

AMSD Position on Vouchers

The Association of Metropolitan School Districts is opposed to the diversion of public funds to nonpublic schools through the use of vouchers. Furthermore, the State should require that any school receiving public aid or enrolling students from families receiving public educational subsidies be accessible to all students and comply with all state laws and rules that are applicable to public schools.

BACKGROUND

The United States Supreme Court ruling upholding the Cleveland voucher program moves the debate on providing public aid to private schools to the state level. Vouchers, according to the U.S. Supreme Court, do not violate the U.S. Constitution's prohibition against a government establishment of religion. As a result of that ruling, each state must now deal with the issue on a state constitutional basis. In addition, it is important that the various public policy implications of a voucher system be considered.

The Minnesota Constitution prohibits the State from directing public money to sectarian schools. Article XIII, Section 2 states, "In no case shall public money or property be appropriated or used for the support of schools wherein the distinctive doctrines, creeds or tenets of any particular Christian or other religious sect are promulgated or taught." That language notwithstanding, the Minnesota Supreme Court has upheld the constitutionality of directing public funds to students attending private, religious colleges.

KEY AREAS OF CONSIDERATION

Minnesota, through open enrollment, the post-secondary enrollment options program, charter schools and educational tax credits and deductions, is a national leader in providing school choice options. In addition, the advent of on-line learning opportunities promises even further choice options for Minnesota students.

These programs have created significant options for students and parents and created

an environment in which schools compete for students. However, this competition is not carried out on a level playing field making it impossible for state policymakers to make sound comparisons and informed judgments about the effectiveness of various educational programs.

In addition to the tax credits and deductions that are available to families of private school students, Minnesota provides direct subsidies to private schools to assist with the costs associated with transportation, textbooks, special education, counseling and nursing services.

State taxpayers have a right to expect that any institution that receives public dollars will be held accountable for how those funds are expended and will follow all applicable state laws and regulations. Further, citizens expect that taxpayer dollars will be used at schools that are accessible to all children, including children with special needs.



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