



COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
THE JOHN A. WILSON BUILDING
1350 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE, N.W.
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20004

March 30, 2011

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi, Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congresswoman Pelosi:

We write to express our opposition to renewed efforts to expand a federally-funded school voucher program in the District of Columbia. We appreciate your interest in providing support to public education in the District. We strongly believe, however, that federal funds should be invested in the existing public education program – both the public schools and the public charter schools – rather than diverted to private schools.

We support the decision by Congress and the President several years ago to phase out the voucher program. Multiple US Department of Education reports of the program indicate that the program has not lived up to the promises made by proponents. Moreover, a Government Accountability Office report revealed that many of the voucher students attend private schools with fewer resources and lower standards than our public schools. The evidence is clear that the use of vouchers has had no statistically significant impact on overall student achievement in math or reading, or for students from schools in need of improvement.

We have serious concerns about using government funds to send our students to private schools that do not have to adhere to the same standards and accountability as do public and public charter schools. For example, private religious schools, which 80% of voucher students attend, operate outside the anti-discrimination provisions of the District's Human Rights Act. Moreover, the voucher proposal is inequitable: if fully funded, the authorization would provide at least \$8,000 per student for vouchers, but only about \$723 per public charter school student, and even less – about \$437 per public school student.

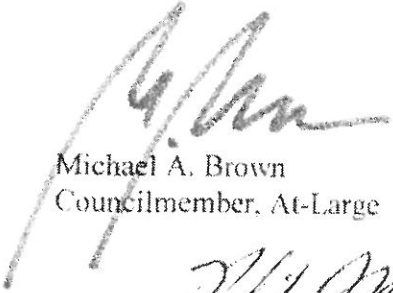
Although we believe that students who are already receiving a voucher should have the opportunity to maintain and use that voucher through graduation from high school, we do not support expansion of the program to new students. The District has devoted considerable funds to public education. As a result, parents in the District have both public school choice and access to the most extensive set of alternatives to traditional public schools in the country.

We appreciate your willingness to take into account the wishes of the District's elected officials on the quintessentially local matter of education as you consider this issue.


Senator Harry Reid, Majority Leader
RE: DC Opportunity Scholarship Program

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Sincerely,




Michael A. Brown
Councilmember, At-Large



Mary M. Cheh
Councilmember, Ward 3



Jim Graham
Councilmember, Ward 1



Phil Mendelson
Councilmember, At-Large



Tommy Wells
Councilmember, Ward 6

cc: Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton