

## Vouchers Do Not Offer Real Choice

Vouchers give a choice to private schools, rather than to parents and students. Voucher programs are governed by different laws in different states, but most allow private schools to accept taxpayer dollars yet reject students with vouchers for a variety of reasons, ranging from disability to ability to pay.

A 2016 report conducted by the Government Accountability Office found that of all the voucher programs across the country, only four required private schools to accept all students with vouchers, space permitting.<sup>1</sup> The other programs allowed private schools to deny students admission or grant preference to certain students for many reasons including disciplinary history, academic achievement, and religious affiliation.

This lack of meaningful choice means that a student may have to turn down a voucher because he cannot find a school that would accept him or provide the specialized educational supports he needs. Additionally, a private school may expel a student using a voucher without a disciplinary hearing. And, a private school may reject a student with a voucher because she or her parents are LGBTQ or the “wrong” religion.

Parents also cannot exercise a real choice when voucher programs do not provide them with necessary or accurate data needed to make informed educational choices. In Washington, DC, for example, the voucher program’s administrator repeatedly failed to provide accurate information to parents about schools participating in the program until after the enrollment deadline had already passed.<sup>2</sup> Nor are voucher schools generally required to give parents the information necessary to determine whether the schools are meeting the needs of their children, such as standardized test scores (which the schools might not even administer to all their students), curriculum used by the schools, or teacher qualifications.

Lack of real choice could be a reason that despite the influx of private school voucher programs, private school enrollment from 1999 to 2015 has actually decreased across the nation.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Gov’t Accountability Office, GAO-16-712, [Private School Choice Programs Are Growing and Can Complicate Providing Certain Federally Funded Services to Eligible Students](#) 26 (2016).

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Gov’t Accountability Office, GAO-13-805, [District of Columbia Opportunity Scholarship Program: Actions Needed to Address Weaknesses in Administration and Oversight](#) 16 (Nov. 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Nat’l Center for Educ. Statistics, [School Choice in the United States: 2019](#), 6 (Sept. 2019).



The **National Coalition for Public Education** comprises more than 50 education, civic, civil rights, and religious organizations devoted to the support of public schools. Founded in 1978, NCPE opposes the funnelling of public money to private and religious schools through such mechanisms as tuition tax credits and vouchers.