

Oppose the Republican Senate COVID-5 Relief Package

This package would send billions of federal dollars to prop up private schools through direct grants and a new federally funded private school voucher program.

Senate Republicans have introduced two relevant relief bills: (1) a supplemental appropriations bill that could funnel billions of taxpayer dollars directly to private schools under a new state formula grant program, and (2) the “Safely Back to School and Back to Work Act,” which would create a private school voucher program called the “Emergency Education Freedom Grants” program that mirrors Secretary DeVos’s “Education Freedom Scholarship” proposal by funneling taxpayer dollars into state tax credit voucher programs.

In the face of a pandemic, Congress should not divert any taxpayer money away from our public schools, which serve 90% of our nation’s students, in order to fund private and religious schools.

- Now, more than ever, our public schools need our support. The pandemic has led to unprecedented challenges for our public school system, as schools face both significant revenue loss as a result of the economic recession as well as massive new costs associated with opening schools safely. As public schools create plans for the new school year that will ensure that students are both able to receive the education and services they need, while also ensuring students’ safety and wellbeing, our public schools need significant resources from the federal government.
- During this challenging time, the federal government should provide more resources to our public schools and public school educators, which are best equipped to serve all students, rather than siphon limited resources to private schools.
- Yet, private schools would be eligible for approximately \$7 billion of the \$70 billion in funding allocated to support K-12 schools regardless of whether they need this funding to educate students during the pandemic.

Private school vouchers and voucher-like schemes don’t work.

- Vouchers will exacerbate, not remedy, the widening equity gaps caused by long-term closures of school buildings and campuses.
- Numerous studies have shown that students attending private schools with vouchers don’t do better academically — and sometimes do worse — than their peers.
- As the CARES Act programs have shown, creating new programs in the midst of a national emergency can easily lead to concerns with fraud and lack of oversight. Even at their best, tax credit programs have these problems, and these faults would be exacerbated by a rush to create new programs at this time.
- This Emergency Education Freedom Grants proposal would provide federal funds to states to funnel into their existing tax credit voucher programs. State voucher programs, especially tax credit voucher programs, have been found to lack sufficient accountability and oversight. In

2019, [GAO found](#) that many state programs that use SGOs to distribute voucher funds are lacking in accountability and oversight mechanisms.

- State voucher programs divert funding to private schools that generally cannot or will not provide the same quality and quantity of services available to vulnerable students in public schools, such as students with disabilities and English learners.
- At a time when schools must increase social distancing in classrooms, redirecting more students with vouchers to private schools that are at physical capacity is not a viable solution.

The Emergency Education Freedom Grants proposal favors states with existing tuition tax credit voucher programs and coerces other states to try to adopt a voucher program.

- This program would advantage the 19 states with existing tax credit voucher programs at the expense of the other 31 states. States with existing programs could easily distribute the federal funds and boost their own programs. It would be nearly impossible for states without existing tax credit voucher programs to utilize the funding since setting up this funding infrastructure could take months—exceeding the 60 day window provided in this legislation—and would require those states to give up their portion of the funding.
- States without existing programs, which are already struggling to provide education for students in the midst of a pandemic, would now face the additional burden of creating an entirely new voucher program in order to access the additional federal money.
- The fact that this funding is being used to create an entirely new federally funded voucher program, demonstrates that its proponents are merely exploiting the pandemic to further their voucher agenda, which they have been unable to pass through Congress.

Taxpayers should not fund private schools that discriminate.

- Private schools that accept taxpayer money often don't provide the same civil rights protections as public schools, including protections against discrimination on the basis of ability, religion, sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity.
- Private schools do not provide the same protections or services for students with disabilities as these students are given in public schools.
- Vouchers are rooted in a racist history and were first created to allow white students to evade integration orders in the wake of *Brown v. Board of Education* and to fund segregation academies designed to keep black and white students apart. Even today, national data show that private schools tend to be more segregated than similarly situated public schools and enroll higher populations of white students compared to public schools.

Vouchers largely fund private religious schools, which violates fundamental principles of religious freedom.

- Taxpayers should never be forced to fund religious education. Nor should they be forced to fund the discriminatory admissions and hiring practices that some religious schools engage in.
- Taxpayer funding comes with the need for accountability; but regulations and inquiries into standards for admissions, curriculum, and hiring practices could threaten religious schools' autonomy and embroil them in political debates. In the end, this is not beneficial for either religious institutions or the government.



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 funneling of public money to private and religious schools through such mechanisms as tuition tax credits and vouchers.

Rebuttals for Including Private Schools and Private School Vouchers In the Next COVID-19 package

Claim: Private school proponents claim private schools should be given taxpayer funding because the coronavirus pandemic could lead to many of them shuttering, and as a result public schools will have to take in their students.

Response: Many of the private schools voucher proponents point to as closing were in economic distress before the pandemic. Enrollment in private schools has been declining even before the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. Indeed, these concerns actually underscore why we must focus on funding our public schools. They are the centerpiece of our education system and, if we don't sufficiently fund them, there is no fallback. Furthermore, the government has already provided private schools with taxpayer-funds during this emergency and they have access to private funding unavailable to public schools.

Claim: Kids that attend private schools need to be kept safe too.

Response: Many private schools have already received federal funding to address concerns related to the pandemic. Indeed, Congress has authorized funding through the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) to assist small businesses and nonprofit organizations, including private schools, that need emergency financial assistance. The program allows businesses, including private schools, to receive loans up to \$10 million to cover payroll and other operational expenses and establishes a loan forgiveness process. Indeed, many private and religious schools have utilized this program and received government funding.

Claim: If Congress is providing assistance for education, it should fund all schools where students receive education, not just public schools.

Response: In addition to the significant amounts of government funds private schools have received through the PPP, private schools have inherent fiscal advantages that public schools do not because they can access private funding that public schools cannot. For example, private schools can apply for private or general commercial loans, refinance or renegotiate existing debt obligations, reach out to alumni and foundations for money or assistance, or have denominations and parishioners that can sustain their schools.



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