing, "Educational Freedom and Opportunity for American Families, Students, and Workers."

The push to divert taxpayer dollars from public to private schools has a long and sordid history. After the Supreme Court's 1954 decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, some districts closed their public schools. Then, to get around the court's ruling against segregation, states used the money to provide vouchers for private, white-only schools. To this day, private schools can—and do—limit admission based on any number of factors. Public schools, in contrast, admit and serve all manner of students.

In recent years, voucher-inspired schemes revolving around tax breaks have proliferated—among them, tax-free home-schooling and K-12 education savings accounts and scholarship programs that provide tax credits for donations to organizations that in turn provide scholarships to private schools. Regardless of the name, the impact is the same: Vouchers and voucher-inspired schemes erode public education, the foundation of our democracy.

Such schemes rob our nation's public schools, which educate 9 out of 10 Americans, of scarce funding and resources. Even more important, they undermine an institution essential to our democracy. Moreover, they rarely cover the full cost of tuition, leaving families promised freedom footing the bill.

Here are the facts about the impact of vouchers and voucher-inspired tax breaks and policies:

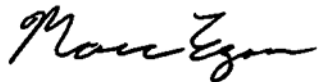
- **No evidence of greater student success.** Nor is there any validity to claims that a "competitive marketplace" forces public schools to improve. Where there is conclusive evidence is that investing more money in public education improves student achievement.
- **No public accountability.** Private schools have almost complete autonomy with regard to how they operate: who they teach, what they teach, how they teach, how (if at all) they measure student achievement, how they manage their finances, and what they are required to disclose to parents and the public.

- **Loss of student support and protections.** Students with special needs who attend private schools lose many rights granted by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). They also may not have the protection of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) the law requires for students with special needs.
- **Higher costs.** Subsidizing private, often religious, schools with taxpayer dollars is not just more expensive, it violates the fundamental principle of separation of church and state. America cannot afford to fund two education systems—one private and one public—on the taxpayer’s dime.

For all these reasons, we urge you NOT to support any legislation built around tax policies that facilitate voucher-inspired schemes to divert taxpayer dollars from public to unaccountable private schools. Taxpayer dollars should go to public schools open to all students, not private schools that can pick and choose their students. Limited education funding should go where it does most good: to the public schools that educate the overwhelming majority of our nation’s students.

We thank you for the opportunity to submit these comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marc Egan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Marc Egan  
Director of Government Relations  
National Education Association