

Questions To Ask Your Legislator About Vouchers

- Q:** With costs estimated to go from a minimum of \$54.3 million in the first year to over \$1 billion in the third year and thereafter, and the state facing a deficit estimated at over \$4 billion, how are taxpayers going to afford this?
- Q:** How can there ever be genuine “competition” between a school that can pick and choose the students it wants to enroll, and a school that has a legal duty to educate all children, including the ones the private schools don’t want?
- Q:** Since most parochial and other private school students do not take the PSSA, graduation tests or the same other tests public schools do, how will parents be able to evaluate where best to use a voucher for their student? Will the same data published about public schools be available for the private schools accepting voucher students? If not, why not?
- Q:** Should voucher students have to submit to mandatory religious instruction and religious exercises as a condition of attendance at a school accepting voucher students? Should they be permitted to opt out?
- Q:** We hear vouchers described as a “civil rights” issue. What about the civil rights that voucher students would have to give up in order to use a voucher, such as due-process, confidentiality, free speech, equal protection, disability accommodation and other rights? How does the legislation protect those things?

Tell Your Legislators to Vote “No” on SB 1

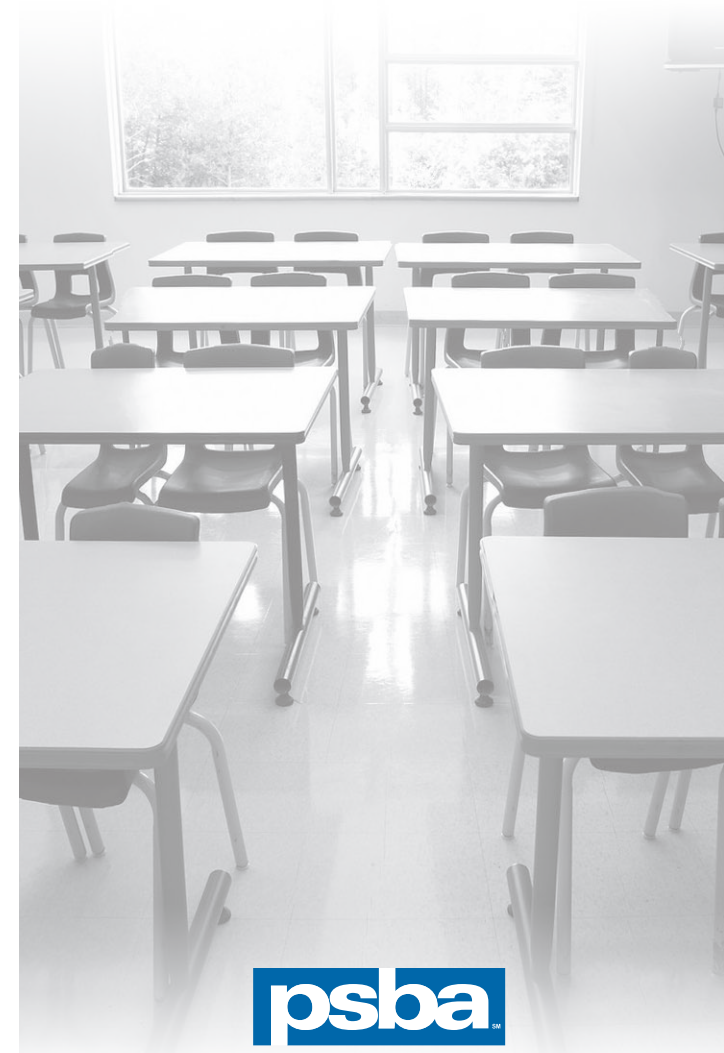
SB 1 sets up a system that is unaccountable, unaffordable, unpopular, untested and unconstitutional. The only way to guarantee that *all students* in low performing schools have the opportunity to get a great education is to fix the school and the conditions in the struggling community. SB 1 does not address this issue.

Visit the
Pennsylvania School Boards Association's
website at www.psba.org
for more information about
taxpayer-funded tuition vouchers.



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Taxpayer-Funded Tuition Vouchers: The Wrong Choice



What is SB 1?

Legislation was introduced in the state Senate to create a taxpayer-funded tuition voucher program. The proposal, known as SB 1 or the “Opportunity Scholarship and Educational Improvement Tax Credit Act,” would provide these tuition vouchers to students from low-income families to be used for public, private or religious schools. The program would begin by targeting students in schools identified as struggling, and within three years be expanded to include any school within the state, regardless of its academic standings.

The cost of the voucher program under SB 1 has been estimated at \$54.3 million the first year, \$156.3 million in the second year, and over \$1.22 billion in the third and later years.

Are Pennsylvania Public Schools Failing?

No, Pennsylvania public schools are not failing! The truth is that public schools have continued to make steady gains in academic achievement. In fact, our schools are showing great gains in student achievement. Results of the 2009-10 state assessment scores (PSSA) show that 82% of Pennsylvania schools met the required academic goals for the federal No Child Left Behind Act – up from 78% of schools last year. Three quarters of Pennsylvania students are now on grade level based on the PSSA scores in math and reading. And that’s not all: A 2009 report released by the Center for Education Policy shows that Pennsylvania is the only state in the nation to have increased academic achievement in every subject, at all tested grade levels.

What About The Schools That Are Struggling?

A preliminary list of the 144 lowest performing public elementary and secondary school buildings has been compiled based on PSSA results. The vast majority of these schools are found in urban school districts with poverty rates that are much higher than the average across the state. Unfortunately, SB 1 fails to take into account the impact of poverty on student achievement. Vouchers will not solve the family, health and social problems that today’s poor children face, and they will not help the vast majority of needy students who will remain in those public schools. Research-based efforts and resources should be focused on building up, not diminishing, public education in Pennsylvania.

The Truth And The Trouble With Vouchers

- Vouchers divert resources from public education but do not adequately reduce costs.
- Creating a separate education system does nothing to help address inadequacies or issues of all struggling students and schools.
- Voters and taxpayers will have no way of holding private schools that receive public funds accountable.
- There is no real choice - Private and parochial schools are NOT open to every child. These schools are allowed to have selective admission policies and they, not the parents, decide who may enroll at their schools.
- Nonpublic schools do not have to provide special education services, protections related to discipline and mandated help for behavioral issues for students with disabilities.

- Nonpublic schools are not accountable in the same way that public schools are. They do not hold students to the same rigorous state academic standards and graduation requirements as public schools, and they are not required to assess their students using the PSSA, Keystone Exams or any state measures of student achievement.
- Private schools do not have to tell anyone anything about how their students perform. Their meetings and records are private. Their student achievement results are private. Their self-improvement efforts, if any, are private.
- Nonpublic schools may hire teachers who are not certified or highly qualified to teach.
- There is inconclusive evidence that students who utilize vouchers automatically make better strides in nonpublic schools than they would in public school, and none of the studies done have shown consistent improvement among voucher students that transfer to a nonpublic school.*
- Pennsylvanians do not support tuition vouchers. According to the Pennsylvania Omnibus survey conducted by the Terry Madonna Opinion Research in 2010, two out of three Pennsylvanians oppose using tax dollars for school vouchers, with opposition being held across political parties, all regions of the state, age groups and races.
- Vouchers violate Pennsylvania’s state constitution, which is far more restrictive than the federal constitution when it comes to government aid to education or religious schools.

*Links to studies can be found at www.psba.org.